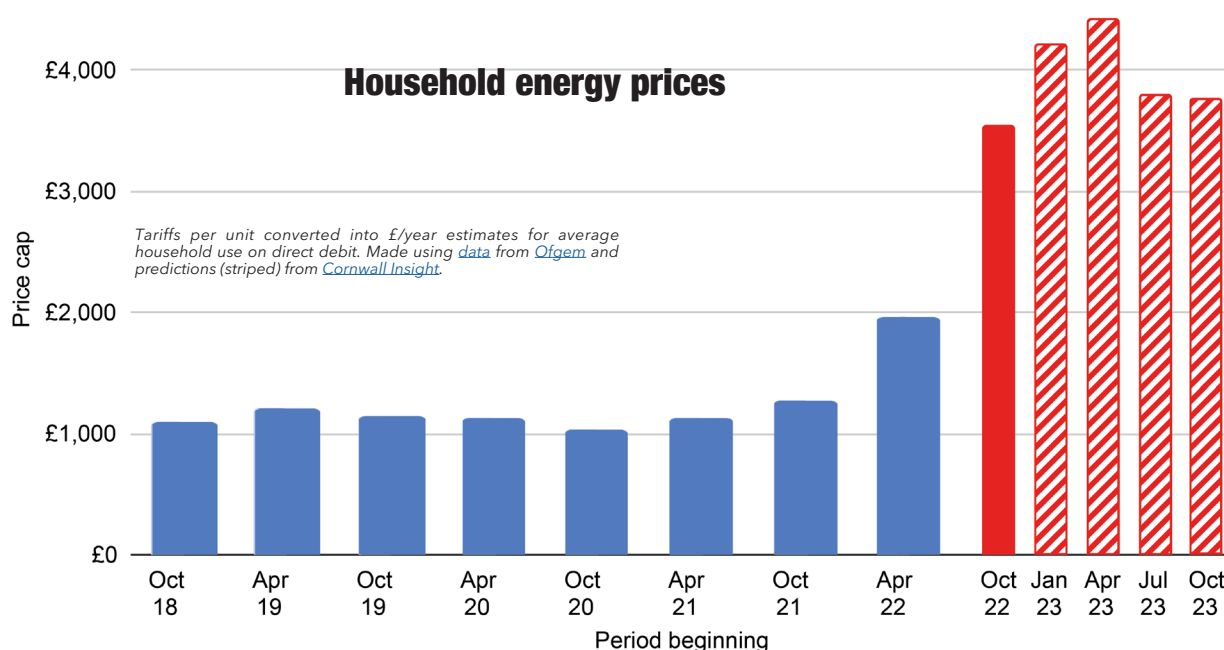




**For social ownership of the banks and industry**

## STRIKE TO SQUEEZE PROFITS



» **Real wage and benefit rises to beat price shock**

» **Take all energy into public ownership: expand green, end fossil, insulate homes**

» **Make Labour back strikes**

*See inside*

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The far right hardens its grip in the Republican Party

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**The ideas that Starmer wants to ban**

# Unite, accelerate, spread the strikes!



Friday 26 August saw postal workers in the Communication Workers Union strike nationwide for the first time since 2009. Over 1,000 picket lines were mounted across the country. Further strike are planned for 31 August and 8-9 September. With 115,000 workers, the strike is the largest of the "Hot Strike Summer" so far.

The strike wave continues to spread. Dockers at Felixstowe, Britain's busiest container port, struck from 21-28 August, after rejecting a 7% pay offer from the company. Refuse workers in Unison, Unite, and GMB at numerous Scottish councils have struck, with further action planned from 6-13 September. Refuse workers in Unite in Newham, east London, struck from 27 August, with the strike due to last until 3 September. School and nursery staff in Unison and GMB in nine Scottish councils will strike from 6-8 September. Outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will strike on 5-6 and 13-14 September. Dockers in Liverpool, members of Unite, may join Felixstowe on strike after they voted by a 99% majority, on an 88% turnout, to take action to improve a 7% pay offer.

On 17 August, Arriva bus drivers in north west England suspended a strike they began on 20 July after their employer offered an 11.7% pay increase. Arriva London bus workers' ballot on strikes closed 26 August. Criminal barristers in England and Wales, members of the Criminal Bar Association, have voted to commence an indefinite strike

## Solidarity 645-7

We're not quite back to our usual schedule yet after the summer exceptions, sorry. *Solidarity* 645 will be 7 September. On 14 September *Solidarity* will skip a week to make space for an issue of *Women's Fightback*. *Solidarity* 646 will be 21 September, and *Solidarity* 647 5 October, with a week skipped to enable our production team to join activities round Labour Party conference 24-28 September. Then we're *really* back to the regular schedule! □

from 5 September, the first strike in the current wave to become indefinite.

The University and College Union begins a ballot of its Higher Education membership on 7 September. The PCS union launches a ballot of its directly-employed civil service membership on 26 September. The National Education Union starts a consultative ballot of teachers on 24 September. The CWU will ballot cleaners and engineers working for the Properties and Facilities Services arm of Royal Mail, in a ballot closing on 27 September.

Rail union RMT has announced plans to expand its disputes with outsourced cleaning companies across the main-line railway, London Underground, and Docklands Light Railway.

Outsourced security guards at University College London in the IWGB union will soon ballot for action to win a £15/hour minimum wage and direct employment. The Fire Brigades Union may soon ballot over pay. Unions in the NHS are planning ballots in September, October, and November.

Accelerating, coordinating, and continuing to spread the strikes will improve each dispute's chances of winning, by adding to the social and economic pressure on employers and government.

Arguing within each union for acceleration and coordination is the best way to build organically towards something like a general strike, better than petitioning the Trades Union Congress (TUC), or some other body, to simply "call" one.

The TUC's most significant intervention into the current wave so far has been to launch, online, a rather tame campaign for a £15/hour minimum wage. The small-print reveals that it's £15/hour by 2030, and strikes and industrial action now to win the demand in individual workplaces are simply not mentioned by the "campaign" at all; so the TUC centrally lags behind many of its affiliates, some of which are already balloting or striking to win a £15/hour minimum wage. But the TUC campaign shows how the current strike wave is already posing social and political questions beyond immediate industrial disputes with individual employers. A society-wide rise in wages and benefits, based on a substantial increase in the minimum wage and inflation-proofed rises for all, requires government action. The more striking unions raise this, as some have begun to, the more the

current strikes will test the limits of the legal prohibition on unions striking for political demands, especially if there is substantial cross-union coordination.

Strikes are not, or should not be, mere expressions of protest or discontent about something an employer is doing. They should be organised so as to win.

Strikers need to give consideration to what kind of action will be necessary to win. Apart from the barristers' indefinite strike from 5 September, all strikes in the current wave have consisted of individual blocks of action, with further blocks announced some weeks or months later. In some, like the Felixstowe dock strike's eight days, the individual blocks have been longer. In others, like the RMT's strikes on the rail and Tube, they have been 24 or 48 hour strikes, with another 24 or 48 hours following the next month.

### Winning

A dispute consisting of short strikes followed by pauses of weeks, whilst members await further instructions from above, is unlikely to win. The whole history of trade unionism tells us that intense, concentrated, accelerating strikes are more likely to win, and if they win, they usually (not always) do so fast. If a strike campaign, becomes a long-drawn-out, slow-paced affair, then we are more likely to lose.

There are probably few workplaces where workers are already prepared to launch indefinite strikes, and perhaps not that many where they are prepared even to start escalating programmes of strikes planned over many months, rather than the "strike for 24-48 hours then wait for further orders" pattern which has become customary in recent decades.

Building up the confidence and organisation to take that kind of action requires, in the first place, those activists who believe it is necessary arguing for it consistently within their unions and, crucially, on the shop floor itself, with their workmates.

Progressing arguments for accelerating the pace of strikes within unions needs meaningfully democratic structures and efficient channels of communication between union leaderships and the rank and file. It also requires rank-and-file reps being prepared to articulate alternative strategies.

Currently, the stock of most union leaders involved in big disputes is

high, and even many relatively militant reps don't yet see a need to develop an independent or alternative strategic vision. Mick Lynch and Eddie Dempsey of the RMT in particular have won plaudits for assured and effective performances in media interviews. But disputes are won on the picket line, not, ultimately, in the media.

Often, union officials will stress the centrality of the negotiations themselves as the place where the outcome of a dispute will be decided. Strikes are seen as an adjunct to that process, a bargaining chip to be deployed by negotiators. Talks take place behind closed doors, and deals are invariably presented to the membership as take-it-or-leave-it faits accomplis. Lynch and Dempsey say, explicitly, that "their job" is to "get a deal".

Members may have a high degree of trust in their officials to "get the best deal possible". But why shouldn't workers be able to directly scrutinise and feed into the process?

In the US, "open bargaining" is not standard practice, but not uncommon either. By allowing rank-and-file union members to attend talks, it not only gives management a visual reminder of the power of rank-and-file action standing behind the officials, but also allows rank-and-file members to caucus with officials to ensure they're sticking to agreed union demands and have their say directly during breaks and adjournments in talks.

Even where "open bargaining" is, as yet, unwinnable, members should insist on the maximum degree of transparency, with negotiating officials giving regular report-backs and comprehensive minutes or notes from negotiations being shared as widely as possible.

A rank-and-file approach to trade unionism does not involve insisting that union leaders must always be wrong, or always on the verge of selling out a dispute. But it does involve moving beyond a perspective in which setting the strategy for a dispute, and conducting negotiations with employers, is seen as the preserve of top officials, with members' job being simply to follow instructions handed down from above.

Especially as disputes drag on, with workers increasingly facing the question of whether to escalate or back down, developing a culture of rank-and-file self-assertion – with the union leaders where possible, but against them if necessary – will be vital. □



# The threat from Truss and Sunak

By Mohan Sen

Whether Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak becomes prime minister on 5 September, the Tory regime will shift even further rightwards – unless the labour movement hobbles it.

The heat the Tory leadership contest has generated should not obscure the fact that Sunak and Truss are not so much on the same page as in the same paragraph.

In many respects the Tories' position is weak. The new government will, for a while, be constrained by multiple crises. Yet those crises pose a greater threat to the working class and labour movement, unless we act more decisively.

Liz Truss is more "on a holiday from reality" (as fellow-Tory Michael Gove put it) and less restrained in playing up to right-wing Tory MPs and activists. But both candidates are pushing more tax cuts for the rich, and by implication less money for collapsing services; a turbo-charged assault on the right to strike and organise; gutting policies intended to help oppressed groups; and aggressive nationalism, including expanding the hostile environment for migrants and further hardening Brexit.

The new prime minister will almost certainly expand emergency relief on household energy bills. Truss and Sunak's incredible reluctance to propose anything new during the leadership contest indicates how meagre the measures will be.

Truss has promised to cancel the rise in corporation tax from 19% to 25%

due in April 2023, to abolish green levies in energy bills, and unstated other tax cuts, fast, to a total of £30 billion. Sunak has denounced Truss for risking an even deeper economic crisis, but in terms of the social impact of tax cuts his only disagreement is the timescale.

Truss also says she will boost, not cut, military spending. Her allies have attacked Sunak over this, but in fact he too says military spending should rise.

Truss is the originator of the proposals for further suppression of the right to strike that have now become a 16-point plan to attack the unions, from Sunak supporter Grant Shapps.

Liz Truss has attacked "woke civil service culture" (straying into antisemitism in the process) and proposed to scrap diversity-related jobs in the public sector. Sunak proposes an assault on the "woke nonsense that has permeated public life". (Though polling suggests that fewer than one in ten of the very right-wing Tory membership are properly bothered about this stuff.)

Both have made clear their war on "wokeness" will attack transgender rights.

Both support the Rwanda deportations scheme, and have promised to expand it. Truss proposes to expand the Border Force; Sunak to set a cap on the number of refugees and launch full-scale militarisation of the Channel.

Truss' campaign has accused Sunak of being soft on the EU over the post-Brexit Northern Ireland protocol. In fact both candidates have made clear their disregard for reality and the people of Ireland by doubling down on moves



to undermine the protocol. Meanwhile they have both proposed "bonfires" (Truss) of EU-derived legislation (mostly various social standards).

Both say they support keeping the totally inadequate target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, while making clear they are unenthusiastic about doing things to meet it. Both have proposed punching holes in the de facto ban on fracking introduced in 2019. Sunak proposes to increase North Sea gas production.

As the NHS, social care and other public services face a combination of underfunding, privatisation, and soaring energy bills, neither candidate is proposing new money for anything – except Truss implying she would take from the NHS to give to social care.

Because Starmer advocates so little

of anything, Labour is unable to convert the Tories' current discredit into solid pro-Labour sentiment. Labour's lead in the polls has grown only to around 10% (no higher than early 2022). (The Greens have done a bit better, at 6%, versus 2.6% in the last election and 1.6% in 2017, though around 10% in mid-2019 polls.)

Before the new Tory government can bed in, the labour movement needs to hit it hard and repeatedly, by escalating and spreading the strikes and launching a great wave of protests and campaigning.

As part of that, it needs to fight to reshape the Labour Party – to make it speak out in support of the strikes, for the social, economic and climate policies demanded by Labour conference, and against Brexit. □

## "Enough is Enough": now build local structures

By Katy Dollar and Mohan Sen

The Enough is Enough initiative launched by the Communication Workers' Union, *Tribune* magazine and Labour MPs including Zarah Sultana held its launch rally on 18 August in South London, with many hundreds there and hundreds more turned away. A rally in Manchester on 30 August has speakers including Manchester mayor Andy Burnham.

At the London rally, the speeches were in many ways to the left of mainstream Corbynism, with the general secretaries on the platform and many others explicitly talking about class and class struggle.

A leaflet announced the formation of four London "branches": how they will func-

tion remains to be seen. CWU General Secretary Dave Ward made clear he opposes setting up democratic structures: "There's no point in running campaigns like this with big committees. Nothing ever gets done. You got to go with this. You connect to the ideas that we are bringing forward."

Activists should look for opportunities to create structures, and more importantly take the energy of Enough is Enough into the democratic structures of the labour movement, union branches, trades councils and CLPs. The CWU is Labour-affiliated, and can unite with the party rank and file to push Labour to take up the political demands Enough is Enough is raising, as well as important ones it isn't yet, like repealing the anti-union laws (though anti-union laws were

mentioned in passing at the rally, there was no proposal to campaign against the threat of new ones or for repeal of the old ones). None of the speakers – including those very actively involved in the Labour Party, such as Dave Ward and Zarah Sultana MP – put forward any perspective of organising or fighting in the party. Criticising Starmer is obviously necessary, but not the same as advocating that unions and activists fight and around in the structures, putting demands in and on the party. Listening to the speakers, you wouldn't have known that the CWU is a major Labour-affiliate or that the party's conference is a month away.

We also need discussion on we can push to escalate, coordinate and spread the strikes. Not all the trade un-

ionists speaking on 18 August have unimpeachable records; our unions, though speeding up, are generally still sluggish and bureaucratic; in any case,

relying on union leaders is a serious mistake. We need to develop rank-and-file organisation within and across unions. □



### 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](#).

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

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

**Sunday 25 September, 6.30pm** – The origins of the British National Front and lessons for today

For events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see [workersliberty.org/events](https://workersliberty.org/events) or scan QR code □



# Why do unions back the Morning Star?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Why do unions back the Morning Star?

The executive of the Bakers Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU) has decided to take shares in the *Morning Star* and join the board of the Peoples' Press Printing Society (PPS), the co-op that publishes the paper.

The BFAWU thus becomes the twelfth national trade union to join the PPS, alongside Aslef, Community, CWU, FBU, GMB, NUM, POA, RMT, TSSA, Unite and Usdaw. The NUM North East Region also has a shareholding and a seat on the board.

The truth is that the PPS is little more than a facade: the paper is controlled by the Communist Party of Britain and although it does carry articles by Labour Party leftists, independents and even, occasionally, people from very distant Trotskyist backgrounds (e.g. Counterfire), all this is at the discretion of the CPB. Naturally, editor Ben Chacko (like all his predecessors) is a party member.

And despite the oft-repeated claim to

be "the only paper that relies solely on its readership and solidarity donations for its income", in reality the paper depends for its very existence upon funding from unions, usually channelled to it without any democratic mandate from the members.

The "good" reason why union officialdom backs the *Morning Star* is that they see it as the only paper that reliably backs strikes and anti-cuts campaigns. In fairness, it does, though usually from the standpoint of officialdom rather than rank and file activists. But:

(1) The MS does not provide the unions with outreach to a working-class public which they could not get with their own materials. The paper is found in union offices, and distributed for free (in union-sponsored editions) at some demonstrations and events like Durham Miners' Gala and Tolpuddle. But the public it reaches is a narrow one, almost entirely people who would already support strikes and anti-cuts campaigns.

If the unions funded *Solidarity*, *The Socialist*, and *Socialist Worker*, they would get wider on-the-streets and door-to-door distribution (not that anyone would put that idea forward as a serious proposition!)

(2) Relatively little of the MS's coverage is about strikes and anti-cuts cam-

paigns in Britain. In fact, in return for ineffectual support for their domestic economic disputes, the unions finance coverage on broader political (especially international) issues which runs counter to basic trade-union values:

- China: giving uncritical support to the totalitarian regime and denying all evidence of forced labour and other human rights abuses against the Uyghurs;

- Ukraine: opposing the supply of arms to Ukraine and advocating "peace" on terms that would amount to Ukraine's surrender (and completely ignoring the many union conferences and executives that have passed strong motions in support of Ukraine)

- Brexit: following the CPB "line", advocating not just a "hard" Brexit, but "no-deal" and WTO terms – in direct contradiction to the policies of the vast majority of unions, and to the paper's hero Jeremy Corbyn!

All in all, we have to conclude that directing union members' money to the *Morning Star* is not just an ineffective way of promoting union campaigns and struggles – it's an affront to working class democracy. □

In late August the *Morning Star* carried several articles marking the 80th anniversary of the lifting of the ban on



its predecessor, the *Daily Worker*. A lengthy piece by CPB historian Phil Katz mentioned – very much in passing – the following: "If the ban had been just about the war, then the paper would have reappeared soon after the Soviet Union was invaded and the CP came all-out in favour of the war effort."

A fair point, but what Katz, and the rest of the MS's quite extensive coverage, fails to mention is that when the ban came into force (22 January 1941), the *Daily Worker*, in response to the Stalin-Hitler Pact, was pursuing a "line" that went far beyond mere neutrality, but was effectively pro-Hitler. (And that being "in favour of the war effort" after June 1941 went beyond anti-Hitler to be against strikes and basic workers' economic self-defence.) □

## Haunted by Andrey Vyshinsky's ghost



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Last week I sent out a message to tens of thousands of trade unionists alerting them to two bits of news. The good news, I reported, was that some workers in Poland had won a big victory in court. The bad news was that in Ukraine, President Zelenskyy had failed to veto anti-union legislation, as we had been demanding. Most people reacted with thanks, or said nothing, but two of the emails I got within a minute of each other were, I think, interesting.

The first said: "You're talking about a fucking union at a time of war. Where's your head at you dirty lefty".

The second said: "Of course, Zelenskyy signed the anti-labour legislation. His government is fucking fascist and YOU SUPPORT HIS FASCIST GOVERNMENT." (Yes, that was all capital letters in the origi-

nal.) My first thought was that if I'm attacked for being both pro-Putin and anti-Putin at the same time, I must be doing something right.

But that's not always the case, as we know.

My second thought was that it would be great to get these two guys into a room. But that was just me being silly.

### Tone

Upon further reflection, it struck that while the messages were diametrically opposed the tone was identical.

One referred to a "fucking union" and the other to a "fucking fascist". Both were addressed to me, referring to my "talking" and my "support". In both cases, I was clearly the enemy.

Politically, neither comment made any sense.

Ukrainian unions have every right – in fact it is their duty – to defend workers' rights even during a war. One might say, especially during a war. If the debate in Ukraine weakened the country or undermined its

unity in wartime, blame Zelenskyy and the parliament, not the workers.

And calling Zelenskyy's government "fascist" (twice in one sentence) is not just wrong, but unimaginably stupid and ill-informed.

And yet, the comments read as if written by the same person.

The tone is extremely nasty and I, like many of you, have gotten used to this.

On a number of occasions I've been called a "so-called trade unionist" or worse. My favourite is from more than two decades ago, but still accessible online, referring to me as "one of the most experienced and influential agents of the bourgeoisie in the world labor movement".

This kind of language is not entirely new, even on the Left. Marx in his time could be quite nasty when challenging people he didn't like very much. But I think in the last century, this incredibly aggressive tone, and the constant assertion that the person under attack is not

really who they claim to be, has its origins in the Stalinist period.

Most famously, it was the chief prosecutor in the Moscow show trials, Andrey Vyshinsky, who ramped up the language of abuse when addressing the historic leaders of the Bolshevik Party, Lenin's close comrades Kamenev and Zinoviev, who would soon be sentenced to death. Summing up his case – which Vyshinsky knew was entirely made-up, based on nothing – he shouted:

### Dogs

"Shoot these rabid dogs. Death to this gang who hide their ferocious teeth, their eagle claws, from the people! ... Down with these abject animals! Let's put an end once and for all to these miserable hybrids of foxes and pigs, these stinking corpses!"

At the heart of the Stalinist political culture was the idea that no one was who they appeared to be. The top generals of the Red Army in the late

1930s turned out to be German agents and needed to be shot. All the surviving members of Lenin's Central Committee were also long-time agents of the international bourgeoisie. And this filtered down from the top so that in every region and every village in the Soviet Union, innocent people were "exposed" as traitors to the cause.

In a healthy political culture on the Left, we would never talk this way. We can disagree with our opponents and perhaps even try to persuade them. But it's very unhelpful to start those conversations by accusing those we disagree with of being "fascists" or "pro-Putin" when that is obviously not the case.

So long as we continue to speak in that old language of abuse, we can see that the toxic legacy of Stalinism lingers on, decades after the dictator's death. □

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



# Feminist revolt in China



**Women's  
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Chinese prosecutors have brought charges against 28 people and are investigating 15 officials for "corruption" following public criticism of authorities for their lack of action after a group of men assaulted four women.

The assault appears to have occurred after the women rejected sexual advances at a barbecue restaurant in Tangshan, north-east China. CCTV footage circulated online showed a man placing his hand on a woman's back as she shared a meal with two companions. After the woman pushed him away, the man hit her before others dragged her outside and beat her as she lay on the ground. Another woman was knocked to the floor.

The attack has again shone a spotlight on violence against women in

China. Millions on China's social media websites condemned the attack. But online articles that went viral condemning the attack as representative of the country's much larger problem of gender-based violence were swiftly censored. Local journalists who travelled to Tangshan to seek information about the victims claimed they were harassed, intimidated and even detained.

Interest in feminism has grown in China, despite propaganda from the Communist Party and widespread censorship. The #MeToo movement in China was launched in 2018, when a several women published allegations of sexual harassment against university professors.

Any independent political organisation is feared and suppressed by the Chinese state, so censors quickly began blocking social media hashtags and keywords related to the wave of feminist politics.

In early August, a man allegedly killed his girlfriend by repeatedly running her over with his car in broad daylight.

Surveillance footage of the incident sparked widespread outrage online before being censored. Women's rights campaigners say domestic abuse remains pervasive and under-reported in China, and prominent feminists also face regular police harassment and detention if they speak out.

Since assuming leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012 and China's presidency in 2013, Xi Jinping has combined growing opportunities for market capitalism with an increasingly repressive and authoritarian regime.

The repression of social and workers' struggles, protests and free speech have been combined with socially conservative ideological drive including ethno-nationalism and stricter gender policing. Despite this harsh repression, expressions of a nascent women's movement continue to emerge. China's working class has enormous potential power. Internationally, we must stand in solidarity with their attempts to organise and the flashpoints of dissent. □



**Activist Agenda**

As Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) restart meetings in September, there is a new chance to submit motions of protest ([bit.ly/ban-m](https://bit.ly/ban-m)) against the ban on Workers' Liberty imposed by the National Executive in March 2022.

Also, the last few CLPs will decide their motions for Labour Party conference (24-28 Sep, in Liverpool) soon, with a deadline of 15 September.

Unions also submit motions: with the current strike wave these may be feistier than usual, but we won't know until closer to conference.

Labour Left Internationalists tell us that motions they have promoted on free movement and on public ownership of energy have been submitted by a few CLPs each, but it looks thin for another LLI-promoted and Momentum backed motion on the police.

LLI is backing motions on support for the strike wave. Also, the Ukraine Solidarity Campaigns has circulated a motion, but we don't know if or where this has been passed.

Motions getting to the floor of conference depends on a priority ballot which will select twelve topics (six chosen by the unions, six by CLPs).

LLI will be active round conference, helping with compositing and promotion of motions, distributing bulletins, running stalls, and promoting fringe meetings.

A Workers' Liberty team will also be there in Liverpool, protesting against the ban, running stalls, and taking part in the left-wing fringe event The World Transformed.

• Text for motions, campaign links, etc. all at [workersliberty.org/agenda](https://workersliberty.org/agenda)

## Price curbs no substitute for wage rises

By Martin Thomas

Price controls don't work in a market-based economy, i.e. an economy where prices are central. The Tory government of the time froze all prices in late 1972, then inflation was 9% in 1973, 17% in 1974.

Even a workers' government, as long as it had to use price mechanisms a lot, would have no quick-fix to stop inflation, especially inflation pushed by world-market factors.

A worker revolt, seeking wage and benefit rises, and increased funding for public services, to match price rises, is

more effective than a consumer revolt petitioning the government to control prices.

Bourgeois governments can control selected prices, as for example the Egyptian government subsidises bread prices.

Subsidising fossil-fuel prices (relative to other prices, which include prices of energy-efficiency measures and of renewables investment) has, however, great ecological downsides.

A makeshift "safety net" softening of the current energy price shock is better provided by a quota of free energy per household, which could be done by a

drastic extension of the current £400 per household rebate-relief, and would not incentivise additional fossil-fuel consumption by the better-off.

Behind the household-energy price rise is a rise in world-market gas prices. That also yields a rise in "economic rents" (super-profits) for energy suppliers with cheaper costs because not reliant on gas imports (renewables, nuclear, etc.)

Public ownership would enable those "economic rent" incomes to be redirected to social and green purposes. □

## Grey area or no difference?



**Letter**

There is a grey area between what Lenin called "bourgeois workers' parties" or "liberal labour parties" and straightforward bourgeois parties with worker support but no organised working-class base.

On that Eric Lee ([Solidarity 643](https://solidarity643.com)) is right, I think. The issue was raised as long ago as the 1960s by the withered and right-wing character then of the French Socialist Party and German Social Democratic Party.

Yet "a grey area" doesn't mean "no

difference". The Democratic Party in the USA certainly draws on union officials; but the unions have no structural role in it comparable to the unions' 50% share of the vote at Labour Party conference.

Most of the funding for Democrat politicians come from the rich. In 1980 Jimmy Carter was only 3% ahead of Reagan among voters from households with at least one union member, and in 2016 Hillary Clinton was only 8% ahead of Trump. (Union density is about 10% in the USA.)

Biden managed a 16% lead over Trump in 2020. □

Colin Foster, London

## Free Our Unions steps up

The Free Our Unions campaign ([freeourunions.org](https://freeourunions.org)) has stepped up its activity in response to threats of new anti-union laws from Liz Truss and Grant Shapps.

The campaign is co-organising a demonstration outside the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy at 5pm, scheduled for 12 September, as part of Extinction Rebellion's September rebellion. Co-organised with Earth Strike UK, an anti-capitalist collective in the climate movement, the demo aims to highlight the ways in which restrictive anti-union laws inhibit workers' action over climate issues.

On 13 September, Free Our Unions is holding a fringe meeting at the TUC congress in Brighton, 6pm in the Friends Meeting House (Ship Street, BN1 1AF). Speakers include PCS assistant general secretary John Moloney. The campaign has produced a new briefing and video on Truss's plans, and is currently meeting fortnightly to discuss and plan activity.

Free Our Unions has also written to the Institute for Employment Rights and the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, the two other main organisations focused on anti-union laws, to propose joint activity. □



# Expropriate the energy industry!

By Sacha Ismail

Public subsidies to energy companies are not a good policy. We need public ownership of the energy system, not just the retail companies but as much of it as possible.

So reluctant are the Tories to do anything substantial about energy bills that Labour's policy of freezing bills through a subsidy to the retailers has been widely presented as a radical turn. It's popular: YouGov found 86% support it, and 85% of Tory supporters.

In fact, because the plan would be funded much more by withdrawing the flat-rate £400 relief payment the Tories have promised for October than by tightening the windfall tax announced in May, it would leave many poorer people in small flats, with relatively low bills, [worse off](#). And with world-market gas and oil prices probably high for years to come, it would only delay the increased bills to April 2023.

There are similar plans from the Lib Dems, the energy retailers themselves, and others, different in detail. All mean subsidising the retailers. Some retail-

ers would indeed go bust if unsubsidised while retail prices rise slow than world-market gas prices. All are spending large amounts on the salaries and perks of those at the top; some with better long-term supply deals are making major profits. Some are part of conglomerates that also include energy production companies, so such policies actually subsidise fossil fuel production.

Alongside immediate measures to cushion people from the impact of energy bills and raise incomes, we need public ownership of the whole energy industry, so we can:

- end the irrational system in which many companies go bust and require public bail-out;
- redistribute billions in profit into new low-carbon energy production and energy-efficiency measures including house insulation;
- restructure prices to provide a free or very cheap energy allowance for households to cover basic needs while avoiding the environment-destroying trap of subsidising prices for higher fossil-fuel consumption relative to

other prices.

The TUC has just come out for public ownership of [energy retail](#) only. Labour Left Internationalists and others will be fighting for [public ownership](#) at Labour conference in September.

But public ownership of energy retail alone will not solve the problem of high prices for fossil fuels. By Tory design, the energy industry is segmented into myriad companies – production, generation, grid, retail. The theory is that this promotes competition and keeps prices low. In fact the “cap” price for retailers is set to mimic standard free-market workings by following the “marginal” price, i.e. the price of the most expensive wholesale supplier, and thus yielding what economists call “rents” to all the lower-price suppliers (renewables, nuclear, North Sea gas).

We need public ownership of generation and grid, and North Sea oil and gas production too, so that surging profits across the sector can be used for social goals and ecological transformation.

Since the 1970s the Norwegian government has had a 78% tax (56% on



top of corporation tax) on oil and gas extraction profits. That would be much better than what the Tories are doing and the Labour leadership advocating – but not at all adequate.

Democratic control, and therefore ownership, is needed to aggressively reorganise this industry so its workforce, equipment and infrastructure can mobilised to help bridle the current chaos; run down and replace fossil-fuel production in a rational, planned way; and redress the vast destruction oil and gas corporations have wreaked in societies across the globe. It should be implemented and organised internationally – but it can be fought for country-by-country too.

79% of Labour voters tell pollsters they support “nationalising the energy companies and bringing them into public ownership”, and 47% even of Tory voters. Let's argue for it. □

# Exploitation rises in Myanmar

By Hein Htet Kyaw

In Myanmar, even though open protests are not common any more as they were after the February 2021 military coup, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) is still in action. A lot of state employees are no longer actively working in their positions. A small number of student activists and workers still protest, though in guerrilla style to avoid being arrested.

On 24 August 2022, the military regime detained Vicky Bowman, a former British ambassador to Myanmar, and her husband Htein Lin, a Burmese artist and former political prisoner, on immigration-related allegations.

In July 2022, four democracy advocates were put to death by Myanmar's military junta on suspicion of aiding in “terror actions”. These were the country's first executions in decades. The death of former hip-hop singer and ex-MP Phyo Zeya Thaw, who is a member of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) shocked ex-

triate communities. Ko Jimmy, a well-known democracy advocate, was also put to death. Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw were the other two men executed. After the death sentences against those four, hundred of workers, activists and revolutionaries are being listed for death penalty by the military junta.

During the first week of August 2022, in a decision by the military administration, Toru Kubota, a Japanese journalist, was charged with violating immigration rules. In the second week of August 2022 Sean Turnell, an Australian researcher who served as Aung San Suu Kyi's economic adviser, appeared in public for the first time with his testimony in the military court. In the following week, another six years of prison sentence were added to Aung San Suu Kyi's 11-year original sentence by the military junta.

On 1 February 2022 the people of Myanmar participated in a “silent strike” on February 1, 2022, to honour the one anniversary of the military takeover. They stayed indoors,

shut down businesses, and stopped all outside activities, leaving the streets of several major towns and cities all but barren. Participants had been forewarned that they risked being charged with breaking the statute against inciting terrorism. The military lobbyist “Han Nyein Oo” called on his Telegram channel for the arrest of shop owners who had announced on social media that their business would be closed on the day of the silent strike. He made the announcement on his Telegram channel. The military council then jailed more than 200 individuals.

Following the economic crisis caused by the mismanagement of the military junta, their inefficiency in administration capabilities, and the upheavals of an ongoing revolution, a lot of capitalist corporates are exploiting the workers more and more.

Food Panda Myanmar's management announced severe wage cuts on 16 March 2022. In response, riders shut down their accounts and arranged a strike on their own. Nearly 90% of the affected employ-

ees joined within three days. In Myanmar, there are about 9,000 Food Panda riders, with 7,000 of them based in Yangon, the country's capital. One cyclist claims that where they were previously paid 1,000 Myanmar Kyats for a distance, it is now only 500-600 Myanmar Kyats.

In July 2022, almost 2,000 employees of a garment factory in Mingaladon Township's Zaykabar Industrial Park in Yangon went on strike, claiming that violations of their fundamental rights had become intolerable. The labourers are employed by JW Factory, a facility in the industrial park that is run by ADK, or “A Dream of Kind,” and is owned by Great Glowing Investment. The reasons for the strike are abuses of power in the factory and wages which are way lower than minimum wages.

According to a report on 25 August 2022, the Lotte Hotel Corporation, a joint venture between the military junta and the South Korean business group POSCO, has decreased the currency rate when paying salaries to local staff. The

market exchange rate between Myanmar kyats and US dollars is around at least 2,100 Myanmar Kyats for one US dollar. However, they are exploiting the marginalised local Burmese employees by calculating the wages with the exchange rate of 1000 Myanmar Kyats for one US dollar.

All these incidents show that workers should not restrict their aims to liberal democracy. They must liberate themselves not only from the military junta but also from capitalist wage-slavery too.

The working class is the force that has the power to transform society, just as it has the power to paralyse the entire system. The misfortune of Burma is that the working class lacks a vision that is willing to go above and beyond the demands of liberal democracy. However, if the working class gained the leadership position, it could rally the youth, the middle class, peasants, and national minorities behind it, not only to overthrow the military regime but also to eradicate capitalism. □



# The Trump Show Season Two

By Tom Harrison

The various threats of legal jeopardy long promised to put Donald Trump in court, yet never seeming to arrive, are now unfolding fast.

The search and seizure by the FBI of stolen classified documents Trump held in the basement of his Mar-a-Lago golf-club home even added new crimes to the mix – contraventions of the Espionage Act and additional examples of obstruction of justice.

Reasons posited for why Trump held box-loads of official documents, many deemed highly confidential, include blackmail and financial gain. They could be seen as a bargaining chip to be released should the state ever threaten to put him on trial. Some commentators on Trump-loving Fox News have even suggested that he had sold, or was about to sell, them to Putin or the Saudis.

Several sources had witnessed Trump personally combing through hundreds of pages of documents – probably the largest amount of reading he'd done in his entire life. Money being the only god venal Trump worships, some kind of rainy day insurance against future fi-

nancial dire straits isn't implausible.

Trump naturally used what he termed an FBI "raid" as another opportunity to raise more million-dollar donations from his deluded followers. His business empire, The Trump Organisation, faces serious consequences in an upcoming fraud trial in New York, when his bookkeeper, Alan Weisselberg, will testify against it.

Additionally there is a civil case against his business in which he took the Fifth Amendment 440 times in the course of a six hour deposition. "If you are innocent, why are you taking the Fifth Amendment?" – the oft-heard cry at Trump rallies – has joined that long list of things that don't apply to him.

Does the discovery of illegally-held documents represent Trump's "Al Capone moment"? Chicago gangster Capone evaded the law for years during the Prohibition era until he was finally jailed for income tax evasion. Will the documents episode finally bring about Trump's downfall?

## Coup

The same sort of thing was expected after the 6 January attempted coup to overturn the 2020 election. Republican politicians, some of whose very lives were endangered by Trumpist insurrectionists, quickly flipped from condemnation to accommodation ranging from silence to actual support.

The Congressional investigation into 6 January has not concluded. More sensational revaluations are in the offing, which could involve the most odious and disgusting person on the American political scene, Infowars Alex Jones.

Jones spread via his internet platform the claim that the massacre of children and teachers at Sandy Hook School in Connecticut was fake and the bereaved parents were "fake actors". Those parents suffered not only the loss of their children, but constant harassment from Jones and his audience.

Those parents are suing Jones for damages. In Texas he was forced to pay out \$50 million. His behaviour at the trial was an object lesson in how fascists like him treat court proceedings. He attacked the parents, claiming one was "slow" and "on the spectrum"; denigrated the jury; and tried to associate the judge with paedophiles.

Jones was caught committing perjury when his lawyers accidentally handed over two years of his phone records to the defence. Those have been passed on to the House Committee investigating 6 January. Jones was a major figure in leading the rabble on that day and was in definite communication with Trump. His phone records may provide further proof of Trump's role that day.

Trump's criminality lies in plain sight,

most obviously with his attempt to overturn election results in Georgia. He is on tape saying he wants authorities there to "find" votes in his favour.

Yet the evidence of his crimes cuts no ice with millions of his followers. It's all "a hoax". A "witch-hunt". Trial by "kangaroo courts". His claim that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and get away with it has a truer ring today than when he originally said it.

If Trump is actually put on trial, most members of the jury will probably vote for a conviction, but maybe a few of his following on the panel would stick out for his acquittal whatever the evidenced (and in the USA jury verdicts on serious charges have to be unanimous).

The most likely road to ruin for Trump, although by no means an assured one, will be via the ballot box. Conventional wisdom has it that the party occupying the presidency invariably gets a drubbing in the midterms. This time around it may not be the case. The majority of American voters don't like the Republican drift to the far right and are alarmed about how many Republican nominees advocate the "big lie" that the 2020 election was "stolen".

The Republican Party is still firmly in Trump's grip as the ousting of Liz Cheney as Republican candidate in Wyoming demonstrated. Cheney is as right-wing as they come. The basic divide between her and Trump was whether to concede to your opponent when you lose an election!

But now Trump-supporting election deniers occupy leading positions in several states and the threat of openly overturning the will of the actual electorate increases.

## War

Fascist-inclined members of the Republican Party proclaim themselves at war with the American state. Gone are the old days of J Edgar Hoover, when the FBI were heroes to the right wing for their targeting of socialists, trade unionists and civil rights groups. Now that law enforcement also targets Trump, it's a different story.

"We must destroy the FBI" said Arizona Congressmen Paul Gosar, well known for his links to fascist militia groups and Holocaust deniers. Many other Republicans have called for the FBI to be "defunded", no doubt thinking it clever to mimic the "defund the police" slogan raised by some in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Carl Paladino, a Republican candidate for Congress, called for Attorney General Merrick Garland to be executed, then claimed the remark was facetious. Paladino has also gone on record as saying Hitler "was the kind of leader we need today."

Death threats have been made

against Bruce Reinhardt, the judge who signed the FBI search warrant. His home address has been posted on right wing websites and his local synagogue has been threatened. A far-right extremist attacked the Ohio FBI office.

Senator Chuck Grassley from Iowa has claimed that Inland Revenue workers are being armed with assault rifles to gun down small business owners. The danger of such rhetoric in a country where privately held guns vastly outnumber the population doesn't need overstating. Far-right terror attacks on the scale of the Oklahoma bombing in 1995 can't be ruled out.

Millions of working class people are paying attention to the J6 hearings, and are alarmed about the threats to democracy. Socialists cannot be indifferent to this.

They should be at the forefront in demanding significant repercussions for those who want to subvert democratic rights and overturn elections. The institutions of the state cannot be trusted to do that.

A mass movement is needed that will genuinely safeguard democracy. □



Mostly the countries of recent high Covid rates – South Korea, Finland, Norway, Australia, Greece, countries which suffered less in 2020 – now have those rates declining. But Japan is at its highest rate of Covid deaths in the whole pandemic. The Northern Hemisphere winter may see only small flare-ups. But we can't know whether there will be new Covid variants, or surges of other viruses. At present the NHS is too starved of resources to manage well even with relatively low summer sickness rates. We need:

- 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. □



## More online

### General strike: we're not there yet

Mohan Sen and Rhodri Evans examine the wide gap between the current strikes and a general or near-general strike, and how to push across it:  
[bit.ly/gs-yet](https://bit.ly/gs-yet)

### Shortages and repression in Russia

Michael Baker reports:  
[bit.ly/r220829](https://bit.ly/r220829)

### Sharon Graham: taken out of context

Mark Simon queries Ann Field's criticisms of the Unite leader:  
[bit.ly/unite-ms](https://bit.ly/unite-ms)

# This drought was avoidable



## Environment

By Stuart Jordan

At the time of writing nine out of fourteen regions across Britain have declared droughts. Thousands have seen their taps run dry. Farmers are predicting up to 50% losses on crop yields. Cattle and other livestock are likely to be slaughtered early as farmers run out of feed.

We have just lived through a long dry spell culminating in the hottest, driest July since 1935. But this drought was entirely avoidable: the result of staggering mismanagement and profligacy by the UK's privatised water companies. Since these natural monopolies were privatised in 1989 they have prioritised enriching their shareholders and top executives over the planning and investment necessary to run water services.

Between 1991 to 2019 privatised water companies paid out £57 billion to their shareholders, almost half of the amount that they invested in maintaining and upgrading the pipes and treatment plants. David Hall of Greenwich University has shown that water-rate

payers financed all the £123 billion investment, whereas shareholders contributed nothing. Companies took on about £50 billion debt to finance dividend payments.

The water company bosses (who top up their six figure salaries with six figure bonuses) now preside over a water network where 20-25% of freshwater is lost to leaky pipes and raw sewage despoils our seas and waterways.

When the rains eventually did come on 15 August, the water companies did not store the water to mitigate future droughts but rather saw an opportunity to dump sewage. Surfers against Sewage dubbed it "the shitstorm after the calm".

In UK law, water companies are allowed to use storm drains to manage excess water. The storm drains connect to the sewer so untreated sewage can be dumped directly in rivers and the sea. Ofwat, the entirely house-trained regulator, does not monitor these discharges, so water companies increasingly use their storm drains to illegally dump sewage on the cheap.

The Environment Agency claim that water companies released raw sewage 375,000 times last year, a total of 2.7 million hours of sewage pouring from outflow pipes. Computational biologist Professor Peter Hammond suggests il-

legal discharges are perhaps ten times greater than this figure. He has evidence of discharges of raw sewage when there has been no rain at all.

The UK's problematic relationship with the water cycle does not stop with privatised water companies. The average person in the UK uses about 150 litres a day, mostly in washing and flushing toilets. But we consume 30 times this amount in the form of "virtual water", the water used in producing imported food and textiles. It takes 2,700 litres of water to make a cotton T-shirt, 10,000 litres to produce 500mg jar of coffee, 13,500 litres to produce a beef-burger.

The UK is the sixth largest importer of virtual water in the world. We are a wet country wasting our own freshwater resources whilst also draining some of the most arid nations on Earth. Many of the world's great rivers are now running dry before they reach the sea, and 21 of the world's 37 largest aquifers are being exploited faster than they are replenished, with 13 in extreme distress. From the Indus basin to California the water table is falling.

Water is a perfectly recyclable and abundant use-value. Natural processes scrub water clean on a molecular level, making it available for terrestrial plants and animals. Humanity currently uses

about 2,575 cubic miles of water a year, mostly for irrigation in agriculture – a tiny fraction of the 6 million cubic miles of freshwater on the planet.

About 68% of that 6 mn is locked in the ice caps and permafrost. A further 30% is in underground aquifers. About 18,000 cubic miles are found in rivers, freshwater lakes and swamps. Rivers, lakes and aquifers are replenished each year by about 26,000 cubic miles of rainfall.

Rainfall will increase with climate change but the distribution will be more erratic. Without careful planning, drier summers and wetter winters increase the risk of both droughts and floods.

Since the early agriculturists of the Fertile Crescent dug irrigation channels 10,000 years ago, human efforts to divert freshwater to the right place at the right time has been central to human civilisation. The ruins of Sumer, Angkor and Maya testify to what happens when these water systems fail. Conflicts over water remain one of the main generators of war.

Human intervention into the water cycle needs to be organised with careful planning and adequate investment. The first step towards this in the UK is to take the water companies back into public ownership. □

# Gay rights in Singapore: one step forward, two steps back

By Sara Lee

On 21 August, the Singapore government announced that it would repeal the ban on sex between men (section 377a of the Penal Code). But at the same time it announced that it would amend the constitution to protect parliament's prerogative to define marriage and therefore prevent constitutional challenges to the legal definition of marriage as one between a man and a woman.

It was thought that the government was going to enshrine the definition of marriage itself in the constitution, closing the door to gay marriage. But it has been clarified that Parliament, in theory, will be able to legalise gay marriage if it wants to. The problem is that, since the beginning of Singapore's independence, the con-

servative People's Action Party has controlled almost all seats in Parliament. It was historic when the Workers' Party won just ten out of 93 seats in the 2020 general election.

The government has somehow managed to attack the gay community whilst seemingly making a concession to it. It was only in May this year that the government quietly changed the law so that gay people wouldn't be able to adopt children.

How do we reduce the government's ability to manoeuvre in the way that it does, so that we can fully win the battle for LGBTQ rights? Answer: we need to have a programme of specific, positive demands which builds solidarity across all oppressed groups.

Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, a group set up to support the miners' strike in

Britain in 1984-5, is a good historical example of why it is important to have demands for gay rights that reflect broader class issues. With specific and positive demands that reflect the interests of not only LGBTQ people but large sections of the working class, these demands can make their way into the mainstream, and it would become harder for the government to side-step issues like marriage in the future.

A socialist perspective is what will enable us to come up with such demands. For example, public housing in Singapore is inaccessible to the working class and particularly inaccessible to LGBTQ people. You are only eligible for a new public housing flat if you are married or if you are a single over the age of 35, and private housing is out of reach

for most because Singapore is one of Asia's most expensive housing markets. A socialist perspective would demand, at minimum, that public housing be greatly expanded so that every person can be housed, and that wealth and profits be greatly taxed in order to achieve this.

Pink Dot's annual pride rally has surely done a lot to change attitudes and pressure the state to repeal the ban on gay sex, but it is not yet the working-class movement for LGBTQ liberation that we need. Pink Dot has long been funded by capitalists, initially by the likes of Twitter and Google and multinational banks, and then by local capitalists when foreign funding for Pink Dot was prohibited by the state in 2016.

One of the most prominent capitalists involved in Pink Dot

is Ho Kwon Ping, who owns several hotels, resorts, spas and luxury residences around the world. The reality is that full LGBTQ liberation is intertwined with the liberation of the working class. In other words, full LGBTQ liberation is at odds with the interests of people who make their money off the backs of workers and who hoard property which they keep out of the hands of workers.

In Singapore in particular, LGBTQ rights are a working class issue not only because the vast majority of gay people are working-class, but also because the fight for LGBTQ rights is a fight against an undemocratic government that has made Singapore into a haven for corporations and the super-rich, and a hell for native and migrant workers. □

• More: [bit.ly/sg-lgbtq](https://bit.ly/sg-lgbtq)



# Organising for worker power



## Book review

By Rose Jones

This new accessible pamphlet on James Connolly has a focus on his writings on trade unionism, and while industrial unionism is the central tenet of this collection – and what this review will focus on – there is a great deal else that readers will find relevant to contemporary matters of left organisation.

Connolly's views in "Industrialism and the Trade Unions" on the Socialist Party USA of his time, for example – while not directly analogous – that "the comrades who think that the... Party is run by 'compromisers' should not jump out of the organisation and leave the revolutionists in a still more helpless minority; and the comrades who pride themselves upon being practical Socialist politicians should not too readily accuse those who differ with them of being potential disrupters," read like an argument that has played out in numerous Constituency Labour Parties across the country in the last few years.

Connolly's descriptions in the chapter "Organisation" of amalgamations and federations that are "engines for steamrolling or suppressing all manifestations of revolutionary activity," will ring true for most activists' experiences with our own bureaucratic institutions who may wonder what function our federations are supposed to fulfil, with any attempts at gaining support or industrial coordination being "so long, so cumbrous, and surrounded with so many rules and regulations that the union in distress is certain to be either disrupted or bankrupted before the Executive can be moved."

There are some proposals in here to be criticised: in "The Problem of Trade Union Organisation", Connolly's (admittedly sketchy) ideas that we should ape the capitalist class's version of the "Cabinet" and have "experts" call unions out on strike for reasons they thought best and justify their decision afterwards sit uncomfortably in an overall thesis of innovation, radical democracy, working-class power, and the spirit of rank and file that runs throughout this collection.

Connolly's experiences of trade union struggle as an organiser with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in New York and as leader of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in Dublin informs this autodidactic collection, which is littered with real life examples (fascinating for their historical explanations and significance alone) he has drawn upon to inform

his theoretical conclusions. His formative involvement in the IWW shaped his belief – which he retained til death – that industrial unionism is the most effective form of workers' combination. This is where workers employed by the same employer or in the same industry are organised into one industrial union, as opposed to the craft union model whereby workers are organised along occupational lines.

Criticisms that have historically been levelled at craft unions by those who pro-actively opposed the craft model – such as the New Unionism movement in England, or the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in America – are for their protectionist, insular, and often conservative behaviour. They have been viewed as exclusionary organisations which preserve the status and conditions of one group, potentially to the detriment of others. They can perpetuate racial, gendered, or skilled-unskilled divisions amongst workers which are then reinforced by job or trade classifications, as was observed by Connolly in the American Federation of Labour (AFL) – a national federation of craft unions in the United States.

### Solidarity

Additionally, and of primary concern to Connolly, is that they can act as a preventative measure to building solidarity in periods of upsurge in class struggle and consciousness.

In "Industrialism and the Trade Unions" Connolly is frank and insightful in his observations about the propensity amongst the working class to "jealousies", where "tailors and shoemakers fretted at the attempts of carpenters and bricklayers to understand the technicalities of their disputes with the bosses". For many "craft" – or what we might now call "professional" – jobs, workers may feel pride, a sense of professionalism, and even an identity in their hard-earned skills. Teachers, nurses, and tradespeople, for example, may feel that other workers may not appreciate the skills involved in their "craft", or the specificities of their work which may give rise to industrial conflict and ultimately give them their power in the workplace. Connolly's nuanced criticism of the industrial unionism as practiced by the Knights of Labor in the US – a diverse industrial federation open to all workers which was the forerunner to the AFL – was that it made no provisions on this account for "the treating of special immediate craft interests by men and women with the requisite technical knowledge".

Connolly's solution to this defect, outlined in "Industrialism and the Trade Unions" was in essence a federal structure of "industrial unity" whereby,

for "administrative purposes only," all workers were to be grouped together according to their industries, with further subdivisions again according to craft. Each section would elect representatives for their industry, and that body should in turn select the ruling body for the whole organisation.

While not couched in the term specifically, what is being strategised in this article is an organisational formula for worker power, and how this can best be organisationally facilitated and expressed. The importance of this crucial question has not diminished, and is pertinent to every trade unionist now: how best can we organise ourselves, what can facilitate and enhance solidarity, what provides us with the most leverage, and how can we collectively express and harness our power?

If we consider the analogy of a hypothetical school, for example: its functioning does not just depend upon the "craft" of teaching in isolation, but additionally requires the labour of teaching assistants, caretakers, caterers, cleaners, and secretaries amongst others. While the NEU might be best placed to address the specific issue of teacher workloads, this is not a concern that exists in a political vacuum.

The budgetary constraints on schools, which (amongst other things) necessitate the high workload for teachers, also impact upon the teaching assistant in the GMB and the caretaker in Unison whose pay has not kept up with inflation. Is the power of this workforce best utilised by the NEU balloting for industrial action in a dispute over workloads? Or is it by the school workforce in its entirety? What if it was the entire "education" sub-division of the industrial union on strike for greater funding across the sector?

Of course, in practice, such a reconstitution of the contemporary industrial landscape of the UK labour movement seems impossible when confronted with seemingly immovable bureaucracies that consider the preservation of the institution – the unelected officers and other staff, buildings, offices, holiday parks and conference centres (!) – its primary concern. Additionally, anti-trade union legislation in the UK restricts any form of secondary action. In the first term of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, the 1980 Employment Act restricted the definition of lawful picketing to only those who were party to the dispute and only picketing the premises of their own employer – legislation which has never been overturned by any successive Labour government.

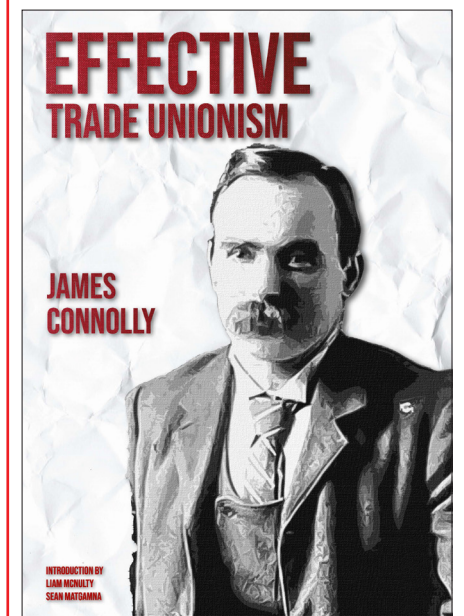
But given the recent upsurge in industrial activity seen in the UK, taken in conjunction with spiralling inflation and the cost of living crisis, alongside the

constant threat that our already meagre "rights" will face further erosion, we need to urgently reconsider what our labour movement activity can look like both within and outside of these restrictive frameworks, and what forms genuine solidarity can take.

In "Industrialism and the Trade Unions" Connolly argues that "secondary strikes" are "a thousandfold more important than the voting of strike funds". In "What is the Sympathetic Strike?" Connolly emphasises that it was not "mere cool reasoning that gave it birth in Dublin...it was born out of our desperate necessity". Despite this materialist basis in favour, however, for Connolly the sympathetic strike is not just a practical requisite of a successful action and a means to an end, but has its own intrinsic value. It concerns an obligation – or rather a duty – of solidarity. This duty is "to each other and to society at large," and provides a "higher conception of mutual life".

This timely pamphlet provides us with a reminder of the importance of the preoccupation with matters of industrial organisation – "as the economic struggle is the preparatory school and training ground for socialists" – as a means to achieve our emancipatory project. □

• Rose Jones is a trade unionist in the education sector.



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death in 1916 was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. **£5.** □

[workersliberty.org/publications](http://workersliberty.org/publications)



# The British Marxists, Ireland, and Ulster



**Connolly, politically unexpurgated**

By Sean Matgamna

Until the outbreak of World War One in 1914, there was a powerful, or seemingly powerful, Marxist international movement.

Its most eminent party by far was the German SPD. It had a national newspaper, *Vorwärts* (*Forward*), and dozens of papers dotted throughout Germany. Its vote steadily grew. The trade unions associated with it grew. It had survive and grown in a decade of illegality (the 1880s). Its leaders had great authority and prestige.

August Bebel, who died in 1913, was the founder and the leader who had presided over the growth and prosperity of the party. Karl Kautsky was the chief theoretician of the German and the international movement, his weekly paper, *Die Neue Zeit* (*New Times*) the most authoritative in the movement. What Lenin tried to do, until 1914, was build a Russian party after the model of Germany. (On that score, much that has

gone from Stalinism into the broader socialist movement, such as the idea that Vladimir Lenin was building "a party of a new type" is plain myth and nonsense, with very little basis in fact.)

The British Marxist movement, initially (1881) the Democratic Federation, from 1884 the Social Democratic Federation, and (from 1911) the British Socialist Party, had an anti-German tradition of its own.

Almost immediately on starting it suffered a split of its most eminent person, William Morris, who with Ernest Balfour Bax and others formed the Socialist League.

They developed different traditions. Hyndman claimed amongst his ancestors one in Ulster who was hanged as a rebel in 1798. He had been on the British Executive of the then revolutionary Land League. He knew such people as the old Fenian leader James Stephens. The SDF approached Ireland independently, critically. The Socialist League, after an initial flurry, in which William Morris tried to put Home Rule on the back burner, emerged as willing to put Home Rule first. Anarchists and near-anarchists took control of the Socialist League and Morris and Bax returned to the Hyndman organisation.

Before that Morris ran the Hammer-smith Socialist Society. One of its members, for about three formative years of the rise of the "new" mass trade unions, was W B Yeats. Yeats would be or become a romantic elitist, but still he sided with the workers and secularism in the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14. He spoke at one of the workers' meetings, wrote in the *Irish Worker*, and wrote the poem September 1913 (which is often explained away as only

Yeats' reaction to the refusal of Dublin, including the employers' leader WM Murphy, to give a special gallery for a proffered gift of pictures).

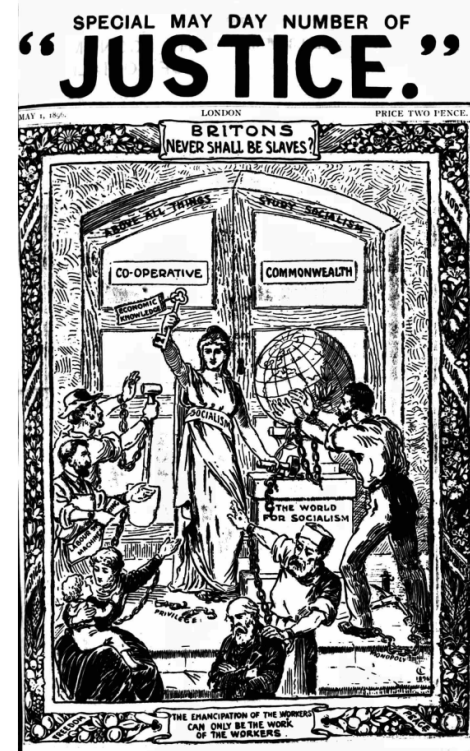
Friedrich Engels and Marx's daughter Eleanor sided with Morris and the Socialist League in 1884. Hyndman was much criticised, and was in turn critical of the German movement.

He was a Tory until near the age of 40. Before setting up the Democratic Federation in 1881 he had separate discussions with both Karl Marx, the author of *Capital*, and Benjamin Disraeli, former Tory Prime Minister, who had granted the vote to some workers in the Second Reform Act of 1867, and had in the more distant past been an MP friendly to the Chartist movement and its vast collection of signatures demanding universal male suffrage. (Disraeli told him that there were too many vested interests in the Tory Party).

## Quelch

Harry Quelch was editor of the paper of the SDF, then BSP, for many years. Leaving school at age ten to work in "unskilled" jobs, he taught himself French in order to read Marx's *Capital*, and also, later, German. He was already very ill when he wrote the article reprinted here, and he died a year later, in September 1913. He was chair of the London Trades Council for many years; large numbers of trade unionists attended his funeral, and it was also one of the greatest mobilisations in years of socialists in Britain.

Lenin wrote: "Quelch was in the front ranks of those who fought steadfastly and with conviction against opportunism and a liberal-labour policy in the British working-class movement. True, isolation from the masses sometimes



infected the British Social-Democrats with a certain sectarianism. Hyndman, the leader and founder of Social-Democracy in Britain, has even slipped into jingoism. But the party of the Social-Democrats has fought him on this, and over the whole of Britain the Social-Democrats, and they alone, have for decades been carrying on systematic propaganda and agitation in the Marxist spirit. This is the great historical service rendered by Quelch and his comrades."

The SDF had campaigned on Ireland ever since Hyndman's early links with the Land League. It supported Home Rule, but also backed "Home Rule within Home Rule" for the compact Protestant majority in north-east Ulster.

James Connolly started off as a socialist in the Socialist League, and then in the SDF. Quelch's article outlines the most considered Marxist view of the time of the "Irish" and "Ulster" questions. □

• This is part 4 of the subsection on "Connolly and the Protestant workers" of the series on "Connolly, politically unexpurgated".



The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. £4 (inc. post) □ [bit.ly/shop-wl](http://bit.ly/shop-wl)

# Would Ulster be right to fight?

By Harry Quelch

It is not necessary to take too seriously the wild and whirling words of Sir Edward Carson, Mr. Bonar Law and other inciters to riot and rebellion in order to recognise that there is in certain parts of Ulster a very strong popular feeling against Home Rule. This feeling may be unreasonable and unreasoning; with no ground whatever for it except blind

prejudice due to social and religious differences and animosities. The point is that the feeling is there, and that nothing whatever is to be gained by ignoring it.

So far from ignoring or ridiculing this feeling or sentiment it seems to me that we Socialists, who are out-and-out Home Rulers, are bound to give it serious consideration. For what, after all, at bottom,

is the demand for Home Rule, except the expression of just such a sentiment, prejudiced and unreasoning as it may be as that which animates the opponents of Home Rule in the Protestant counties of Ulster?

Economic causes, without a doubt, largely influenced Irish discontent with English rule, and, as Davitt said, the Home Rule movement was mainly an economic movement, and

there is no doubt that the Land League agitation gave unprecedented vitality and vigour to the cause of Home Rule. But, altogether apart from these considerations, and before form and direction was given to the land agitation, there was a Nationalist movement in Ireland, and the idea of "Ireland a Nation" was the passionate aspiration of all patriotic Irishmen. Now, moreover, the

same aspiration survives the disappearance of those economic influences which played so large and important a part in the agitation of thirty years ago.

By dint of persistent agitation, not always of the most pacific character, the Irish people succeeded in forcing successive British Governments to deal with the fundamental grievance of the Irish



peasantry, landlordism, in so drastic a fashion that, for the present, that grievance may be said to have disappeared, and on every hand we hear of the prosperous and contented condition of the Irish peasantry. "The principle embodied in this Bill," said Mr. Gladstone of one of his Irish Land Bills, "is one that I should be the last to apply to English legislation, but Ireland is within measurable distance of a social revolution." The menace of a social revolution not only forced the last of our great commercial statesmen to apply to Irish legislation a principle which was objectionable to him but it compelled him and his successors to do for Ireland, in the matter of giving the cultivators a "grip on the land," and in housing the labourers, what, he would never dream of doing for any other part of the United Kingdom. The result is that the inhabitants of that "most distressful country" have become the "most favoured nation" in these islands. British credit to the tune of twelve hundred millions has been pledged to buy out the rack-renting Irish landlords and to give the peasantry a hold on the soil, and the economic basis of the Home Rule agitation has been undermined.

Nevertheless, the Home Rule agitation goes on and the demand for Home Rule has rather strengthened than weakened, albeit no longer characterised by the vehemence of the days when it was an economic as well as a political question.

Deprived of its economic aspect, therefore, the demand of the Irish people, outside the Orange counties of Ulster, is just as much a matter of sentiment as is the protest of the people of those counties against Home Rule.

Home Rulers, believing in the right of every people to self-government and to the management of their own affairs, however badly they may manage them, we Social-Democrats have always championed the demand of the Irish people for legislative independence. We have aided their agitation when their present Liberal friends were coercing and dragooning them and throwing their chosen representatives into gaol. We should, in the same way, have cordially stood by them if they had risen in open revolt and put the cause of Irish Nationalism to the stern arbitrament of the sword.

We, as Social-Democrats, believe in the "sacred right of rebellion" – in the right of every nation or people to fight to acquire or to defend its national freedom and independence. But if we are, and should be, in favour of a revolt by the Irish Nationalists against the Union and against being subject of an English-Scotch Protestant majority, we can scarcely condemn the Protestants of Ulster for declaring their determination to fight against being brought under the rule of a Catholic Nationalist majority in Ireland.

This raises once more the whole question of Socialism and Nationalism, and the position of the Socialist Party, internationally, in relation to what is called anti-patriotism.

It has been well said that we Socialists are Internationalists, not Anti-Nationalists. Yet we find many of our friends vehemently condemning the national idea and loudly proclaiming themselves to be anti-patriots. For them the national idea is opposed to internationalism, and patriotism is a crime against international solidarity. This appears to me to be a complete misconception arising from a perverted view or use of the terms employed.

Nationalism, so far from being opposed to Internationalism, is an integral part thereof. There can be no inter-Nationalism if there no nations, and patriotism – real patriotism – does not mean "my country, right or wrong," nor the lust for domination over other nations. It means the equality and autonomy of each national unit in the comity of nations, the right of every people, in the democratic "federation of the world," to the most complete autonomy, the fullest liberty, in directing its own affairs and in working out its own destiny, as is compatible with the equal liberty of every other people.

On no other ground can we British Socialists justify our steadfast championship of Home Rule, our determined opposition to the suppression of the Boer Republics; our persistent demand for the substitution of native for British rule in India and Egypt. We cannot reasonably claim for other peoples the right of self-government and national autonomy if we not prepared to insist upon, to maintain and defend the same rights for ourselves.

But, it is contended by our anti-patriotic friends, National-

ism is really only thinly-veiled imperialism and patriotism, as I said some years ago, no longer means a love of one's own country and a determination to maintain her liberties, but a love of somebody else's country, and a determination to grab it for the benefit of the international capitalist marauders. All that is perfectly true, but we do not abandon definite principles simply because the terms by which they have been designated have been abused and misapplied; and we do not become Anti-Nationalists and Anti-Patriots because the words "Nationalism" and "Patriotism" have been wrested from their meaning and are used to denote aggressive domination and imperialist expansion. The things themselves remain the same by whatever names they may be known and to whatever misuse their original designations may now be turned. Patriotism does not mean imperialism, nor does Internationalism mean the abolition of all national autonomy, any more than real individualism means autocracy, or Socialism means the crushing out of all individuality and individual liberty.

Many Socialists regard any State interference with individual liberty – however wanton and mischievous – as an expression of Socialist principle. I, on the other hand, am a Socialist because I believe that it is only through Socialism that the fullest individuality can be developed and the greatest possible individual liberty can be secured. But what I mean by individuality or individual liberty does not imply the superiority or dominance of this, that, or the other individual. It means the sovereignty of the individual in all purely individual things, and in all self-regarding acts; and this necessarily involves the equal rights and equal liberty of every individual. As soon as those rights are interfered with true individual liberty ceases. So, too with nations.

True Nationalism and patriotism exclude the idea of imperialism, of domination, of my country, right or wrong, because such an idea practically expressed by any one nation must be an abrogation of the national rights of other peoples. So far therefore, from Nationalism or patriotism being synonymous with imperialism, imperialism is the very antithesis of any sane and logical conception of na-

tionality: Anti-Nationalists, therefore, who are so eager to divest themselves of any suspicion of chauvinism that they vehemently denounce any expression of patriotism are in serious danger of finding themselves enmeshed in the snares of imperialism.

If we are so anti-nationalist that we would not raise a finger to maintain our own national liberty and independence, it is sheer hypocrisy to encourage and applaud Irishmen, Egyptians and Indians in making heroic efforts and sublime sacrifices to gain that national liberty which we regard as not only worthless, but actually mischievous and wrong. To say that the proletariat has no country to defend, and that the class antagonism, which runs through all nationalities, is of more importance than the divisions between nation, is but to beg the question. All questions cannot, unfortunately, be settled in terms of the class war and the material interest of a proletarian in the land in which he lives, or its institutions, is not likely to be enhanced by the suppression of national autonomy.

There can be no question, therefore, that Socialists must be Nationalists and stand for national autonomy in a world federation, just as they are individualists and stand for individual liberty in society generally.

Whereas, however, there is no difficulty in determining what is an individual, and little in deciding what rights and liberties pertain to the individ-

ual human being in society, it is by no means so easy to determine what does, or should, constitute the national unit, or what are the limits of its autonomy. On the determination of the former question depends the answer to the question at the head of this article.

We have been told repeatedly that, in certain contingencies, "Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right". To that asseveration I can only put the question – Will it? I have no hesitation in saying that any and every nation has a right to fight for its liberty, and maintain its autonomy. But what is, or constitutes a nation? Or what determines what should be autonomous unit in the international democratic federation of the peoples?

To me it appears that, this can only be determined by a variety of circumstances or factors. Racial and political unity, identity of economic conditions, geographical situation, each and all of these combined, and none alone, must determine whether a given group of people should constitute a unit in the international. Certain it is that no group, however small, should be forcibly coerced against its will into forming part of such a unit, and that, finally, the question will have to be settled by each group or body of people for itself. But only for itself. However wrong the coercion of a minority by majority may be, the coercion of a majority by a minority is still worse. □

• *The British Socialist*, 15 September 1912

## The Ulster Covenant, 1912

*The Ulster Covenant, signed by some hundreds of thousands on 28 September 1912, read:*

Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship, and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty King George V, humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant, throughout this our

time of threatened calamity, to stand by one another in defending, for ourselves and our children, our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom, and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us, we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority.

In sure confidence that God will defend the right, we hereto subscribe our names.

And further, we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant. □

# What the Presbyterians said

*"Our civil and religious liberties imperilled": Resolution of the Irish Presbyterian Convention of February 1912, reaffirmed by the General Assembly January 1913.*

That we, the members of this great Convention, representing the overwhelming majority of Irish Presbyterians, assembled irrespective of the diverse opinions which we individually hold upon the political questions of the day, having in view the early introduction by his Majesty's Government in the coming session of a Bill to establish a Parliament in Dublin with an Executive responsible to it, hereby record our unalterable opposition to all such proposals. Under Home Rule, as foreshadowed, the Parliament and the Executive alike are certain to be controlled by a majority subject to the direction of the authors of the *Ne Temere* and *Motu Proprio* decrees, against whose domination all safeguards signed for the protection of the Protestant minority, embracing almost one-third of the total population of Ireland, would be wholly valueless.

We are confident that among other disastrous results under Home Rule

(a) our religious and civil liberties would be greatly imperilled;

(b) our industrial and agricultural interests would be seriously crippled, with calamitous results to all dependent on them, to whatever religious creed they might belong;

(c) the many philanthropic and missionary enterprises of our Church at home and abroad would in conse-

quence be greatly curtailed;

(d) Presbyterian minorities in all parts of Ireland (many of them consisting of settlers from Scotland), would in most cases, through the unavoidable shutting down of small and struggling congregations, lose the religious ministrations which they now enjoy; and

(e) in view of the long-continued action of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the direction of denominationalising education in Ireland, the children of such minorities would be deprived in all the provinces of Ireland of places of instruction which they might frequent as they do now, without danger to their faith.

We call upon the Government, with whose policy apart from the question of Home Rule many of us are in general sympathy, to save us from the disaster which Home Rule would render inevitable. And, should the Government fail us, we would earnestly appeal to our co-religionists of all shades of political opinion in Great Britain to save us while there is yet time from such overwhelming calamity. Seeing that so-called safeguards cannot avail, surely there rests an obligation upon our fellow-citizens of the same faith to stand by us in securing the rejection of a policy so dangerous to our highest interests.

We appeal to them to remember that we Presbyterians are now in Ireland because three centuries ago our forefathers were "planted" in Ulster by the English Government in order that by their loyalty and industry they might secure the peace and prosperity of our province, and promote the mutual wel-



The temporary hall built for the huge anti-Home-Rule Irish Unionist Convention in 1892. Erin go Bragh means "Ireland For Ever"

fare of both countries. Our fathers and ourselves having done our best to fulfil the trust committed to us, we feel that it would be an unworthy requital should we now, notwithstanding our solemn protest, be deprived of the heritage we enjoy, as fellow-citizens in the United Kingdom of equal status with our English and Scotch co-religionists.

In our opposition to Home Rule we are actuated by no spirit of sectarian exclusiveness, and we seek no ascendancy, religious or otherwise. Many of us were active sharers in the struggle which over forty years ago secured religious equality and initiated land reform in Ireland; and if permitted, we are all of us ready to co-operate with Irishmen of every creed in the advancement of the social and material prosperity of

our common country.

Our demand is, as a matter of elementary right and justice, the undisturbed continuance of our present place in the Constitution under which our Church and our country have so signally prospered. Our Scottish forefathers, in their struggles for religious freedom and civil right, cast their burdens on the Lord Omnipotent, who gave them signal victory. Facing as we do dangers similar to theirs, we shall follow in their footsteps and emulate their faith. In the profound belief that God reigns, we commit our cause in all confidence to Him. □

• *Belfast Newsletter*, 7 January 1913

## The other £100 billion



**Socialism vs Capitalism**

By Martin Thomas

In the financial year 2022-3, the government will pay out about £113 billion of its tax revenue to rich people and institutions as interest on government bonds (IOUs) they hold. In 2023-4 it will be more than £130 billion, or so the *Financial Times* estimates, starting from reports of the Office for Budgetary Responsibility.

In 2021-2 it was £24 billion; even in 2021-2, boosted by extra government borrowing for Covid measures, effective or ineffective, the payout was

£54 billion. Comparisons? The wages before taxes of all NHS workers total about £60 billion a year.

Keir Starmer estimates his proposed six-month freeze on household energy tariffs to cost £29 billion (some 40% of which he wants to have recouped by cancelling the £400 energy-bills relief payment scheduled by the Tories). The more ambitious scheme mooted by the energy retailers themselves has been costed at £100 billion over two years.

Roughly twice the NHS wage bill, or twice the projected annual rise in household energy bills, will be paid to wealth-holders, as a matter of routine, without fuss,

and not because of any work they've done, but simply because they hold wealth.

The sudden boost in payouts is because unusually many of the British government's bonds (IOUs) carry interest payments linked to the Retail Price Index, rather than a fixed percentage. But the broad pattern is not unusual. It is capitalism. The cream goes not to those who work, but to the owners of wealth: bonds, shares, private companies.

As workers shiver and scrimp this winter – more or less so depending on how much the current strike wave can wring from the bosses and the government – the rich will thrive.

Even if a recession comes,

as looks probable, those who choose well where to stash their wealth will still thrive.

That brings in another twist, standard for capitalism. To save our environment we need to convert the whole energy production system, and increase energy efficiency. The work needs knowledge, talent, and drive.

Yet capitalism sucks the best-educated and most dynamic into jobs which are essentially about grabbing a bigger chunk for one group of the wealthy, as against another, of the huge incomes flowing to wealth.

Of all maths and physics graduates in Britain, one-fifth, usually those foremost in their studies, go to jobs in "finance"

– that is, in devising the best schemes to grab more of the income flowing to wealth.

Socialism will be different because the great concentrations of wealth will be socially owned and so not bring incomes to wealth-holders. Because the rule will be "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. Because the most talented and industrious will be drawn to working on what will most help the community, not to what will give the biggest pay-out. Because unpredicted calamities (and those will still happen) will spur a common effort to reduce the suffering, not meagre relief schemes while vast privilege flows on as routine. □



# Scottish council workers force improvements



By a Unison member

Local government workers' strikes in Scotland have already brought some improvements in the below-inflation pay offer from the councils. Before the strikes started the councils upped the offer from 2% to 3.5%. Then, on 19 August, to 5%. On 29 August they shifted further, to (a dodgy version of) the £1,925 flat-rate offered in England. Unite has rejected the latest offer, Unison is consulting members while recommending rejection, and strikes set to start 6 September are still on.

As of October, the Institute for Fiscal Studies [reckons](#) that the lowest-income 20% will be facing an 18% price-inflation rate, and even the highest-income 20% will face 11%.

The Unite union moved first to bring out waste and recycling workers in Edinburgh in Phase One, which focused on the Edinburgh Fringe. Their 250 members struck, and bins were overflowing and streets strewn with waste at a time of high media coverage.

The second phase saw GMB and Unison join Unite, though on a slightly different timetable and in different councils.

[Unite](#): 24 to 31 August in 14 councils, and 6-13 Sep in 19. [Unison](#) – 26-29 August and 7-10 September in nine councils. [GMB](#) – 26-29 August and 7-10 September.

Unison has sent notices to nine councils across Scotland that school and early years staff will be on strike on 6-7-8 September, to join the refuse workers. Unite members in schools will strike on 6-9 Sep, and GMB members on 6-8 Sep in two councils.

Meanwhile, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, consultations in Uni-



son and GMB have begun on the joint employers' flat-rate offer of £1,925 (pro rata), which is a real wage cut even for the lowest grades. Unison is balloting 19 August to 19 September, and GMB 22 Sept to 21 October. Unite, which in local government is the smallest of the three unions, has rejected the offer and is calling for renewed talks.

Scotland shows that action can win improved offers, Scottish workers need to hold out, and in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland we need to reject this offer and move to a strike ballot

as quickly as possible. Activists should be building workplace networks and workplace meetings, and recruiting more stewards. Unison has set up an online phone-banking tool, welcome because of the numbers of members still home-working or harder to reach.

The three unions also need to get going on the pay claim from April 2023, to get it submitted by the end of 2022. All the current action and talk is about a pay award due from April 2022, with workers already five months behind in response to escalating prices. □

# UCU's new ballot starts 7 Sep

By a UCU member

University staff are heading back into dispute in the new academic year, as the University and College Union (UCU) launches a ballot for action over pay and pensions on 7 September. Unlike last year's ballot, this will be an aggregated vote: if an outright majority of members vote for strikes, everyone will be able to join in, even if their individual workplace hasn't met the 50% turnout threshold.

When a few years ago, UCU began to use the tactic of disaggregated ballots to ensure at least some universities

could strike, it was widely welcomed as a way to circumvent the imposition of the 50% rule.

The most recent dispute, however, showed up some of the risks. With only a minority of branches taking action by the end, it effectively broke down into a series of local disputes. Strong branches in financially stable institutions were able to extract extra concessions on top of the 3% national pay rise: some gaining £1,000 bonuses, or re-grading agreements, or a 2% bonus paid across the 2022-23 academic year. Branches that hadn't struck didn't have

the same leverage. While the Higher Education Committee could in theory have insisted no branch accepted local deals until UCEA improved its national offer, by the time these local offers came about the number of branches involved in action had dwindled, and such insistence would likely have demobilised things further.

An aggregated ballot at least avoids that problem, though the 50% national threshold was only just met in 2021, so it will take work to get the vote out. We need to avoid a situation like last year, when strikes

demand significant financial sacrifice from members but were strung out over an extended period that didn't put sufficient pressure on management.

There is also a wider issue in play. While the picture of how the last dispute ended is complex – some striking branches with intransigent managements got nothing extra – the risk to national pay bargaining from local deals is clear.

Designed at a time when student numbers were regulated and marketisation far less of an issue, the national bargaining system is already fraying.

Pay offers are determined by what the institutions in most financial trouble can afford, and not by what the wealthiest can pay. Even managers concede in private it's not working.

There has always been a bit of this – Oxbridge paying housing allowances, for example – but it risks becoming much more widespread. There is no straightforward answer here: the root of the problem is the government's policy of marketisation. The union needs to make sure that some universities' problems don't become an excuse to let the richest off the hook. □

# Unison to strike in some universities

By Joan Trevor

Over 90 Unison Higher Education (HE) branches recently took part in a disaggregated ballot to strike against the national pay offer of around 3%. It was a poor time to ballot over the summer, with many people being on leave,

but four Scottish branches and 18 English branches got over the 50% threshold, and many more were close.

Welsh branches organised an aggregated ballot but did not get over the threshold.

The Scottish branches have set five strike days in September/October, in

the welcome week period at the start of the new academic year. English branches will be encouraged by the union to organise strikes to coincide with their local welcome weeks.

The HE Service Group Executive has agreed to reballot any English branch that did not reach the threshold or did

not ballot previously, if they want to ballot, with a view to organising a second wave of strikes, coordinated with the UCU around November. Welsh branches will be invited to reballot on a disaggregated basis. UCU will soon ballot over pay and pensions. □



## “What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• [workersliberty.org/join-awl](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)

# But it's not in the KPIs



## Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

It's often the little things that get to you: not having the right equipment, no tech support when you need it, and management who don't seem to care unless it's on a computer screen and affects the "Key Performance Indicators" (KPIs).

Just recently, we've had the spectacle of no lubricant available in our stores. For maintaining points, supplies are a minimum requirement. Even though we've recently had no rain, which tends to wash the oil off, the need to lubricate is still there.

In we come one night, and due to perform the points-lubrication maintenance. Before we left the depot I checked the back of the van. No oil. Ok, I looked in the back of the other vans



and found just enough to cover our job.

Our intention was to replace what we took from those other vans with some from the stores and get extra on the back of our van for the following day.

Enter stores, hopes high, only to be dashed with nothing in its usual place and a half empty top-up canister. Turns out that we had started refilling the bottles we use rather than just throwing them away. Ok, but nobody had informed us. We had thrown away most of the empty bottles, as we had always done, and now had no bottles to refill.

Never mind, we'll just take a ten litre bottle and refill the bottles in the depot? Unfortunately, it looks like

someone else had had that idea. The stores were now bare, except for one bit left in the bottom of the last ten litre bottle.

Just one of those little things that pile up to make for a thoroughly annoying day in a thoroughly annoying week in what's become a thoroughly annoying job. And nobody higher up cares. They just leave it to the workers to organise ourselves, and then they have the cheek to complain when the work isn't done.

Time for workers' control, I think. □

• Matt Shaw is a railway trackworker.

# NHS: create strike committees

By Alice Hazel

Across the NHS, trade unions are preparing for ballots on pay. RCN and Unison are running "pledge" campaigns asking members to commit to voting yes in the forthcoming ballots. The commitment to run formal ballots whatever the results of these processes is good, although accelerating

the process would be even better. The pledge campaigns should be seen not as consultations but as vehicles to build support for ballots, involve members, recruit new reps, clean up membership data, get the phone-banking and communication systems of the unions in place at national and local levels. The process can also be used to highlight the strongest areas of the union so that

an effective strategy for winning the formal ballots and meeting turnout thresholds can be developed.

Despite the union leaderships favouring action and the context of higher militancy in the labour movement, it is going to be difficult to build from the low turnouts last year, less than 25%, to the necessary 50%.

Workers' Liberty still favours disaggregated ballots, so that action can be taken by the most active sections of the unions, as part of a broader strategy to involve the whole health union membership. The strategy should be developed democratically with input from branches and members. That means the leadership sharing data and details of results, and opening branches up by creating strike committees. □

## Wolfgang Petersen, 1941-2022



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

German director Wolfgang Petersen, who died in August, was renowned for his brilliant World War Two film *Das Boot* ("The Boat", 1981).

Based on Lothar Buchheim's novel, *Das Boot* follows the German U-Boat U96 as it stalks Allied convoys in the North Atlantic. The film is notable for its lack of conventional heroics and its stress on the details of submarine life – very smelly, grubby, cramped and tedious. The U96 captain, played by Jürgen Prochnow, dislikes the Nazis but he carries out his duty (as he sees it) with a degree of detachment and subdued cynicism. The crew share his sentiments and there is a strong sense of camaraderie.

The tedium is broken only when



Jürgen Prochnow as the U-Boat captain

U96 attacks a convoy or is itself attacked. After sustaining heavy damage U96 attempts to slip through the Straits of Gibraltar and it is again attacked. Turning back, the crew, utterly exhausted, some seriously wounded, make it to the apparent safety of La Rochelle in Occupied France. Soon after disembarking there is an air raid and the captain, hit by shrapnel, sees U96 explode and many of the crew are killed. He dies shortly after. Deeply moving, this is one of the finest war films ever made. □

## Join Workers' Liberty!

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



## Preparing for 26 September



**John Moloney**

Our outsourced worker members at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will strike again on 5-6 and 13-14 September. It's part of their long-running fight for workplace justice. They're striking to win improved pay and terms and conditions.

The outsourced contracts at BEIS are due to be re-tendered next year. The employer plans to take a number of outsourced contracts and consolidate them into a smaller number of regional contracts, with one for security and a separate one for cleaning, reception, and catering. We're mounting a legal challenge to that, as we don't believe the employer has given proper consideration to equality in the tender process. Our view is that outsourcing is a form of indirect discrimination.

We want to build a wider campaign around the tendering process, demanding in-house work but, even short of that, ensuring demands like full contractual sick pay and union recognition are written into any contracts that are tendered.

Our members working for Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS), on a contract from the government's Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), in Liverpool will strike again from 5-10 September, following a strike on 15-20 August. Their employer has offered a 3.25% pay increase, obviously well below inflation. PCS density in the workplace is very high and the strikes have been solid. HGS's owners are amongst the wealthiest capitalists in the world. The idea they can't pay their workers an above-inflation pay rise is laughable.

The whole union is, of course, continuing preparations for our national ballot of civil service members for industrial action over cost-of-living issues and job cuts, due to start on 26 September. A lot of work is being done on the ground, but there's more to do. The key task is to ensure a continual flow of communication and dialogue from the members in the workplace, via reps and activists, to the union centre, so we can ensure membership data is up-to-date and that members are being contacted in preparation for launching the ballot. □

• John Moloney is the Assistant General Secretary of the civil service union PCS, writing here in a personal capacity

# Defence barristers strike from 5 Sep

**By Hannah Webb**

*From 5 September criminal defence barristers, members of the Criminal Bar Association (CBA), will be striking indefinitely. Hannah Webb, who is co-chair of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, spoke to Solidarity.*

The great majority of criminal defence barristers are on strike – about 2,500 people around the country. We are generally self-employed.

In terms of the decision to go indefinite, there was a lot of peer-to-peer discussion, and regular online meetings organised by the CBA where people could debate the issues. For a lot of us it feels long overdue.

Confidence has grown with taking action. This was reinforced by the threats made against us turning out to be empty. Dominic Raab threatened to effectively blacklist people; the Lord Chief Justice called for the Crown Prosecution Service to ask courts to issue wasted costs orders in order to make individual barristers liable. Nothing like that happened. It's hard for them to victimise people when the action is so solid.

There have been some very well-at-

tended and lively pickets and that really boosted confidence. And then the government was clearly digging in. We had three options: continuing with week-on-week-off – but that wasn't budging them; giving in; or escalating.

The main demands are a 25% increase on all "representation orders" (when a solicitor is granted legal aid and a barrister is appointed); payment for written work, which is a huge part of the job but currently in effect unpaid; and payment for pre-trial work in cases where you have to do a lot of it in different locations before the trial begins.

At the moment the government is offering 15% and only on new representation orders, which given the lengthy process we have to get paid means we might not see that inadequate increase for many months or even years.

People generally don't do this for the money, which early on is really poor; we do it because we want to help people. For a long time there haven't been enough people to do the work, and last year 40% of the people at the junior end of the profession left. There are longer and longer delays and people are routinely denied even the opportunity of justice. If more people leave,



Pic: [Twitter: @jonblackbsb]

as will surely be the case if things don't change substantially, I really don't know how the system will function at all. So we are striking for ourselves, no apologies, but also for the people we represent.

There aren't yet strong links with other disputes, or loads of discussion about them. What is changing the consciousness a bit is that court staff in PCS are moving into struggle, with several disputes over a range of issues. That includes a dispute among security staff, who have immense power to shut the courts down. □

• Abridged. More: [bit.ly/hw-out](http://bit.ly/hw-out). Strike fund: [bit.ly/cba-f](http://bit.ly/cba-f) □

## BT workers strike 30-31 August

**By Rosalind Robson**

Telecom workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) struck in BT and Openreach for the second time on 30 and 31 August, continuing their fight for an improved pay deal. BT has already imposed a £1,500 flat-rate increase which, the union calculates, amounts to between 3.8% and 8%, i.e. a real-terms pay cut.

The strike is the first national action at BT for 35 years. The gap is partly explained by the historical strength of the union – high union density and comprehensive representation in collective bargaining structures – in the once state-owned telecoms company. Union strength has brought a mixed bag for members, staving off compulsory redundancies for many years, but losing out on issues such as pensions. In re-

cent years there has been a negative shift in industrial relations at BT and, with a background of high inflation and upturn in class struggle, it's not surprising that pay has become a clear crunch issue.

BT will be under pressure as their business expands into fibre fixed broadband and 5G mobile. BT will not want to lose skilled engineers to other companies. These strikes, involving some 28,000 engineers at Openreach, who build and maintain the UK's biggest broadband network (on which many other companies and mobile networks rely), will be creating a backlog of repairs.

Reportedly the CWU has now met again with BT (after BT unilaterally called off the negotiations on pay), but without any new outcome. □

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# Postal workers upbeat after first strike

By a CWU rep

*Postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) struck on 26 August, and strike again on 31 August and 8-9 Sep. A postal worker and CWU rep from south west England spoke to Solidarity.*

The strike was absolutely brilliant. There was a real upbeat feeling. I organised members to attend our picket line throughout the day, and it was particularly notable how members who'd never picketed before, never been on strike before, loved the experience.

I was interviewed by a journalist from the local press; she asked me what the reaction from the public had been like, and before I was able to answer, there were constant honks and cheers from passing drivers. Eventually she just said, "I suppose that answers that!"

Our office is on a busy main road, so there was passing traffic all day. The public support was very apparent, which gave everyone on the picket line a boost.

Members see the strike as an opportunity for us to fight back against all the ways the job has been made worse since privatisation. £2 billion has been paid out to shareholders since privatisation resulting in our conditions continually being ground down. We'll get into work and they'll say, "we've got no van for you today, you'll have to take a trolley." The strike is about workers saying we've had enough of that situation, where shareholders are profiting from our working conditions getting worse.

The strike was extremely well supported. The company is manipulating the figures for participation, because it includes people who are off sick, on annual leave or on days off in its calculation for the number of workers who attend for work/ are not on strike. That's pure spin. Support for the strike in my office was around 97% and I've heard reports from many other reps in our branch who tell me that they have had a full 100% sup-



port. Royal Mail is also using dangerous bribery to undermine the strike.

They've offered managers a £1,000 bonus if they have full attendance up to 31 October. They want to make sure there'll be a loyal core of managers at work throughout the first phase of our dispute. The managers' union, Unite, is objecting to that. But it means that if you're a manager, if you're ill, even if you have Covid, you're being bribed by the company to come to work to get the full attendance bonus. That bonus pot totals £6 million across the country – they're prepared to spend on that, but not on a decent settlement for us.

We are prepared to be in this fight for as long as it takes. The closer we get to Christmas, the more leverage we have. During the last national strike, in 2009, the overall volume of parcels was nowhere near as high as it is now, and even then they simply had nowhere to store the backlog of undelivered parcels. They ended up having to drive them up and down the motorways in lorries!

We have two parallel disputes – one over pay, and one over our terms and conditions, with live ballot mandates for both. Although they're technically distinct disputes, we see them as one fight. There's no point in accepting a decent pay settlement in one dispute and then accepting detrimental changes to our terms and conditions in the other. That would just make the pay increase irrelevant. If the company says, we'll give you a 15 percent pay increase, but you have to accept Sunday working, cuts to sick pay and annualised hours, that's meaningless. We won't sell our conditions.

We absolutely see the logic in coordinating our action with other unions. If that's going to happen, it needs liaison between the NECs of different unions. I think we're heading that way anyway; there's a sense of uprising in the country. Even workers who aren't on strike see what we're doing as fighting for them as well. □

• Abridged. More: [bit.ly/rm-strike](https://bit.ly/rm-strike)

# Where next in the national rail dispute?

A discussion piece from Off the Rails

Rail union RMT's NEC will meet on 1 September to discuss the next steps in the national dispute over pay and conditions with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs). Reps will also meet on 1 September to discuss the next steps in the [ongoing dispute](#) with London Underground (LUL).

The Executives of the other unions will also be meeting soon to discuss their own disputes. And, most importantly, discussion is taking place in mess rooms across the job everywhere about how the strikes have gone so far, and where we go from here.

RMT members at Network Rail and TOCs have struck six times so far (21, 23, and 25 June; 27 July; 18 and 20 August). Aslef members at eight TOCs have struck twice (30 July and 13 August). TSSA members at Avanti West Coast struck on 27 July, with TSSA members at seven other TOCs and Network Rail also striking on 18 and 20 August. Unite members at Network Rail also joined the August strikes. Meanwhile, RMT members at Arriva Rail London, technically a TOC but operating the London Overground network on a contract from Transport for London (TfL), struck on 19 August, whilst RMT members on London Underground Ltd. have struck on 1 and 3 March, 8 June, 21 June, and 19 August, with Unite members on LUL and TfL joining the strike on 21 June and 19 August. Outsourced cleaners in RMT working for Churchill on various TOCs in the south east and for Atalian Servest on Avanti West Coast also struck in April.

The employers are digging in. So we're faced with two choices: give up, or step up. And *Off the Rails* has yet to hear from anyone, in any station or depot across the country, who wants to surrender. So we need to discuss what effective escalation looks like.

## Longer strikes

There's no getting around the basic fact that, if 48-hour strikes aren't working, the simplest form of escalation is to strike for longer. The Felixstowe dockers have set a good example by striking for eight days. Rail workers might not be ready for that level of action yet, but our next strikes should be over three days, as a minimum.

## Calendar of action

So far, the pattern in the dispute has seen unions announce a set of strikes, and then wait for several weeks before announcing the next set.

At the moment, the bosses probably believe that, as long as they can ride out 48 hours of strikes every six weeks or so (our current pattern), we'll probably tire before they do. But if we announce an escalating programme of action over several months, it makes clear that's not the case – and may, therefore, shorten the dispute overall.

## Coordinate the action

Sadly, Aslef seems currently committed to pursuing its own course and avoiding coordination with other unions. The significant number of Aslef members who can see the folly of this approach need to speak up within their union and pressure their leadership to change course. In the meantime, RMT, TSSA, and Unite should continue to coordinate strike days.

With the "Hot Strike Summer" spreading to multiple other sectors and workplaces, there's also potential for coordination with other unions.

Unite is also in dispute with London United/RATP, where drivers struck alongside RMT members on LUL and London Overground on 19 August, and Arriva. Coordination with their action is also obviously logical.

## Step up the public campaign

Our fight is not just about our pay, jobs, and conditions – it's about the future of rail transport in this country.

RMT's day of action against ticket office closures on 23 August, alongside the We Own It campaign, was a good start. Similar days of action should be called regularly between strike days, focusing on different aspects of how the planned cuts will impact passengers. RMT needs to enact the policy passed at its AGM committing it to equip local branches to run stalls in town centres, promoting the campaign and trade unionism in general.

With just a few days to go before the RMT NEC's meeting, reps and activists should contact their NEC members to ensure their views are heard. We haven't gone on strike just to register a protest... we've gone on strike to win. And winning requires escalation. Let's do it.

• Abridged. More [bit.ly/otr-wn](https://bit.ly/otr-wn)





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## UKRAINE FIGHTS TO DRIVE BACK PUTIN

**By Dan Katz**

On 29 August Ukraine launched its Kherson ground offensive. It claims to have broken through in three places. Initial reports, as *Solidarity* goes to press, suggest it has made some limited gains.

Since the Russian army destroyed and then overran the eastern Ukrainian towns of Sievierodonetsk (24-25 June) and Lysychansk (3 July) the battlelines in Ukraine have remained largely unchanged. Russian forces have seemed to be temporarily exhausted, having suffered debilitating losses in the six months of fighting since Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine in February.

Russia has also been forced to move troops from the Donbas front to the south where Ukraine has been preparing a counterattack. Ukraine aims to re-take the area north of the Dnipro river which includes Kherson city, occupied by Russia since the first weeks of the war and still with a majority pro-Ukraine population.

Ukraine needs a victory in Kherson because it needs to show the West and its own population that it can beat Russia. Ukraine also needs to move quickly. It aims to prevent

a rigged Russian referendum taking place in Kherson Oblast which is apparently set for 11 September.

In addition, if Ukraine aims to fight offensive army operations, especially across the open, flat farmland in the south, it has to move before the winter makes the ground soft and muddy.

The Russians intend to annex the occupied south of Ukraine. They have already taken substantial steps towards that end: abducting Ukrainian activists, abolishing elected local councils and imposing their own officials, and introducing Russian media, currency and school curricula.

In the past weeks Ukraine has used advanced weapons supplied by the US and European states to effectively target Russian command centres, arms dumps and lines of communication. Ukraine has damaged bridges used by the Russians to supply their forces in Kherson. Ferries across the river are being attacked.

The key Russian-held hub of Nova Kakhovka has been repeatedly hit and now has no water or electricity.

Assassinations of Russian imposed Ukrainian collaborators continue. The latest killing took place on 29 August when

former Ukrainian MP, Oleksiy Kovalyov, was shot dead. Kovalyov had joined the Russian-controlled Kherson regional government. Kherson is regularly plastered with posters warning that Ukrainian collaborators will be targeted.

Whether Ukraine is capable of retaking Kherson city is not clear. The Russians have substantial resources and have been preparing to defend the area for many weeks.

Ukraine also wants to retake the city while inflicting minimal damage to its population and to the city's infrastructure. That means it can not act as Russia has in the East where towns like Mariupol have been destroyed, at enormous human cost, by Russian troops who are indifferent to Ukrainian casualties.

Workers' Liberty supports Ukraine's fight for self-determination and we want Ukraine to win the battle for Kherson. However, we also recognise that Ukrainian gains in Kherson would put Putin under political pressure inside Russia, and might lead to further Russian military escalations, provocations and outrages. This is a moment of hope for a Ukrainian victory, but also of danger. □

• Background: [bit.ly/u220825](https://bit.ly/u220825)