

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Meanwhile...



SPREAD THE STRIKES!

BEAT BACK TRUSS!

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Spread the strikes!



The next two months should see hundreds of thousands more workers join the burgeoning strike wave.

A wave of new ballots is coming, as well as further strikes in sectors already balloted. The new ballots will not be easy to win, but the ongoing strikes will surely have a galvanising effect.

The explosion of price rises cuts both ways, so to speak, for efforts to build industrial action. It makes the need for action to win pay rises and other improvements more clear. It may also lead to more apprehension about the prospect of losing money through sustained strikes.

Unions can offset some of that apprehension by effective use of strike funds and hardship payments. In addition to nationally-distributed funds, branches and regions must be licensed to fund-raise and administer local funds. Administration of funds at the lowest possible level, as close to the workplace as possible, is key for maximising ease-of-access and democratic accountability.

In the RMT, the national union distributed £500,000 from its central disputes fund to branches, proportional to the number of members they currently have involved in live disputes, and licensed branches to establish their own processes for applications to and withdrawals from the fund. That is a good model which should be generalised as far as

possible.

Cross-union donations will help too: the British Medical Association, the hybrid professional association/union which represents doctors, recently publicised its £1,000 donation to the RMT's strike fund. Although the donation was technically based on individual donations from members of its council, the fact it was promoted on the BMA's official website is surely a sign of the times. The BMA's Junior Doctors' Committee is currently preparing for a potential ballot of its members for action over pay.

The first major settlement of the current wave is in Scottish local government, where further strikes by refuse worker and nursery and primary school workers have been called off. The deal is still below inflation, and so can't be hailed as a victory. But it is a big advance on what those workers were first offered, and it includes some positive elements the rest of the movement should learn from, including unions' insistence on a flat-rate consolidated pay increase rather than a percentage rise.

Further action

That further action is being called on the railway is positive, and RMT and Aslef striking together on 15 September is particularly significant, as it disrupts what has seemed to be a deliberate strategy on the part of the majority of the Aslef leadership to avoid joint action with the RMT at all costs.

By naming its own strike on 15 September, the RMT has rightly forced the issue, and can now use the opportunity

of joint action and joint picketing to discuss industrial unity with Aslef members. But TSSA's choice of the 26th, and the somewhat slapdash fashion in which coordinated action on the 15th has come about, shows there is still a long way to go in terms of building coordination even within the rail dispute, let alone between sectors.

That, and much else in the current wave, pose urgent questions of democracy, transparency, and accountability. Currently, the issue of coordination between unions seems to be largely a matter of behind-the-scenes communication between general secretaries' offices. We don't yet have cross-union committees or assemblies of reps, which could discuss strategy and prospects for coordination, and develop proposals which could then be fed back into the democratic structures of each union, or even workplace or sector strike committees as a mechanism for asserting grassroots control of disputes. It is up to socialists active in the rank and file of unions to raise such ideas.

Such committees, even where they are entirely unofficial, comprised of reps in a local area coming together to discuss next steps, must also consider the question of the pace and intensity of action. Beyond its next strikes on the post on 8-9 September, the CWU has announced no further action in Royal Mail or BT.

The RMT continues to call 48 hours of action once a month, and less on London Underground. Aslef and TSSA are back to 24 hours of action in their national disputes. The dogma that disputes must be run as "marathons" rather than "sprints" continues to prevail, with union leaders apparently wedded to the idea that a slower pace of action will "keep them in the game" for longer, presumably hoping they will grind down the employer eventually.

All historical evidence is that strikes are more likely to win (and win quickly) by being intense, concentrated, and fast-moving. The "marathon" strategy may have the opposite effect to the one intended, even on union leaders' own terms. A repeating pattern of one or two-day strikes over several months that produce few results can lead to a loss of confidence amongst members. The new Tory prime minister will not go for a deliberately slow and piecemeal fight back from the government.

Barristers, with their indefinite strike from 5 September, and others such as outsourced care workers in Lancashire who will strike again from 10-19 September; Baker Hughes factory workers in Unite, who are striking from 29 August-16 September, followed by two months of discontinuous 48-hour strikes; and Liverpool dockers, also in Unite, who will strike from 19 September to 3 October, show a better way forward. □

Inflation and how to counter it

By Martin Thomas

Inflation is high because of the knock-on effects of world gas, oil, and some other prices being pushed up by the Ukraine war.

That compounds with supply blockages, some due to China's Zero-Covid lockdowns. As some spending power pent up during lockdowns is released, and creates some "snowball" of expanding market demand, those factors make it easy for bosses in many sectors to push up prices.

The governments' response is to raise interest rates (tighten credit) and clamp down on wages so as to cool demand. Experience from the 1980s was that (much higher) interest rates then tamed inflation only after big slumps and with years of delay.

The official CPI inflation rate is 10.1% (July-to-July). That is lower than the old measure, RPI, at 12.3%.

There are technical reasons why RPI is unreliable (CPI has a better, though

still makeshift, allowance for budgets shifting to substitutes whose prices rise less), but such differences fade compared to others.

Inflation will rise, indeed has already risen since July. "Factory gate" prices in July 2022 were up [17.1%](#). That will feed through to retail.

Inflation is higher for poorer households which spend more of their budgets on energy, fuel, and food. The Institute for Fiscal Studies [reckons](#) inflation in October will be 17.9% for the worst-off 20% and 10.9% for the best-off 20%. As Leon Trotsky wrote in 1938:

"Neither monetary inflation nor stabilisation can serve as slogans for the proletariat... Against a bounding rise in prices... one can fight only under the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages in relation to the increase in price of consumer goods". Add to that: automatic rise in benefits and in budgets of NHS and other public services. □

Strikes

29 Aug-12 Sep: Factory workers (Unite) at Baker Hughes factory, Montrose, Scotland strike

1-5 Sep: Factory workers (Unite) at Venator Materials chemical plant in Hartlepool strike

8-9 Sep: Postal workers (CWU) strike

10-19 Sep: OCS care workers (Unison) strike

13-14 Sep: Outsourced civil service workers at BEIS (PCS) strike

15 Sep: Train drivers (Aslef) strike at Arriva Rail London (London Overground), Avanti West Coast, Chiltern, Cross Country, Greater Anglia, Great Western Railway, Hull Trains, LNER, Northern, Southeastern, TransPennine Express, West Midlands Trains

15 Sep: Rail workers (RMT) strike at Arriva Rail London (London Overground), Chiltern, Cross Country Trains, Govia Thameslink Railway, Greater Anglia, Hull Trains, LNER, East Midlands Railway, c2c, Great Western Railway, Network Rail, Northern, Southeastern, South Western Railway, TransPennine Express, Avanti West Coast, West Midlands Trains

17 Sep: Rail workers (RMT) strike at all of the above, except Arriva Rail London (London Overground) and Hull Trains

19 Sep-16 Nov: Factory workers (Unite) at Baker Hughes launch a series of discontinuous 48-hour strikes

19 Sep-3 Oct: Port of Liverpool dockers (Unite) strike

26 Sep: Rail workers (TSSA) strike at Avanti West Coast, c2c, Cross Country, East Midlands Railway, Great Western Railway, LNER, Network Rail, Southeastern

Strikes are also likely on London buses, (by Unison) at some universities, plus further strikes in BT and London Underground, but we don't yet know when.

Ballots

6 Sep: Higher Education workers (UCU) ballot opens

11 Sep: NHS workers in England (Unite) ballot closes

15 Sep: NHS workers in Wales (Unite) ballot closes

15 Sep: NHS nurses (RCN) ballot closes

24 Sep: Teachers (NEU) consultative ballot opens

26 Sep: Civil servants (PCS) ballot opens

Early-mid Oct: Firefighters (FBU) ballot opens

27 Oct-25 Nov: NHS workers (Unison) ballot opens □

Why we back Ukraine's offensive

By Dan Katz

Ukraine's long-planned counter-offensive in Kherson Oblast, southern Ukraine, continues to make small territorial gains towards its aim of retaking Kherson city.

Workers' Liberty supports Ukraine's fight. Here's why.

Russian forces invaded Kherson region on 25 February, and by 3 March claimed to control the main town, Kherson. The population of the area is overwhelmingly hostile to Russian military rule. In March the people of Kherson city regularly demonstrated against the Russian occupation before their protests were crushed with violence and a regime of terror was imposed across the whole Oblast.

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report from July, based on evidence from 71 people from across the occupied south of Ukraine, states that "Russian forces have turned occupied areas of southern Ukraine into an abyss of fear and wild lawlessness". HRW accuse Russia of war crimes including torture (beatings, suffocation and electric shocks) and killing prisoners of war.

It seems that at least 600 people have been forcibly disappeared from the area since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Those detained include elected mayors, journalists, civil servants and police

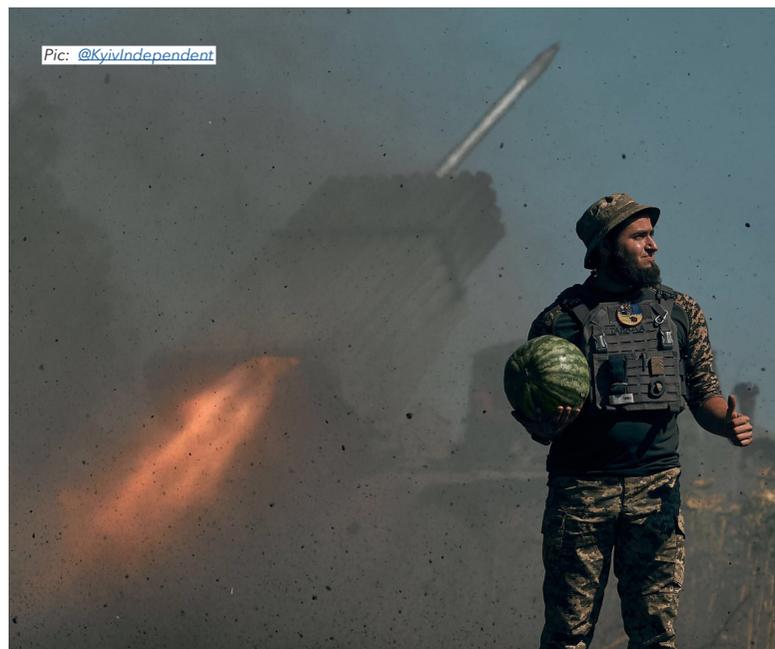
officers. The intention is to decapitate the active resistance to occupation, allowing the occupation authorities to impose Moscow-directed policy.

Nevertheless, resistance continues. Anti-occupation posters plaster Kherson walls and leading Ukrainian collaborators have been poisoned and shot dead. On 30 August, alongside the army offensive a major gun battle took place in Kherson city centre.

Moscow aims to annex the occupied regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson following fake referenda in September. The votes will be rigged; most people will not vote (and many residents have fled the region; Kherson's pre-war population was 350,000, now reduced to 180,000).

Locally elected officials have been replaced by Russian appointees. The schools have been purged and teachers instructed to teach a Russian curriculum whenever the schools manage to re-open. The Russian ruble has been introduced. Ukrainian media has been jammed and replaced by Russian television and internet.

There is no reason at all that Ukrainians should have to passively accept this Russian occupation. Demands from some on the British left for the West to stop arming Ukraine amount to saying: we intend to abandon you to suffer this



occupation. And that is a disgrace.

The Ukrainians' war is a just war and they have a right to demand weapons to defend themselves. We have an internationalist obligation to support them.

Settlement

Demands for a negotiated settlement wilfully ignore Russian statements that they will not negotiate. Putin intends a relentless war with the aim of abolishing the Ukrainian people's right to decide their own future, dismantling Ukraine, annexing territory and subordinating Ukraine to Russian power. A small economically weak country, Ukraine, faces invasion and subjugation by a

more powerful neighbouring state, Russia.

So why should the oppressed Ukrainians wait? They are right to fight back now.

The regime Putin would impose on Ukraine is similar to that which has existed in occupied Donbas since Russia grabbed the eastern Ukrainian area in 2014. Donbas is run by Moscow-controlled gangsters. Civil liberties have been abolished.

Putin's original justifications to invade Ukraine absurdly include the idea that Russia's war is a war to oppose a Nazi regime in Ukraine. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and Defence Minister

Oleksii Reznikov are all Jewish. Ukraine is a functioning democracy and the far-right in Ukraine is tiny. In the presidential election of 2019 the far right candidate got 1.6% of the vote.

The kitsch left in Britain also argues that this war is driven by NATO, seemingly believing the West is the major aggressor in all circumstances, and irrespective of all facts and contrary evidence. However, NATO did not force Russia to invade Ukraine. Putin invaded for his own imperial, nationalist reasons. The expansion of NATO (Finnish and Swedish accession), the increase in German arms spending, the application of Moldova for EU membership are all driven by fear of Putin's Russia.

NATO explicitly refused to allow Ukraine to join and the US has been very careful to limit the arms it provides to Ukraine; NATO troops are not fighting.

And if Putin wins in Ukraine, he won't stop there. Just as wars in Chechnya, Georgia and Donbas led to this current war, a victory for Putin in Ukraine will endanger the Baltic states, Moldova and Kazakhstan.

The Ukrainian people have the right to self-determination. The Ukrainian people are simply defending that right, aiming to push Russia out of Ukraine. Victory to Ukraine! □

Sanctions are not effective solidarity

By Dan Katz

An assessment in the *Economist* magazine suggests that Western sanctions against Russia introduced to force Russia to withdraw from Ukraine are not working.

The editors conclude that, eventually, over a period of some years, the bans on exports to Russia may seriously impact on Russia's economy, limiting Russia's ability to innovate and develop high-tech industry.

However, damaging Russia's economy is not the same as forcing Putin to leave Ukraine. And pulling the Western states' and Russia's economies apart, and realigning Russia somewhat with India and China, may well push the world towards division into blocs and more political or military conflicts in future.

The *Economist* identifies different types of sanctions:

- Seizing the assets of the oligarchs. This plays well to the Western public and makes good television - after all, who likes an oligarch? - but those Russian plutocrats are good at evading such measures and besides have little power to change Putin's policy.

- Financial sanctions. Shutting Russia out of the SWIFT payment system used for international payments has only been partial and has been circumvented by using a similar Chinese system. The Russian rouble has bounced back from a deep exchange rate-low at the start of March. Russia still has deep reserves of foreign currency and is topping up by continuing to sell gas and oil at higher prices.

- Trade restrictions. Oil sanctions have raised prices, so Russia sells less, but at a higher price.

Of all the Western sanctions, the *Economist* calculates that the Russian

ruling class has been hurt most by restrictions on exports to Russia - computers, software, chemicals, and spare parts for machinery and vehicles - so manufacturing output has fallen.

And hundreds of thousands of young, often skilled, workers have left Russia since the start of the war.

None of that will force Putin out of Ukraine, though.

Survey

A survey by Yale University academics claims the sanctions are working. That survey, however, picks on scraps of evidence (oil and gas revenues were low for Russia in May 2022); obfuscates the effect of Russian counter-sanctions on Europe (cutting off gas); fails to consider whether the timescale of the economic hurt is short enough to affect the war any time soon; and also fails to consider whether in that timescale Putin could find enough "ways round"

sanctions (e.g. getting high-tech imports from China) to subsist indefinitely.

Some sanctions are immediately, politically, counter-productive. The attempts of Finland and the Baltic states to ban Russians travelling through Europe and taking holidays amount to a collective, blanket, anti-Russian punishment. The political effect will be to help Putin claim the West is opposed to Russia and Russians as a whole, not just his imperialist regime and the invasion of Ukraine.

Estonia has also begun to remove Soviet-era statues. For example, a World War 2 memorial has been removed from Narva, a majority Russian-speaking city. Justifying the move foreign minister Urmas Reinsalu said Russia was trying to exploit "internal divisions" in Estonia, which is 25% ethnic Russian. In fact the government's campaign is helping Russia to do so. □

The Morning Star's trouble with Gorbachev



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The death of Mikhail Gorbachev has caused some difficulty at the *Morning Star*. That's because any serious assessment of the man inevitably involves an assessment of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist empire across Eastern Europe whose collapse he inadvertently brought about.

And the *Morning Star* (together with the organisation that controls it, the Communist Party of Britain) isn't quite sure of what to say regarding the Soviet Union – at least, as it was by the time Gorbachev became leader in 1985.

So best to fall back on banality, summed up by the headline of the paper's editorial (1 Sep) "Gorbachev and his legacy must be viewed in historical context": difficult to disagree with that, eh?

The editorial starts out with the observation that "when a life is lauded by both Henry Kissinger and Boris Johnson, the deceased must have done something very wrong."

And that "very wrong" something turns out to have been to have been... well the editorial isn't quite sure. Despite lauding the Soviet Union for "full employment and relatively generous welfare provision with extraordinary access to social and cultural facilities", the editorial cannot avoid noting "problems of resource allocation, waste, environmental degradation, [lack of] innovation and declining productivity".

In a masterpiece of understatement, the editorial admits that citizens "felt alienated from important aspects of a bureaucratic command system that failed to involve them in democratic participation."

So it seems that Gorbachev was right to have pushed for reform, but wrong in the way he went about it: "his half-baked domestic programme of 'perestroika' (restructuring) and 'glasnost' (openness) soon led to chaos".

Andrew Murray, in a lengthy piece in the same edition, uses a strange formulation to describe Gorbachev's international policy: "the prioritisation of 'universal values' over class considerations in international affairs". This (according to Murray) meant "not just peaceful coexistence but a deeper level of co-operation between socialism and imperialism."



Pic: CC BY SA 3.0

Murray also seems to blame Gorbachev for allowing the growth of independence movements in the Baltic republics within the USSR and allowing "the countries of eastern Europe ... to move away from socialism." According to Murray, "he was reluctant to use the powers he had to ensure social stability."

(Assuming that what Murray means by this is that Gorbachev failed to clamp down on independence movements, he's simply wrong, as far as the republics within the USSR were concerned: he acted with brutal force against separatist movements in Kazakhstan in 1986, Georgia in 1989, Azerbaijan in 1990 and Lithuania in 1991, killing protesters in the process. But maybe that wasn't forceful enough for Murray?)

Murray's willingness to blame Gorbachev for not cracking down harder on independence movements leads him to reach a conclusion that Vladimir Putin would surely agree with: "His legacy, alas is being written on the bloody battlefields of Ukraine, as the citizens of the country he destroyed confront each

other as enemies." Something of a contrast can be found in the weekend (3-4 Sep) edition, which carried a lengthy piece by Kate Clark, the paper's Moscow correspondent throughout the Gorbachev years: "After decades when the Soviet centralised economy had stagnated... the shortcomings were there for all to see – shortages in the shops, apathy and low productivity... and an increasing distrust of the Communist Party leadership... so reform was needed."

Clark's more sympathetic assessment reflects the fact that when Gorbachev resigned in December 1991 and the Soviet Union collapsed, the paper carried an article entitled "A Tragic Farewell for Gorbachev", honouring him as someone who'd "tried to rescue the Socialist ideal from the authoritarian strait-jacket that was suffocating it to death".

What no-one at the *Morning Star* – either during the Gorbachev years and immediately afterwards, or now – has suggested is that a mass popular revolution for political and civil liberty, including the right to organise free trade unions and working-class political parties, could have led to genuine socialism. □

• More online: How Gorbachev's attempts to save the USSR system undid it, bit.ly/gorb-v

The case for space



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

In the last few days, NASA has twice had to abort launches of the Artemis mission to the Moon. By the time this article appears in print, there may be another attempt, a successful launch or a failure. Regardless of what will happen, I will watch the launch attempts with enthusiasm – and I say this as a socialist.

Watching a weekend politics programme this morning on the BBC, I saw a journalist attempt to coax a Labour politician to say something positive or negative about the Artemis mission – with little success. There is a sense that many on the Left either take no interest in exploring space, or oppose the programme as a waste of money desperately needed here on Earth.

The debate goes back many decades. In the 1960s there were many in the U.S. who opposed the

NASA missions that successfully landed a man on the moon on the grounds that the money could have been better spent on, for example, alleviating poverty. Of course that argument ignored the fact that in the mid-1960s, under the Democratic President Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. had launched a very expensive "war on poverty" at the same time as it was sending astronauts into orbit. Apparently, it was not a zero-sum game.

In 1983 I interviewed the American writer Michael Harrington, who founded Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). He told me that he believed that it was "important to explore the universe. I think that there might be some things that are not necessarily of economic value out there." He added: "We might even learn something about ourselves."

Harrington's comments followed on a long tradition of interest in space travel on the Left. In the early Soviet

period, before the onset of the Stalinist regime, visionaries like Konstantin Tsiolkovsky pioneered many key concepts that allowed for eventual exploration of the planets and the stars. It was another Soviet scientist, the Ukrainian Yuri Kondratyuk, who came up with the method being used today by the Artemis programme to send a rocket to the Moon and back. The early Soviet scientists came up with some of the core concepts used today by NASA and others, including the idea of a multi-stage rocket, which Tsiolkovsky developed in 1929. Try to remember that as we watch the various stages of the giant Space Launch System blast off and then separate.

I think part of the reason why socialists have sometimes been among the most enthusiastic supporters of space exploration has to do with how we view the future. We have long used the slogan "socialism or barbarism" and it might be useful to think about what



Pic: CC BY 2.0

that actually means. To me, it means that we can either imagine a socialist future for humankind – or no future at all. To us, the alternative to climate catastrophe and global nuclear war is the creation of new societies based on social justice.

In other words, while businessmen, and the governments that support them, are focussed on making a "quick buck", we are thinking more long term. We can imagine a future for our species and our planet and we can therefore think over the horizon.

That's why we look forward to things like Artemis, with its promise of humans once again setting foot on the Moon – and in just a few short years, landing on Mars as well. I for one can't wait to see that happen. □

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



Activist Agenda

Free Our Unions has fringe meetings at TUC Congress (Brighton: Tuesday 13 Sept 6pm, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, BN1 1AF) and Labour conference (Liverpool: Monday 26 Sept, 7.30pm, the Liverpool pub, 14 James St, L2 7PQ).

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement (LCFM) has a session, "Beyond Borders", at The World Transformed fringe event at Labour Party conference, Saturday 24 Sep, 11am-12:30, School Cinema, 41 Greenland St, L1 0BS. LCFM is also planning its own fringe meeting.

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign's Labour conference fringe meeting will be Tuesday 27 September, 6pm at the Friends' Meeting House, 22 School Lane, L1 3BT.

Labour Left Internationalists will be at Labour conference promoting those meetings and others, plus helping with compositing and promotion of motions, distributing bulletins, running stalls, etc.

A Workers' Liberty team will also be in Liverpool, protesting against the Labour NEC ban on Workers' Liberty, running stalls, and taking part in The World Transformed. □

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

Towards a general strike in Sudan?

By Sacha Ismail

The military regime that seized power in Sudan in October 2021, eliminating the civilian half of a government that was supposed to form a bridge to free elections, is still there. It has killed at least 117 protesters and counting. It is reshaping the Sudanese state back towards the pre-2019 Bashir dictatorship: creating special forces to police women's behaviour, deepening the country's ties with Russia.

Remarkably, despite the repression, Sudan's democracy movement is still there too, and still mobilising regular mass protests.

The "resistance committees", local neighbourhood-based bodies mobilising for protests and coordinating struggles against the coup regime called for a general strike on 24 August. They then decided to postpone, in part so



activists could participate in relief efforts for floods that have killed over a hundred, made thousands homeless, and impacted hundreds of thousands.

A statement from a group of resistance committees committed to work with trade unions to build up organisation capable of a strike that can deliver a "fatal blow in the face to the coup".

Meanwhile numerous strikes over workplace and economic demands are still taking place in a range of sectors.

At the end of August Sudan's jour-

nalists formed their first independent union since Omar al-Bashir's regime dissolved the last one in 1989.

Throughout the anti-coup struggle, many Sudanese democracy activists have displayed strong internationalism. Protesters have vocally supported Ukraine. In August, the Alliance of Demands-based Bodies (TAM), a coalition of workers', environmental and refugee rights organisations, declared:

"We commend the struggles of the British trade unions and support your demands. We want to build a movement without borders to raise the demands of ordinary people. The impoverishment of the majority for the benefit of a rich minority is clearly unjust. Big corporations are the source of great misery. Strikes and protests are a human right. Access to life-saving medicines is part of the right to life. Lives before profits. Laying off workers is a

crime against society. We stand in solidarity with those who stand in solidarity with us. Rights do not stop at any border."

The Sudanese Teachers Committee declared:

"The Sudanese Teachers' Committee stands in full solidarity with the unions and workers in Britain in their movement to improve the living conditions of the workers in Britain and to stop the brutal exploitation of workers by capitalism. Long live the struggle of the working class all over the world."

UK trade unionists should make links with worker-activists in Sudan, including with workers in their own sector. □

• More on Sudan: workersliberty.org/sudan. The MENA Solidarity Network carries regular updates and information on how to send messages of solidarity.

Women killed for being "witches"



By Katy Dollar

Demands are growing for greater action on sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) in Papua New Guinea. Calls include an editorial in the *Post-Courier*, PNG's foremost newspaper. The violence includes the public torture and murder of women accused of witchcraft.

The most recent high-profile case followed the death of trucking magnate Jacob Luke. Press reports say Luke, who died while bushwalking in Enga, an underdeveloped province in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, likely died of a heart attack before his body was discovered by telecommunication workers in late July.

Members of Luke's tribe from the province implicated nine women, accusing them of "kaikai lewa" (removing the victim's heart for sorcery). The women were covered in petrol and burned. Five of the group were tied naked and sexually assaulted with hot irons in front of a mostly male crowd. The five surviving women were rescued by state agents after several failed attempts.

Research from the Australian National University (ANU)

published in 2020 found the attention to witch-hunting and the torture and killing of women alleged to be involved in sorcery was "not only warranted but also urgent considering the apparent increase in number and the brutality with which the witch hunters operate".

In a paper published a year earlier, the same authors found SARV was more than surviving: it is "very clear it is entering new geographical areas" like Enga, where they had found no records of such attacks taking place before 2010.

An ANU study published in 2017 found just 91 out of 15,000 perpetrators had been imprisoned for their crimes. A follow-up study published 12 months later found that in 2018 some 121 individuals were given harsh sentences for SARV violence in relation to six cases of wilful murder. In all those cases, the victims were men.

Some 70 percent of women in Papua New Guinea experience rape or assault in their lifetime. Lack of support services means women have to rely on charity or religious institutions for help. But activists against SARV accuse churches of feeding the problem. About 96 percent of people in Papua New Guinea identify as Christians, according to government statistics, while many

combine their Christian faith with traditional Indigenous beliefs like animism and sorcery.

A SARV activist told Al Jazeera: "[Some churches] are complicit with preachers who actually advocate the violence.

Many Christians are told that demons are real and that it is therefore plausible that there are evil people in the community who do Satan's bidding. I think it goes back to their theology, where they believe in

incarnate spiritual evil, which makes it hard to take a stance against witch-hunting because they could be accused of defending witches." □

Analysing Labour's poll results

By Martin Thomas

The two-yearly elections for Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) and other positions (results out on 1 September) show a continuing drift to the right.

In 2020 the left won five seats in the NEC constituency section to three for the right, and one for Ann Black (reckoned as "centre"). This year: four left, four right, and Black.

The right also won the Young Labour seat on the NEC; with backing from Unison and GMB, Elsie Greenwood beat incumbent Lara McNeill.

Turnout was down again. In 2018, when the left won all nine seats (under a different voting system), it was about one-third; in 2020, 25%; this year, 16%. The right-wing's lead candidate, Luke Akehurst, lost votes (21,000 in 2020, 14,000 this year), as well as the left sagging.

The evidence is of demoralisation and disengagement, rather than a coherent swing to the right.

In 2018 and previously, most people voted solidly for the left or solidly for the right. The vote has become more scattered. In both left and right slates the top candidates get around four times the vote of the lower scorers, and the flow of preferences shows quirks, for example some from Luke Akehurst to Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi.

The replacement on the NEC by Wim-

borne-Idrissi of Mish Rahman, who had, with Gemma Bolton, been the most active of the 2020-2 NEC left, is a step back.

Wimborne-Idrissi is articulate and energetic – she was a member of Workers' Liberty's predecessor in the 1970s, before disappearing from politics then reappearing in Jewish Voice for Labour – but she is chiefly known for denying or minimising antisemitism in and around the Corbyn movement. Momentum cited her failure to commit to trans rights as reason for not backing her.

Elections for the reconstituted Labour Students (which was controlled by the right through the Corbyn era, then disbanded in 2019) were won by the left, but on a low turnout (about 500 votes total).

Turnout for the Young Labour elections was also low, about 4,000. The left retained control, but the particular "left" which runs Young Labour had even before 2019 reduced it to less life than it had under right-wing and mixed administration before Corbyn.

If an impulse from the unions, even an imperfect one, can now revitalise the Labour left, then the right wing's base can be shown to be quite narrow.

But a new left will have to be more internationalist, more oriented to independent working-class action, more democratic-minded, than the left which keeps Young Labour lifeless or denies antisemitism as a problem. □

Pakistan: a disaster made by capitalism



Environment

By Sacha Ismail

One third of Pakistan is under water. At the time of writing more than 1,500 people, including over 400 children, have been killed by the flooding; over 12,000 injured; and well over 30 million - the equivalent of ten million in the UK - affected.

Over 700,000 livestock are dead. In the province of Sindh, which produces half of Pakistan's food, 90% of crops are ruined, threatening tens of millions more. The rains that have deluged the country are still coming.

This is a capitalism-made climate catastrophe. The downfall is a result of increased warming of the Arabian Sea, combined with an extreme heatwave accelerating glacial melting.

The people of Pakistan are victims of other countries' climate recklessness. Pakistan has 2.8% of the global population and accounts for less than 1% of carbon emissions; it is eighth on the Global Climate Risk Index. The UK, with 1% of the world population, accounts for well over 1% of emissions; the US, with 4%, 11%. Both are near the bottom of the climate risk list.

Many poor countries, with South Asia



Pic: @az_journalist

on the frontline, are already in the kind of climate dystopia we may experience in a few decades if the labour movement does not lead a global insurgency against capital.

The poorest people are suffering most. These floods have disproportionately affected the rural parts of some of Pakistan's most impoverished areas, Sindh, south Punjab and Balochistan. In those areas it is the poorest, predominantly communities based around agricultural labour, small tenant farming and fishing, hit worst.

These regions and those communities lack "resilience" in the face of disaster because the forms of economic development pursued both under the British Empire and by the capitalists and landlords of independent Pakistan, instead of improving life in rural areas, made it even more precarious for many. In addition to deaths, injuries

and destruction of crops and livestock, facilities of all kinds - meagre already - have been destroyed. Over 2,000 miles of roads and 200 bridges are gone; and 17,000 schools.

This is not the first time Pakistan has suffered climate breakdown in recent years. It faces a range of climate emergencies. This summer, before the floods, it experi-

enced severe heatwaves (peak temperature not 40 but 53 degrees) that badly damaged crop yields. As the region heats up, glacial melting could be the biggest issue of all.

Up against the "third pole" wall of ice that separates China from a string of South Asian countries, Pakistan has the highest number of glaciers outside the world's poles. In addition to producing flooding, the melting of the third pole could have another, even more terrifying outcome, replacing an ecosystem of flowing water that sustains many hundreds of millions of people in South Asia with expanses of sterile rock. Even if the world meets the 1.5C target, a third of the ice sheet that still exists in the region will go.

What is happening in Pakistan underscores the urgency of a climate insurgency, particularly in the rich, high-emitting countries - and of fight-

ing to transform the labour movement so it can lead it.

The pledges rich countries have made to provide poorer countries with funding to help tackle climate change and mitigate its convulsions, but have failed to meet, must be urgently delivered and expanded.

We should demand large-scale emergency aid from the UK and other rich, high-emitting governments to Pakistan. We should demand debt cancellation. After some hesitation, the Tories have increased emergency aid to Pakistan from £1.5 to 15 million. But Pakistan's external debt is £110 billion, while its total state spending is only £30 billion.

Meanwhile Pakistan's workers', peasants' and left-wing social movements need solidarity against their many enemies inside the country. □

• Pakistani socialists are supporting a disaster relief appeal by the small farmers' organisation Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee: bit.ly/pakistansolidarity



Action on Covid-19

Scarcely 60% of the world's population is vaccinated against Covid. Vaccine supplies are now more ample. Yet worldwide vaccination rates have fallen steadily since late 2021, now to a rate at which it would take four and a half years to give everyone in the world a new jab, or a first if they've had none. Part of the reason is difficulties of distribution and take-up, part of it that governments (with a few exceptions: Vietnam, Japan, Norway...) have given up. Outside China most people have had Covid by now, and have some protection from that earlier infection. Yet vaccination remains a good block to severe symptoms, and probably will give some protection against a fierce new variant if that comes in the Northern Hemisphere winter. So:

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

Myanmar: the need for mass strikes

By Hein Htet Kyaw

Hein Htet Kyaw looks back at the potential shown by the movement against the February 2021 coup in Myanmar.

In February 2021 a revolutionary-scale movement was set in motion by the coup. The extensive and expanding strikes as well as the protest movements unleashed demonstrated how determined the general populace was to prevent the military from seizing power. Clearly, the military junta misjudged the strength of the opposition they would encounter.

During the coup attempt, the military junta ensured that the electricity was turned off. Additionally, they restricted communication. They used deceptive propaganda and false hopes to stifle the population's spontaneous revolutionary movements.

The very first false infor-

mation was propagated by unidentified sources, but primarily populist liberals shared it or hosted it on their platforms. There was a strong reactionary belief that was prevalent on the first day following the coup. It stated that "the United Nations will deploy 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) to Myanmar in order to remove the military junta if the people don't carry out the strikes within 72 hours."

However, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), started spontaneously by health professionals and students, disputed this "72-hour propaganda".

The FGWM, once known as the Federation of Garment Workers Myanmar but now grown into a general workers' union with thousands of members, is credited with starting the mass movement in Yangon. Their first strike rallied huge crowds to participate in the streets to protest the new junta.



FGWM lead demonstration, Feb 2021

Pic: @SolidarityCntr

Unfortunately, these facts were covered up by some prominent liberals. Instead of acknowledging a general workers' union as starting the revolution, the liberals tried to portray the workers as followers led by a populist politician called Ei Thinzar Maung, a centre-left civil rights activist.

In fact an interview Thomson Reuters Foundation featured with Moe Sandar Myint, a popular FGWM leader, made it apparent that workers were already activated and spontaneous as far as the strikes and protests were concerned. During the day, she went around organising the work-

force and urging them to "fight against the military government till the end."

Government employees and medical professionals began to participate in strikes, and pressure from below increased. The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) was absorbed

into the population along with the mass strikes. Later, the CDM was innovated by a noisy new night-time ritual of banging pots and pans.

Even though banging pots and pans and singing anti-dictatorial songs had no immediate effect, they helped raising the revolutionary motivation of the population. Sections of the state bureaucracy, including the investment and transportation ministries, the tax office, and the General Administrative Department, which oversees several public services and governmental operations, were paralysed by strikes. □

Chile: setback for the left

By Matthew O'Higgins

After a long campaign, the people of Chile voted on Sunday 5 September to reject a proposed new constitution by a margin of 62% to 38% percent, marking a major defeat for the Chilean left, including recently-elected President Gabriel Boric. Activists had hoped that higher turnout, induced by compulsory voting, would enable them to defy the advance polls. It didn't.

The new constitution would have transformed Chilean politics, though it was not as radical as either its detractors or many of its international supporters made out, at least in economic terms. Its paper guarantees on healthcare and housing were more symbolic than they were practical. J P Morgan's analysis was that it would "maintain a largely orthodox fiscal framework". But by overriding the Pinochet-era constitution, which locks in privatisation of basic services, it would have removed the main barrier to social change in a country that is desperate for it.

In feminist and environmentalist terms, and in terms of indigenous rights, the constitution would have been more genuinely groundbreaking. Chile would have been the first country on earth to guarantee abortion rights constitutionally, and to enforce gender-balancing across decision-making roles in the state. Indigenous people would have been given rights and representation. The environment would have had legal guarantees. These were the achievements of well-organised social movements, and a particularly strong feminist presence.

The result of this referendum is the first defeat for a new generation of the Chilean left. Since the "social explosion" of 2019, when mass unrest forced the political class to initiate a process to change the referendum, the left has won first a referendum to form a Constitutional Assembly, then the elections to that Assembly, and then a Presidential



election. Now, despite having voted for radical change on multiple occasions, the people of Chile find themselves trapped in a constitutional arrangement written by Pinochet, and with abortion all but banned.

Explaining the defeat is a complex task. In a sharply polarised society, divided increasingly by age and urban-versus-rural, the Chilean right is coalescing around far right figures like Jose Antonio Kast. The far right's usual social coalition (the military and the very wealthy) has been supplemented by anti-migrant voters, religious groups and people in conflict with indigenous communities. The constitu-

tion provided easy content to mobilise social conservatives and economic liberals together. The sheer complexity and overarching nature of the document made it easy to caricature and sensationalise.

And it is fair to say that the right went beyond caricaturing. Viral social media content was disseminated warning that the constitution would take away people's homes and establish Communist rule. Gigantic and mysteriously-sourced sums of money went into advertising the opposition's case on radio and in social media. Some right wing media outlets consciously repeated disinformation. Unfortunately, the antics of some Constitutional Assembly members, many of whom were elected as maverick independents fresh from the riots of 2019, provided the right with ample content.

The left is down but not out. At its head is Gabriel Boric, a 2011 student leader and figurehead of the Broad Front.

Broad Front is an umbrella coalition of democratic socialists, autonomists, libertarian leftists and left social democrats (Boric himself is from Social Convergence, the Autonomist grouping). Their main coalition partner is the Communist Party. It is a mass organisation which, although long Stalinist, centralised, and strategically conservative, is in the throes of a generational shift that may yet radicalise and democratise it.

Having failed to win the referendum, Boric is likely to attempt a painstaking reform of the constitution through the Congress. This will not be easy. Even to pass legislation, Boric has to win the votes of the rump of the centre-left and the centrist Christian Democrats. To contemplate changes to the constitution, he will need to assemble an even wider consensus.

Once again, it may fall to street movements and mass unrest to break the deadlock. Until that deadlock is broken, the Chilean left is stranded in high office. □

Far-right threat to EuroPride in Serbia

By Pete Radcliff

"I will curse all those who organise and participate in such a thing... If I had a gun, I would use it..." So Serbian Orthodox Church Bishop Nikanor Bogunović denounced this year's EuroPride, due in Belgrade 12-18 September. The Church, a major prop of the far right regime of President Alexander Vučić, organised a march on 28 August to celebrate Vučić's ban on the EuroPride week of events, imposed just two days before.

At least 10,000 turned out. The march was led by the Night Wolves, a biker gang of 4,000 members and far right Putinist grouping which originated in Russia but roams across Eastern Europe. Some of the Night Wolves fought for the Putin-backed separatists in the Donbass, and their leader has declared their purpose in Putin's war on Ukraine as bringing "death to faggots".

Alongside medieval religious icons on the 28 August march were placards of Putin and Russian flags. Bishop Bogunović called for Putin to be recognised as the "Tsar of the Planet".

Violent homophobia is strong in Serbia. In 2010, despite gay rights laws

introduced the year before, a Pride demonstration was attacked by some 7,000 well organised homophobic thugs.

One of the main organisers of those attacks was Mladen Obradović of the openly fascist Obraz movement. Obraz, now illegal, had targeted LGBT activists and Zionists for attacks. Obradović had called for lynching of gays and was convicted of hate crimes.

Much of the Serbian far right has made cult-figures of Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, convicted of genocide after Serbia's war on Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Fascists

After Vučić's election victory in 2012, Obradović had his sentence lifted and an amnesty was granted for 3,000 criminals, including a great many from the Obraz group who have taken up prominent positions under Vučić's regime.

Those fascists reorganised in groups like Dveri Zaventnici and its People Patrols which have been reactivated on Belgrade's streets by Putin's war on Ukraine. The Zaventnici have been courted openly by Putin's regime. Foreign Minister Lavrov met them back in

2016. They now threaten EuroPride.

Vučić's power base comes from the Serbian Putinists and fascists as well as the Church, whose claims over Montenegro and Kosovan church property he uses for his increasingly aggressive postures towards those countries. His anti-NATO rhetoric is welcomed by Putin, who might welcome a renewed war in the Western Balkans to relieve pressure on him in Ukraine.

Vučić also needs to maintain support from the EU, of which Serbia has candidate membership and from which it gets a lot of funding. He has appointed a lesbian Prime Minister, Ana Brnabic. She supported Vučić's ban on EuroPride on the grounds that Serbians had to unite behind the President in his current dispute with Kosova.

Serbian gay activists and organisers such as Kristine Garina, president of the European Pride Organisers' Association, are determined that EuroPride will take place.

Several radical oppositional parties such as Ne Davimo Belgrade and the green-left Moramo coalition, of which they are a part, have called on people to join the main Pride march on 17 September, as have less radical parties

such as the Democratic Party and the Movement of Free Citizens. There was opposition ten years ago in trade unions, particularly the teachers' union, to the Serbian far right's attacks on LGBT rights. Unions remain weak both numerically and politically but some explicitly working class organisations like Solidarnost - part of Moramo - are mobilising in support of Pride.

Vučić may allow the main march on 17 September. But we don't know to what extent he can or will pull back the fascist and homophobic mobs, or restrain attacks on the wider week-long EuroPride.

The labour movement across Europe and the world must give solidarity to the EuroPride 2022 demonstrators. □



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, £9.99 □ bit.ly/shop-wl

A public health new deal



Book review

By Les Hearn

The NHS is seen as the nearest thing to socialism in Britain (“From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”), its “father”, Aneurin Bevan, wanting to “universalise the best”. Its universalism was soon under attack from Labour itself, with prescription charges introduced in 1951, provoking Bevan’s resignation. The one shilling charge (£0.05 = £1.30 in today’s money) has now increased to £9.35.

This and other attacks have met with mainly defensive responses from the labour movement but in his book *The Five Health Frontiers* (Pluto) health expert Chris Thomas wants us to go on the offensive, with his call for a Universal Public Health Service (UPHS) with a far wider remit than that of the NHS, going beyond improving health care for those who are ill to improving health by preventing or delaying illness.

Chris Thomas heads the IPPR’s recently established Commission on Health and Prosperity, exploring the hypothesis that a fairer country is healthier and more prosperous. This is the message of decades of research by Michael Marmot and colleagues (e.g. the Whitehall Study), demonstrating substantial differences in health and life expectancy between subordinate and superior grades of work and between deprived and well-off areas (see [Solidarity 277](#)).

Inequality

Forty-two years ago, the [Black Report](#) (commissioned by Labour but published under Thatcher) revealed unequal distributions of ill-health and death among the British, inequalities that had widened since the establishment of the NHS. These were not due to failings in the NHS, but rather to other social inequalities influencing health: income, education, housing, diet, employment, and conditions of work. The Report recommended a wide strategy of social policy measures to combat these inequalities. Its release was delayed until an August bank holiday; only 260 copies were printed; and few people had the opportunity to read it. Social Services Secretary Patrick Jenkin baldly stated that the cost of its recommendations (£2bn per year) was “quite unrealistic in present or any foreseeable economic circumstances”, even if he had agreed with them.

The Black Report’s recommendations covered a better start in life for children,

improved quality of life for people with disabilities, and encouragement of good health by preventive and educational action. The Labour Party called on the next Labour government to implement the report and campaigners in the Socialist Health Association and the Politics of Health Group pushed the issues. One of these, Jeannette Mitchell, referred to the findings of the Marmot Whitehall Study, then only 15 years old, in her 1984 book *What is To Be Done About Illness and Health*, calling for a radical new integrated community approach. But, despite lip service, Black’s recommendations were not followed after 1997 because of Labour’s commitment to Tory spending policies: by 2005, inequalities had widened. Eventually, by the end of Labour’s term, there was some decline in health inequalities, health expenditure having increased from 4.7 to 7.6% of GDP over 13 years. Since 2010, these have worsened again.

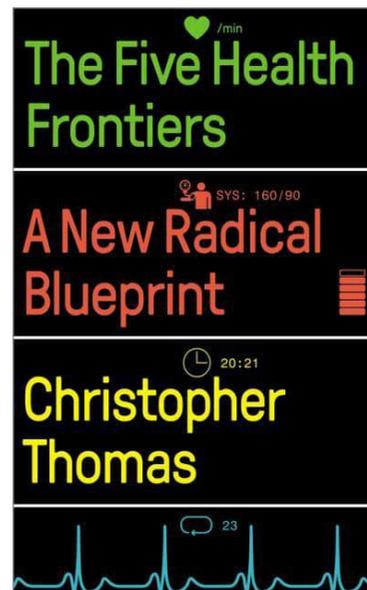
It is a sign of our weakness that Thomas is now raising exactly the same concerns (and more) as 40 years ago, even though treatments have improved and life expectancy has increased. Thomas’s approach, though, encompasses more influences on health than just the NHS.

First, Thomas shows how the NHS, despite the heroic efforts of its underpaid and overworked staff, falls behind similar countries for such important health outcomes as cancer survival, infant mortality, heart failure treatment, and waiting times for joint replacements and cataract removals. By 2019, we were below average among high-income countries on 60 health metrics, with 4.5 million awaiting treatment (80% higher than under Labour), and below the OECD average for staffing, beds, medicines and technology.

However, the decline of the NHS is not the only factor affecting our health, as shown by Covid deaths. These disproportionately hit ethnic minorities and the low-paid, unable to work from home and forced by poverty to work even when unwell. They are more likely to live in overcrowded, poorly ventilated dwellings, further encouraging spread of infection. Once ill, they are less likely to be able to access the free health care offered by the NHS.

Taking these and other factors affecting people’s health into account, Thomas targets five frontiers for improvement. In addition to the obvious NHS frontier, he adds the social justice, economic, social care and sustainability frontiers, calling for a UPHS to generalise the NHS ethos of collectivism and state intervention into these areas.

NHS: Thomas wants to roll back



the markets and targets approach of Thatcher and Blair. The plethora of targets did nothing for health inequality, with “post-code lotteries”, and scandals such as Stafford Hospital, where management had a perverse funding incentive to ignore poor standards of care to focus on targets and balances.

Thomas wants a return to Bevan’s “universalise the best”. This could happen rapidly, says Thomas, showing that change occurred quickly during the Covid emergency, with general practice shifting online, bureaucracy junked, and money for innovation suddenly available. He urges a reversion to “oversupply” (of staff, equipment and beds) from the present “skeleton crew” approach, which saves money but causes the NHS to be swamped during emergencies, with staff burnout. This would improve resilience but Thomas also calls for investment in social care, should those less unwell need to be discharged during a crisis.

With the increase in long-term health problems in an ageing population, Thomas wants the NHS to become a “wellness” service, helping people live productive lives, despite handicaps. He also wants it to tackle the institutional injustice linked to the legacy of colonialism. The NHS can function only with an international workforce, yet BAME staff are discriminated against and BAME patients receive worse standards of care.

Social Justice: Bad housing and low status precarious employment harm the health of the poor, as Marmot’s research on the social determinants of health shows. So also do inequalities in schooling which lead to poorer outcomes, linked to poorer health in later life. Thomas’s UPHS approach “prescribes” equal education, universal free school meals, healthy housing, ending energy poverty, and an end to low paid, dead-end work.

Economic: The market encourages

production of harmful goods, tobacco, alcohol, junk food, gambling ... and fossil fuels. It promotes bad work conditions, job insecurity, long hours and low pay. Higher profits come at the expense of workers’ and consumers’ health but governments put the onus on individuals to change their behaviours.

Thomas wants the liability for poor health to be transferred onto the capitalism that causes it. A new target, Public Health Net Zero, would be achieved through financial disincentives (like the soft drink “sugar tax”), regulation (as in smoking bans), and new ownership models (like the Swedish state alcohol monopoly).

Social care: Care for people with disabilities or long-term illness was never included in the NHS. Despite increasing need, with an ageing population, provision remains low quality, patchy, unreliable and expensive, while workers are poorly paid. In England and Wales, some 1.5 million over-65s have unmet needs impairing their quality of life.

Thomas wants a National Care Service (NCS) as a minimum. He calls for “the right to a brilliant life”, with NCS-provided personalised, empowering, high quality, well-paid care, keeping people in their homes and communities as long as possible.

Sustainability: For Thomas, “health security” includes cooperating with global responses to climate change which makes for worse health problems and habitat loss which brings people closer to (pandemic-)disease-carrying wild animals.

Thomas costs this Public Health New Deal (PHND) at £100 billion per year, as much as cut from public spending by Tory austerity policies and dwarfed by stimulus injections by other governments.

However, the PHND is not just about money: Thomas emphasises the need to remove the private companies infiltrating the NHS. For example, he calls for GPs to be nationalised (not done by Bevan), so practices cannot be bought up by private companies. Also, regions with greater health inequalities need greater autonomy in spending.

This sort of policy should be first nature to Labour but it is not even using its present identification with the NHS to increase support. Thomas cites the frankly incomprehensible statistic of 42% of health workers voting Conservative in the 2021 local elections, despite real-terms pay cuts, staff shortages, and Covid mismanagement. Rather than merely defending the NHS, Labour needs to get behind the radicalism of the PHND. □

Putin's rise to power

By Michael Baker

First of a [series of articles](#) on Putin and opposition forces in Russia

To understand Vladimir Putin's reign, his initial popularity, and his later repressive turn, it pays to look briefly at the country he inherited from his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. This article aims to briefly draw out the elements of Russia's politics and economy in the 1990s that are necessary to understand the changes Putin later brought in.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Boris Yeltsin took power as Russia's President. Yeltsin was widely regarded as a poor leader, and these days he is primarily remembered as a drunk. Yeltsin oversaw the transition to capitalism and the creation of Russia's oligarchs. He brought in a policy that was heavily encouraged – and partially designed – by Western capitalists, now usually referred to as “shock therapy”: a swift transition to a capitalist economy that included removing price caps on goods (food prices tripled overnight) and encouraging speculative trading on the rouble. The old Soviet state enterprises were privatised en masse; many productive industries (oil, mining, metalworks) were taken over by those who had been in senior roles before the collapse of the USSR. Others founded banks and profited from the sudden flurry of speculative investment. The “loans for shares” scheme, arranged by Yeltsin in 1995 with the help of oligarch Anatoly Chubais, used a series of backroom deals and shady business practices to allow companies to auction state industries back to themselves at incredibly low prices.

In terms of political power, there was an uneasy alliance between Yeltsin and the oligarchs, who rallied around him to prevent the potential resurgence of the old Soviet Communist Party. The CP had now been rebranded by some of its old leadership as the CPRF, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. In one famous incident, at the Davos conference in 1995 oligarch Boris Berezovsky, scared by the growing popularity of CPRF leader Gennady Zyuganov, gathered the Russian multi-millionaires with control of all major industries and media platforms and convinced them to put aside their interpersonal differences to campaign for Yeltsin's re-election. The result was a resounding victory.

Wages fell 68% in real terms over the decade of the 1990s. Across the country, especially outside of the major cities, people went hungry, lost their jobs, and had no access to proper health-care, insurance or government support. Many who still had jobs received either appalling wages or none at all, and

were kept alive by the non-monetary welfare support that their workplaces could still administer – a hangover from the Soviet era. By the end of the decade, there were attempts to replace even these meagre forms of welfare with soon-worthless monetary compensation.

The first Chechen war began in 1995 and quickly became drawn-out and expensive, destroying Chechnya and killing thousands of Russian and Chechen soldiers, causing mass waves of psychological trauma that both countries still suffer from.

Onto the scene steps Vladimir Putin. Initially a middle-ranking, unsuccessful KGB officer stationed in Dresden. Over the course of the 90s Putin got himself swiftly into politics, at first through various roles under mayor of St. Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak. Putin leaned on his former KGB contacts repeatedly for personal and political gain, a practice that came to define his career – siloviki, ex-KGB men installed in major political positions, have always been a large part of Putin's entourage. In 1999 he was chosen as the next Prime Minister and Yeltsin's eventual successor. The succession itself would happen after less than six months, when Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve 1999.

The Second Chechen War had begun back in August. In September, a series of apartments across major Russian cities were bombed, killing around 300. There is debate as to whether or not this was on Putin's orders, but there was at the very least secret service involvement – FSB officers were found planting explosives in a block of flats in another city and tried to play it off as a “training exercise”. Regardless of who gave the order, Putin's resulting hard-line “anti-terrorist” messaging made him immediately popular across Russia. He presented himself as the sober, calculating alternative to Yeltsin, and used that image to garner public support for his policies.

There is a common-sense reading of Putin's actions between 2000-2005 which argues that he “renationalised” many branches of Russian industry, and in doing so “returned” the country to its “Soviet past”. Modern Russia is evidently not a socialist state, and Putin's “nationalisation” was a far cry from any form of socialism. The state did in fact gain control of a number of key corporations – most famously the oil company Yukos, which was broken up and sold to Rosneft, the state-owned oil company. But this was nationalisation strictly for the growth of the state's own coffers, with almost no redistribution or investment in public services whatsoever.

The result was a much more cen-



tralised and strict hierarchy between business and government: while movement between executive boards and government positions is common, and corruption is omnipresent, there was no mistaking who was now in charge. Putin also made sure that the tax system – which had been decimated in the 1990s – was firmly in place and strictly enforced, meaning any large business transactions would now have to pay their fair share to the government.

Oil and gas

The state's control of oil and gas was secured just in time for an oil boom – at the end of 2001 oil cost around \$32 per barrel, while in mid-2008 it was around \$180. Russia was one of the only countries in the world ramping up its oil production at the time, and profited enormously. To give an incredibly simplified version of events: with exports high and prices rising, money was coming into the country like never before. A sovereign fund was set up in 2004; at the time it was the second largest in the world, and even today it is still in the top ten. Ramping up military investment from these gains also laid the infrastructure and groundwork for his later military escapades.

This influx of oil money led to more speculative investment on the rouble, and this in turn brought more investment from the West and greater interest in exporting commercial goods to Russia. A good example of how Putin leveraged the oil boom to bring business into the country is the car industry: in the mid-2000s, he told foreign car manufacturers that he would be willing to remove the exorbitantly high import tariff on foreign vehicles, but only if the companies were willing to move their manufacturing to Russia. The majority of the largest European and Asian car manufacturers soon had Russian factories, and the country saw foreign cars

line the streets. The upper and middle classes of the country will have seen this as a period of great economic success, with the creature comforts of twenty-first century capitalism, like foreign cars and clothes, appearing for the first time. The working class will have seen comparatively very little; key infrastructure and services remained poorly run and underfunded. 50% of the population had a household “wealth” of \$870 or less; by 2014 23 million people lived below the poverty line.

The 2000s also saw the Russian government take control of public media channels. The majority of the television networks and newspapers that had been set up by oligarchs were now either taken under direct state control, or the oligarchs that owned them were made to toe the line. Russia Today, perhaps the most prominent of the state news channels, was founded in 2005 by the state media corporation, RIA Novosti. Independent news in the country has been made largely unpopular for most of the twenty-first century, and Putin's people were in control of most Russian television stations by the end of 2004. It is a fact worth mentioning that since the year 2000, 87 journalists have been murdered on the job in Russia – although the circumstances of each death and those responsible for ordering them are matters for debate.

In 2008, the economy took a pretty extreme hit. As a primarily export-based economy, Russia was not well-positioned to deal with the impact of the financial crash, and as Putin “left” power in 2008 – switching places with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to reset the counter on his two terms as president – there were growing signs of unrest in the country due to how little of Russia's newfound wealth had ever made it to the general population. □

North-East Ulster



The Unexpurgated Connolly

By James Connolly

This was one of the main articles in which James Connolly responded to the mobilisation of Irish Protestant workers against Home Rule.

A Dublin Comrade once remarked to the writer of these notes that as two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time, so the mind of the working class cannot take up two items at the same time. Meaning thereby that when that working class is obsessed with visions of glory, patriotism, war, loyalty or political or religious bigotry, it can find no room in its mind for considerations of its own interests as a class.

Somewhere upon these lines must be found the explanation of the fact that whereas Dublin and Nationalist Ireland generally is seething with rebellion against industrial conditions and manifesting that rebellion by a crop of strikes, in Belfast and the quarter dominated by the loyalist element, class feeling or industrial discontent is at present scarcely manifested at all.

For Dublin and its Nationalist allies, the Home Rule question has long gone beyond the stage of controversy; it is regarded as out of the region of dispute and consequently the mind of the working class is no more excited over

that question than it can be considered to be excited over the general proposition that the whole is greater than its parts.

In North-East Ulster, on the other hand, the question of Home Rule is not a settled question in men's minds, much less settled politically, and hence its unsettled character makes it still possible for that question to so possess the minds of the multitude that all other questions such as wages, hours and conditions of labour, must take a subordinate place and lose their power to attract attention, much less to compel action.

According to all Socialist theories North-East Ulster, being the most developed industrially, ought to be the quarter in which class lines of cleavage, politically and industrially, should be the most pronounced and class rebellion the most common.

As a cold matter of fact, it is the happy hunting ground of the slave-driver and the home of the least rebellious slaves in the industrial world.

Dublin, on the other hand, has more strongly developed working-class feeling, more strongly accentuated instincts of loyalty to the working class than any city of its size in the globe.

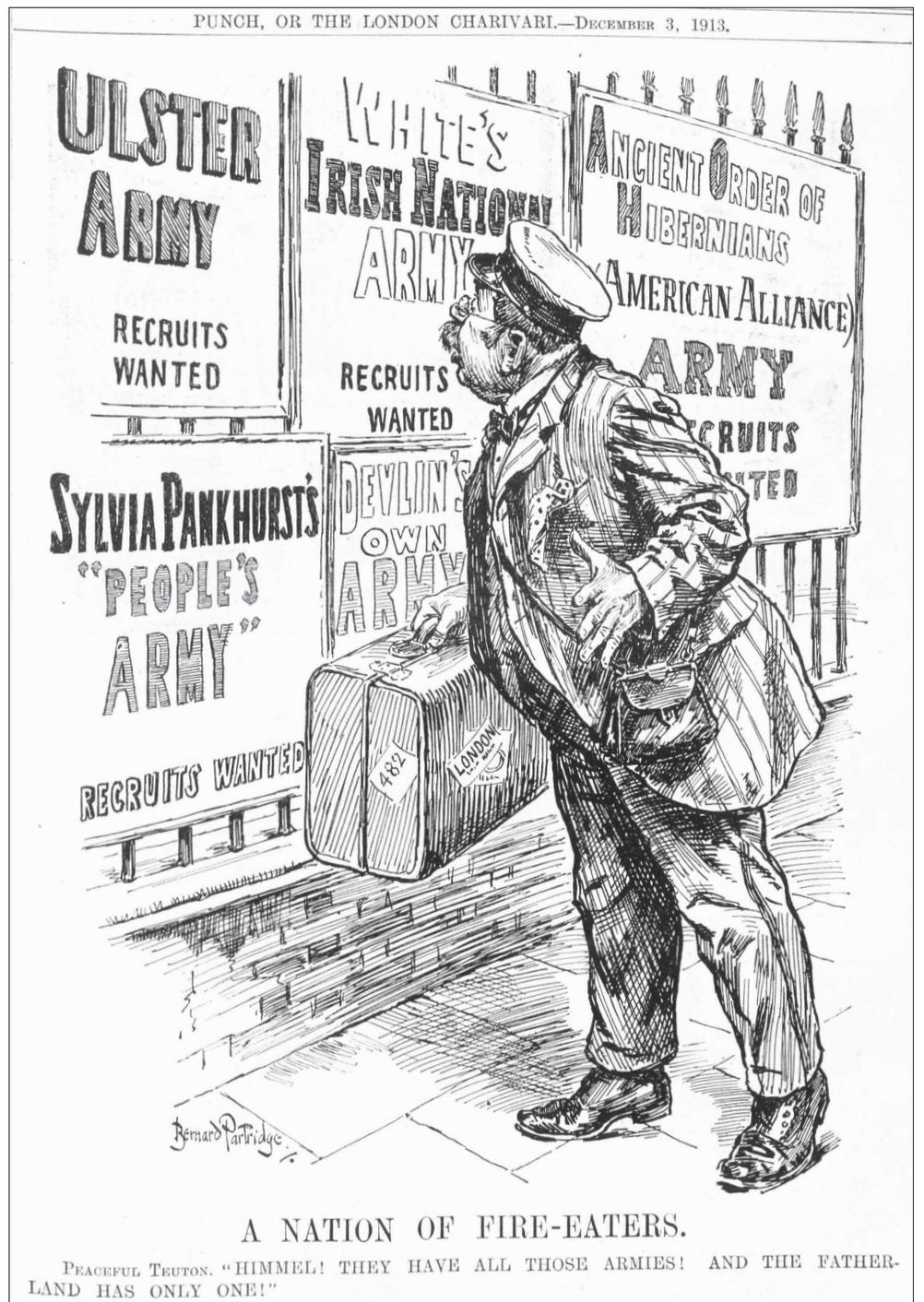
I have explained before how the perfectly devilish ingenuity of the master class had sought its ends in North-East Ulster. How the lands were stolen from Catholics, given to Episcopalians, but planted by Presbyterians; how the latter were persecuted by the Government, but could not avoid the necessity of defending it against the Catholics, and how out of this complicated situation there inevitably grew up a feeling of common interests between the slaves and the slave-drivers.

As the march of the Irish towards emancipation developed, as step by step they secured more and more political rights and greater and greater recognition, so in like ratio the disabilities of the Presbyterians and other dissenters were abolished.

For a brief period during the closing years of the eighteenth century, it did indeed seem probably that the common disabilities of Presbyterians and Catholics would unite them all under the common name of Irishmen. Hence the rebel society of that time took the significant name of "United Irishmen".

But the removal of the religious disabilities from the dissenting community had, as its effect, the obliteration of all political difference between the sects and their practical political unity under the common designation of Protestants, as against the Catholics, upon whom the fetters of religious disability still clung.

Humanly speaking, one would have confidently predicted that as the Presbyterians and Dissenters were eman-



A NATION OF FIRE-EATERS.

PEACEFUL TEUTON. "HIMMEL! THEY HAVE ALL THOSE ARMIES! AND THE FATHERLAND HAS ONLY ONE!"

The English magazine *Punch* shows a caricature German aghast at the "private armies" in the British Isles in 1913

ipated as a result of a clamorous agitation against religious inequality, and as that agitation derived its chief force and menace from the power of Catholic numbers in Ireland, then the members of these sects would unite with the agitators to win for all an enjoyment of these rights the agitators and rebels had won for them.

But the prediction would have missed the mark by several million miles. Instead, the Protestants who had been persecuted joined with the Protestants who had persecuted them against the menace of an intrusion by the Catholics into the fold of political and religious freedom - "Civil and religious liberty".

There is no use blaming them. It is common experience in history that as each order fought its way upward into the circle of governing classes, it joined with its former tyrants in an endeavour to curb the aspirations of these orders still unfree.

That in Ireland religious sects played the same game as elsewhere was played by economic or social classes does not prove the wickedness of the Irish players, but does serve to illustrate

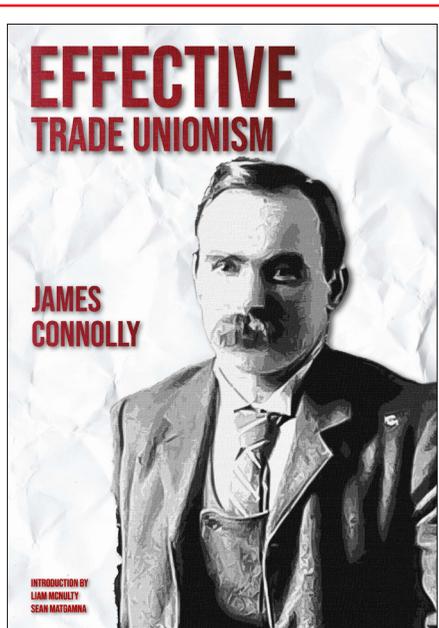
the universality of the passions that operate upon the stage of the world's history.

It also serves to illustrate the wisdom of the Socialist contention that as the working class has no subject class beneath it, therefore, to the working class of necessity belongs the honour of being the class destined to put an end to class rule, since, in emancipating itself, it cannot help emancipating all other classes.

Individuals out of other classes must and will help as individual Protestants have helped in the fight for Catholic emancipation in Ireland; but on the whole, the burden must rest upon the shoulders of the most subject class.

If the North-East corner of Ireland is, therefore, the home of a people whose minds are saturated with conceptions of political activity fit only for the atmosphere of the seventeenth century, if the sublime ideas of an all-embracing democracy equally as insistent upon its duties as upon its rights have as yet found poor lodgment here, the fault

continued on page 11 →



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

Time to lose faith in markets



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Rhodri Evans

“Markets may lose faith in the British economy”, said Rishi Sunak on 30 August.

He was trying to convince Tory party members to back him for Tory leader against Liz Truss, with her promise of tax cuts.

The same argument is used by Tories against conceding real wage rises in the NHS and other public services, and against budget boosts for the NHS and those services to cover unexpected price rises for the inputs they have to buy.

Bosses likewise say that if they concede a good wage rises, then “markets” will predict lower profits for them, fewer people and institutions will buy their shares, and so they won’t be able to raise funds for new investments.

They have the same response when challenged about big payments on dividends or share buy-backs: they are needed for “investor confidence”.

How do these faceless creatures, “markets”, get to rule our lives? Why does keeping them happy rank above making people happy or comfort-

able or secure? In a capitalist society, we get almost all our goods and services as commodities, as things bought in the market. This marketisation of life, so Karl Marx explained in *Capital*, leads to commodities figuring as the agents in economic life, and people only as the vehicles to bring commodities to market.

When you go to a supermarket, the decisive relationship is between the money in your pocket (money is only a special commodity) and the food you want to buy. Any personal relationship between you and the shop workers is secondary. Whether you are starving or overfed is secondary. You acquire food by way of your money acquiring it.

Abstraction

“The relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest”, as Karl Marx put it, “appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things”.

When Marx wrote, share and bond markets were relatively underdeveloped. They have boomed so much, especially since the 1980s, that “the markets” – a further abstraction from individual commodities – have become the great actors

in economic life. The drive to profit has become not primarily the individual greed of the individual owners of firms, or even of the pressure on firms to compete and get ahead. It is about the firm having to convince “the markets” that its profits will yield good dividends, bond payments, and share buybacks.

Some firms, like Uber and Tesla, do well in “the markets” despite years of losses because “the markets” expect big profits in future, but profit, current or predicted, remains the ruler.

The British state has to retain “market confidence” because it relies on selling bonds (IOUs) for its day-to-day spending, and must convince “the markets” that the interest payments on those bonds (over [£100 billion](#) in 2022-3) are guaranteed and that they can confidently buy new bonds at only modest rates of interest.

The formulae of capitalist market economy, as Marx put it, “bear it stamped upon them in unmistakable letters that they belong to a state of society, in which the process of production has the mastery over humankind, instead of being controlled by them”.

Against all that, socialism means the community taking democratic control and

ownership of our economic life. Decisions about where to direct investment and about how much to subtract from current consumption to enable investment and provision for the future should be made collectively and democratically. By people, and not by an abstraction (a “really-existing” abstraction) derived from our historically-evolved interactions and called “the markets”.

A workers’ government in its early stages will still have to use markets a lot, and adapt to world markets. It will break the supremacy of profit and push

towards the socialist formula, “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need”.

It will enable us to respond collectively and democratically (though not without blunders and conflicts!) to issues like climate change and environmental degradation.

It will form us into a collective where care for others and solidarity are more than private virtues, or rules of episodic resistance, as they are now, but the governing principle of social life. As “market confidence” is now. □

Upcoming meetings

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

Thursday 8 September, 7.30pm: North London AWL: Art and the Russian Revolution. Menard Hall, 14 Galway St, EC1V 3SW

Sunday 11 September, 11am: Should socialists back nuclear power? (online debate)

Wednesday 14 September, 7pm: East Midlands AWL: Ongoing crisis: cost of living, trade unions and the Labour Party. The Vat & Fiddle, 12 Queensbridge Road, NG2 1NB

Sunday 25 September, 6.30pm: AWL online forum: the origins of the British National Front and lessons for today

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



→ from page 10

lies not with this generation of toilers, but with those pastors and masters who deceived it and enslaved it in the past – and deceived it in order that they might enslave it.

But as no good can come of blaming it, so also no good, but infinite evil, can come of truckling to it. Let the truth be told, however ugly. Here, the Orange working class are slaves in spirit because they have been reared up among a people whose conditions of servitude were more slavish than their own. In Catholic Ireland the working class are rebels in spirit and democratic in feeling because for hundreds of years they have found no class as lowly paid or as hardly treated as themselves.

At one time in the industrial world of Great Britain and Ireland the skilled labourer looked down with contempt upon the unskilled and bitterly resented his attempt to get his children taught any of the skilled trades; the feeling of the Orangemen of Ireland towards the Catholics is but a glorified representation on a big stage of the

same passions inspired by the same unworthy motives.

An atavistic survival of a dark and ignorant past!

Viewing Irish politics in the light of this analysis, one can see how futile and vain are the criticisms of the Labour Party in Parliament which are based upon a comparison of what was done by the Nationalist group in the past and what is being left undone by the Labour group to-day. I am neither criticising nor defending the Labour Group in Parliament; I am simply pointing out that any criticism based upon an analogy with the actions, past or present, of the Irish party, is necessarily faulty and misleading.

The Irish party had all the political traditions and prejudices of centuries to reinforce its attitude of hostility to the Government, nay, more, its only serious rival among its own constituents was a party more uncompromisingly hostile to the Government than itself – the republican or physical force party.

The Labour party, on the other hand, has had to meet and overcome all the political traditions and prejudices of its

supporters in order to win their votes, and knows that at any time it may lose these suffrages so tardily given.

The Irish Party never needed to let the question of retaining the suffrages of the Irish electors enter into their calculations. They were almost always returned unopposed. The Labour party knows that a forward move on the part of either Liberal or Tory will always endanger a certain portion of Labour votes.

In other words, the Irish group was a party to whose aid the mental habits formed by centuries of struggle came as a reinforcement among its constituents at every stage of the struggle. But the Labour party is a party which, in order to progress, must be continually breaking with and outraging institutions which the mental habits of its supporters had for centuries accustomed them to venerate.

I have written in vain if I have not helped the reader to realise that the historical backgrounds of the movement in England and Ireland are so essentially different that the Irish Socialist movement can only be truly served by

a party indigenous to the soil, and explained by a literature having the same source: that the phrases and watchwords which might serve to express the soul of the movement in one country may possibly stifle its soul and suffocate its expression in the other.

One great need of the movement in Ireland is a literature of its very own. When that is written people will begin to understand why it is that the Irish Catholic worker is a good democrat and a revolutionist, though he knows nothing of the fine spun theories of democracy or revolution; and how and why it is that the doctrine that because the workers of Belfast live under the same industrial conditions as do those of Great Britain, they are therefore subject to the same passions and to be influenced by the same methods of propaganda, is a doctrine almost screamingly funny in its absurdity. □

• *Forward*, 2 August 1913. Part of a series on “Connolly, politically unexpurgated”: [workersliberty.org/connolly](#)

Unison HE branches to strike

By a Unison HE activist

Twenty-one UNISON Higher Education (HE) branches have held a successful strike ballot against a 3% pay offer and are now making plans for strikes, probably in the first weeks of the new academic year for maximum impact.

These branches are: Manchester Metropolitan; Leeds Beckett; Birkbeck College; Liverpool John Moores; City University; Liverpool Hope; King's College London; University of Brighton; University of the West of England; London South Bank; Bath Spa; University of Leeds; University of Gloucestershire; University of Bristol; Royal Northern College of Music; SOAS; University of Winchester; Edinburgh Napier; Glasgow Caledonian; Robert Gordon; and University of Glasgow.

Welsh, Scottish and English branches who failed to meet the 50% threshold for turnout or opted not to ballot the first time have been invited by the

HE Service Group Executive (SGE) to ballot/reballot for a potential second round of strikes later in the first term, ideally alongside UCU who begin balloting over pay and pensions on 7 September.

Hopes are high for eventual joint action but as the union's Service Group Executive prepares to meet on Thurs-

day 8 September to discuss this, alarming rumours are swirling that the second HE ballot might be postponed by Unison as it prioritises ballots in its mega-sized health and local government sections. HE branches will lodge strong protests if this happens: we have fought hard to begin building militancy in our sector, and we can't jeopardise

that because of resourcing problems at Unison HQ. Our members deserve to be respected as equal members of our union and their efforts to organise be supported.

We should build the first round of strikes and use this to inspire further action so we can win a pay settlement that matches the rising cost of living. □

Big anti-abortion march in London

By Lewis Joyes

The anti-abortion group "March for Life UK" held their annual march and rally in London on 3 September under the banner "10 Million Too Many". This year was bigger than 2021 (they claimed 7,000), with the objective: to stop all abortions. They credit the overturning

of Roe v Wade in the US for the boost.

M4LUK, likely in a bid to win over young people with otherwise socially progressive views, has adopted a pernicious identity politics, painting abortion as racist and an affront to feminism. M4LUK simultaneously appeals to men about "authentic masculinity", making

out men's rights and freedoms to be some of those most infringed upon by existing abortion laws. Plainly, M4LUK is a right-wing front for amongst the most bigoted reactionaries around, attempting to absorb anyone prepared to listen.

Whilst loud, angry and energetic, the counter demonstration organised

by Abortion Rights UK was much smaller. It is critical that the wider left and trade union movement seize the opportunity to push for abortion on demand, rather than sleepwalking into the wholesale roll-back of reproductive rights that the far-right are clearly aiming for. There is no time for complacency. □



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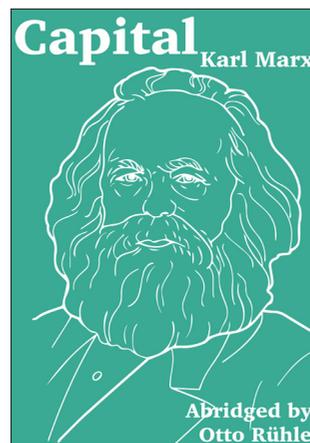
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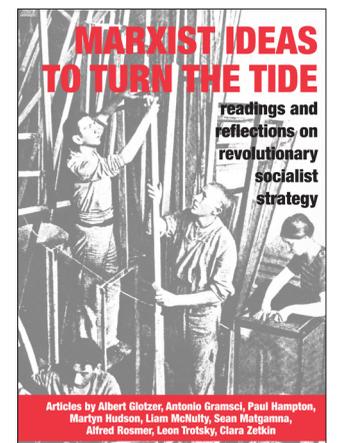
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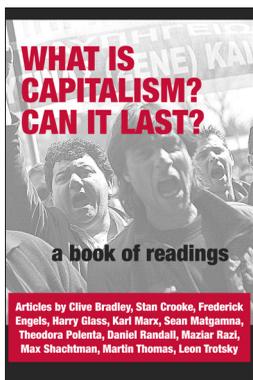
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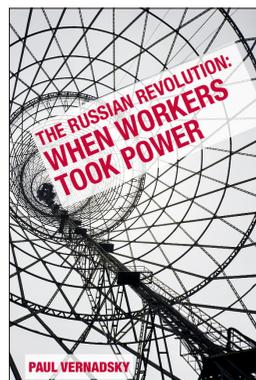
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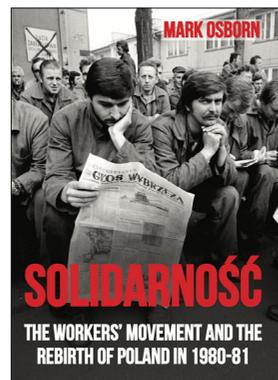
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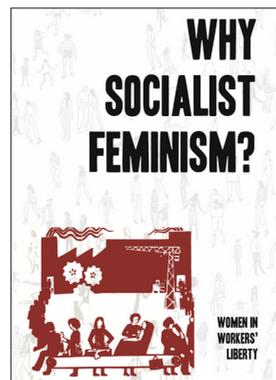
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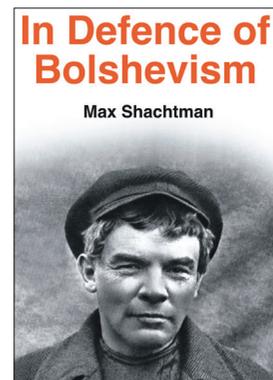
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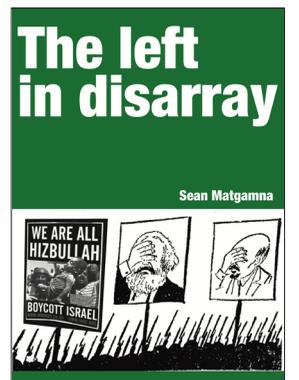
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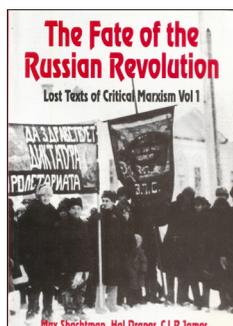
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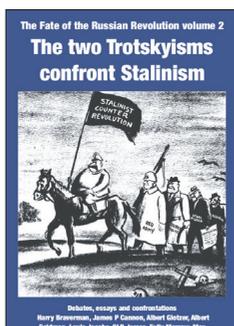
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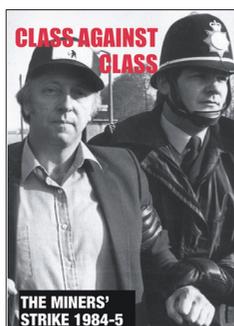
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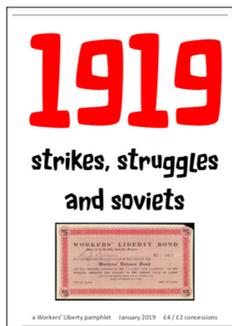
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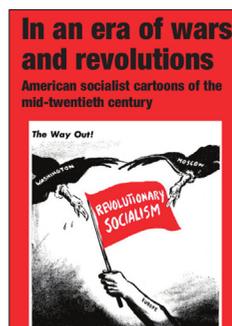
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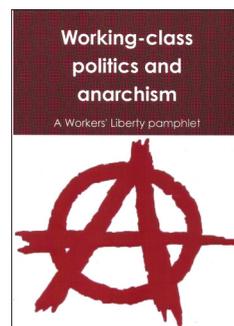
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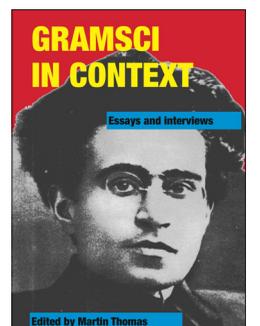
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BT: needing a strategy from below

BT workers struck again on 30 and 31 August. Winston Richards is a BT engineer and an activist in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) Greater London Combined branch. He spoke to us on a picket line at the Southwark Telephone Exchange.

The reason why we're here today is that, over a number of years, and especially in the last three-four years, the relationship between the company and us as workers has deteriorated. This has coincided with a change of regime at senior management level. The new senior management has picked fights over issues like grading and the restructuring of jobs.

Pay was the final straw. Throughout the pandemic, we were classed as key workers, we continued working throughout. Most of us didn't mind doing that because we've always had a sense of responsibility towards our

customers. But there are a lot of older workers in our workforce, in the demographic that put them at higher risk. Workers were getting ill and dying. So there was a lot of concern amongst our members, plus many of them live with people who were vulnerable, so people were afraid of going to work, catching the virus, and bringing it home.

The company didn't appreciate what we'd done. We maintain the telecoms infrastructure that's so vital to our lives and economy, especially given the shift towards increased homeworking. More and more people realise the importance of the work we do, but our employer doesn't seem to. In 2020, they didn't give us a pay increase, but imposed a non-consolidated £1,000 payment as a one-off. We thought that was ludicrous. But we were assured that, the following year, 2021, there'd be meaningful negotiations towards a proper pay rise. What happened instead was



another imposition, this time of £1,500.

When you look at the numbers, the company has made £1.3 billion in profit, and they've given the Chief Executive a 32% pay increase. He's been rewarded. But we, the workers who generated that profit, haven't been. So following that imposition, what choice did we have?

Imposition sets a dangerous precedent. What does the future hold for industrial relations in the company if the employer can simply impose what it wants without negotiation? I think this new management plans to continue this way, imposing things rather than negotiating, and that means our only option is to fight them industrially.

For the lay members, there was some apprehension, but they've been totally solid in these strikes. People have had enough. We're seeing our terms and conditions eroded as the amount of work expected from us increases, but we're not seeing any additional rewards. Our members are in this fight to win.

There's no official figure [for the union's pay demand]. There was an informal, unofficial campaign, organised via social media, which said "10% and nothing less". But that's redundant now given that inflation has exceeded 10% and is forecast to rise even further.

Scottish local government: strikes can win more!



By a Unison member

Local government workers in Scotland should reject the new offer and restart the strikes. Workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland should join them.

The last two weeks' coordinated and targeted strikes by the three local government unions in Scotland (Unison, GMB and Unite) have pushed up the offer from 2% before action was discussed, to 3.5%, then to 5%, then to a differentiated flat-rate offer (but not consolidated), and now to a new offer, consolidated.

Targeted strikes of bin and recycling workers rolled out beyond Edinburgh to two thirds of the councils, and the unions planned for early-years and school workers to strike for three days from 7 or 8 September across a large number of councils. In some areas like Glasgow that would have closed all schools.

The action forced the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish government to find more money.

The new offer, for which the unions have suspended strikes and will consult their members with a recommendation to accept, is complex. But for every single worker it is less than the July 2022 12.3% RPI rate, let alone than the 17.9% rate which the Insti-

tute for Fiscal Studies estimates for lower-paid workers between October 2021 and October 2022.

This offer is consolidated. The previous one included one-off temporary payments, but this one will see the grades increase permanently.

Those on up to £20,500 will get £2,000 flat increase (between 10.7% and 9.8%)

Those on £20,500 to £39,000 will get £1,925 (between 9.8% and 5%)

Those on £39,000 to £60,000 will get 5%

Those over £60,000 will get a flat rate of £3,000

The amounts will be calculated pro rata based on a 36 hour week (in England a 37 hour week is "full time"), and there will be an additional day's leave this year (in England the promise is an extra day's leave a year later).

This is better than the £1,925 flat-rate offer in England.

GMB Scotland organiser Keir Greenaway has said the offer is "not perfect". In fact, accepting it means squandering an opportunity just as the strikes are working, when schools and nurseries have yet to strike, and when more pressure is coming from strikes in rail, the post, BT, and maybe soon the civil service and teachers.

Accepting it means that Scottish local government workers will start next year's pay round worse off in relation to price inflation (which will be worse than) than they did this year. It is likely also to undermine the possibilities of rejection of the £1,925 flat-rate offer in England and Wales, which is even more a real-wage cut. □

I think we need to demand an increase that at least matches inflation. It has to be a flat rate, because flat-rate increases benefit the lower paid, the people who need it most, far more. We want to try and close the gap between the highest and lowest-paid, and fighting for a flat-rate increase can help to do that.

The "10%" campaign had a galvanising effect, because that showed people that members could get together and articulate what they wanted, rather than just waiting for the union executive to tell them what was happening.

We're not getting much from the executive in terms of explaining what their strategy is, and inviting discussion around that. We have Zoom meetings called at pretty short notice, and then we're told, "this is what we're going to do."

There needs to be a wider discussion about what the demand and strategy should be, rather than it all coming from the top down. The members need it to be bottom up. If a settlement is ultimately recommended by the executive that doesn't match what members want, and which members don't feel they've had a say in shaping, we are going to have a problem.

It's woken me up to some extent, I think now that we should probably have been more vociferous in trying to assert a strategy from below. In the past we've largely relied on the executive for that. But the rank and file has to step up if we're going to win this. □

RMT election

Solidarity contributor Daniel Randall is seeking nominations for the London Transport seat on the National Executive Committee of the rail union RMT. The ballot will run 31 October to 4 December.

Daniel has worked on the Tube as a Customer Service Assistant at Oxford Circus since 2014, has held several union positions, and is co-organiser of the Free Our Unions campaign.

In his letter seeking nomination Daniel says he will work for "RMT's culture of rank-and-file democracy [to be] deepened and extended, with as much power as possible in the hands of members, in the workplace".

He commits himself to "equality as a core trade union principle". "As a committed socialist", he adds, "I will also organise to put our union at the heart of a working-class fight-back against the rule of profit, and for it to make practical solidarity with workers' and democratic struggles internationally". Email: danielrandall.rmt@gmail.com □



More online

Socialist summer camp

Good turnout for Workers' Liberty's summer camp, 25-28 Aug:
bit.ly/2022-sc

Verdict on Gorbachev

How his attempt to save the USSR system undid it:
bit.ly/gorb-v

Graham: support and criticism

Ollie Moore argues that it was right to back Sharon Graham in the Unite gen sec election, but we should be critical
bit.ly/crit-sg

6699 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

Richer and more predatory



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

One of my first observations, as I look back over decades as a workplace and union activist, is a societal and class observation.

Society and the working class overall are much, much richer in material goods than I could have imagined as a child in Brisbane, Australia, in the sixties and early seventies.

There were four children in my family, two boys and two girls. Mum was full-time stay-at-home (as most married women were then) and Dad was a merchant seafarer. We were not poor, nor were we "well off". We were average in many respects.

Mum was adamant that the invention of the washing machine was her greatest godsend. It relieved her from toiling for hours over a hot copper.

In the early 1960s in Brisbane most toilets were outside ("the dunny"). The "dunny man" came once a week and emptied the toilet.

In the late 1960s Brisbane City Council started massive public works to hook up all houses with the sewage network.

Cigarettes were relatively cheap then. Mum could afford to smoke two packets of unfiltered Rothmans a day. Today you would need to hold up a bank to afford that habit.

Mum had a massive heart attack at 49 in which smoking was a chief felon. Mum survived the heart attack, but her health was permanently challenged after that.

Yet life has become more insecure for many.

Social housing in Brisbane was managed and owned by the Queensland State Government. The houses provided then were sturdy three-bedroom houses (though small by Queensland standards). Tenants were to keep them in good repair. A state government representative, known as the Housing

Commission man, collected rent each fortnight and had the power to inspect houses.

Most Housing Commission tenants were working-class families, many of whom used them as a base to buy their own home.

In the late 1960s an average three-bedroom home on, say, a 560 square metre block would cost around two times a median salary. Fifty years later, the same home takes eight or nine years of median salary to purchase.

The massive uplift in housing prices has made owning their own home unobtainable for many working-class people. 70% of houses in Australia were owner-occupied in the 1960s, but home ownership for younger people has gone down markedly since then.

A predatory class of real estate investors has been created – many of them, paradoxically, workers who got in the market early and went on to buy investment properties. This is an area that really needs examination. □

Tragedy, shame and anger



Diary of an NHS worker

By Edel Ginger

Gordon was found dead in his flat. Nobody had heard from him for ten days, so a couple of friends went round to check.

Gordon had worked for the NHS for over 30 years. He caught Covid early in the pandemic, pre-vaccination. To start off he seemed to be recovering and came back to work. But as time went on he

got more and more breathless, went off sick again and started to find it difficult to get out.

He lived on the upper floor and walking up the stairs left his chest heaving. He told me the short walk to the local shop used up his energy for the day. He lived on his own. He had friends who he'd socialised with, but work had also served a social purpose, keeping him in touch with people day to day.

He was cheerful and chatty at work. A solid union member and reliable workmate.

Lockdown and his illness

left him isolated. He started drinking and that got out of control. When we realised what was happening, a few from the union tried to rally round him, helping him clean up his flat and take him to appointments. I think he was filled with shame and hid the extent of what was going on. He was bitter about being left to suffer with his illness for so long without support, especially from management, who after all had exposed him to the virus with inadequate protection.

Bitterness is an individual response that turns inward.

Similarly, his death has left individual guilt with those who tried to help. But the failure is collective.

An underfunded NHS, crap mental health services, isolated housing, and the notion that we should all be able to fend for ourselves whatever the circumstances, are all written into the fabric of modern capitalism. It's not trite to say these things killed Gordon. Our movement must act so that collective anger of our class can help overcome individual shame and guilt. □

Native Americans onscreen



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The recent apology to Native American Sacheen Littlefeather for her treatment at the 1973 Academy Awards Ceremony when she declined an Oscar on behalf of Marlon Brando is about 50 years too late, but welcome all the same.

While attempting to speak for the cause of Native American rights she was booed and, some allege, threat-



ened by John Wayne. Officials told her to keep her speech to one minute or face arrest. It could well be the case that Native Americans have been subjected to more racist abuse, onscreen, than any other ethnic minority in the world since the introduction of cinema

in 1899. They were depicted as primitive, savage, brutal, murderous, rapists in countless Hollywood films.

Delmer Daves' *Broken Arrow*, 1950, and Robert Aldrich's *Apache*, 1954, may be two exceptions. Representations of Native Americans began to change in the late 1960s/70s with films such as *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970) and *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970). Later films such as Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves*, 1990 continued that glacial shift in understanding.

There are now a number of films directed by Native Americans: *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998) is one of the best-known. □

TUC Congress, the strikes and the Truss regime

By John Moloney

The TUC Congress coming up on 11-14 September *should* be dominated on one hand by all the strikes that are burgeoning, and on the other hand a Truss government and the plans to bring in new anti-union laws and rip up European-derived workers' rights.

There's going to be an emergency motion from Unite on coordinating strikes. In the past talk about coordination has led to nothing. This year a critical mass of union leaderships seem to genuinely want coordinated action. Clearly we need pressure from below, but I do think there is some push at the top.

I should add that PCS has submitted a motion for campaigning against civil service job cuts, and to back our likely industrial action; and one against the Rwanda deportation policy and for migrants' rights.

Judging from the TUC briefing, the union leaders think Truss's plans for new anti-union laws are a done deal; all that can be done is delay new laws or maybe knock some edges off. They're advocating very minimal forms of parliamentary lobbying. Much of the debate in the trade union movement, in so far as there is one, oscillates be-



tween that kind of thing and vague talk about defying the law. We certainly do need to think about defying the new laws, and earlier ones too, but then we need serious discussion about what that would mean.

Really the first step is organise vocal campaigning, protests and demonstrations about the new attack. Without big demonstrations we're not going to stop it; in fact we might not be able to stop it even with demonstrations, but they can maximise our chances and also put us in a better position to achieve both defiance and repeal.

Even some vigorous parliamentary lobbying that actually mobilised members, or some vigorous campaigning to get a commitment from Labour on repealing anti-union laws, would be a step up.

More generally, the failure of the

unions, particularly the big affiliated unions of course, to put pressure and demands on and in the Labour Party - to support strikes, but also for wider pro-working class demands - continues to be a problem.

There are important disagreements on climate change, as we saw last year with debate on GMB's motion; but the labour movement is broadly united around many good policies on this. What we lack is any mass campaigning.

No union has managed to generate any mass mobilisation or involvement: mobilising for demonstrations, our own or others'; attempts to link strikes to the climate struggle; or even more basic large-scale campaigning. I've been pushing for a trade union conference and demonstration on climate change, so far unsuccessfully. I'll keep pushing. We need to get into the habit of bringing people onto the streets.

There's no motion on Ukraine and very little on international issues. Internationalism is often seen as sort of extra-curricular, so it's easy for it to be knocked off the agenda. There's also a great reluctance to have debates at the TUC seen as divisive.

It's also a fact that a lot of people in the labour movement aren't so keen to stand in solidarity with Ukraine. Most

unions have passed decent positions, or defeated bad ones, but there's lots of leaders and officials who won't be overly keen to solidify that by passing something good at the TUC. Supporters of Ukraine need to redouble our efforts, but sadly this Congress may not provide much chance to do that. □

• John Moloney, assistant general secretary of PCS, spoke to *Solidarity* in a personal capacity. Longer interview: bit.ly/jm-tuc

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Preparing for Truss's attacks



John Moloney

The first round of strikes by our outsourced worker members at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), planned for 5-6 September, has been suspended. Local reps felt managers for the contractor ISS were making concessions in talks that were sufficient to call the strikes off. Further strikes, planned for 13-14 September, remain on, and that action will take place if those concessions don't turn into concrete guarantees.

Our members at the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) centre in Liverpool, run by Hinduja Global Systems, are on strike between 5 to 10 September.

Given Liz Truss as premier, we're preparing to organise against attacks on our jobs and conditions. She's said she wants to scrap working time regulations, posing it as a matter of

choice, and to give workers freedom to work overtime; it's about licensing employers to exploit people. In reality the law is not observed and that is why the union has lodged complaints with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) over breaches of the working time regulations. Unfortunately there's a long-standing culture of excessive hours in many departments. To tackle this, we must insist that the law is complied with. Just as important is to strengthen trade-union consciousness and empower workers to refuse when pressured to work longer.

I'm also working on a project around sickness policy in the civil service. Departments operate sickness "triggers", meaning if you have a certain number of days off within a given period you could face disciplinary interview. In effect it punishes people for being ill. We know that health, and therefore sickness absence, is very much a class issue: lower-paid workers are likelier to have health problems and need time off. So the policy hits the lowest-paid hardest. It's also often utilised in a discretionary way that benefits the better-off. If you're

a senior manager who has lots of time off sick, you're more likely to be dealt with supportively and sympathetically. Addressing sickness absence for us is also about looking into issues of workload and work-related stress that cause people to have time off.

A main focus for the union nationally is, of course, our impending ballot of our civil service membership from 26 September. There are lots of encouraging signs, with some of the biggest members' meetings we've had for years. There's an electric atmosphere I haven't seen, probably, since a major pay dispute in the 1980s. There's still more to do, including improving our record-keeping so there's centralised info on which members have been spoken to.

The key all along has been to activate the activist base. The national union and central apparatus has a vital role to play, but this has to be led and driven by reps and activists in the workplace. □

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

Royal Mail: now is the time to strike to win

A CWU rep from south east England spoke to Solidarity

On 26 August, my picket line was visited by members of Workers' Liberty. We still talk about it now. Going on strike and being on the picket line can be lonely,



and we felt buoyed by this show of support by people who were serious about the strike and wanting to know how we can fight to win.

We are striking again on 8 and 9 September which is good, but hard on the workers who struggle to put food on the table. Fellow posties try and give each other a bit of financial support if they need it, and even members of the public do, but strike funds and hardship funds will be crucial to our ability to stay out. Neither the union nor the branches have strike funds, which is concerning.

Fundraising needs to be organised by the union. The question of funds was raised at a meeting of reps in London but nothing was decided. We shouldn't assume it's impossible to raise those funds and distribute them. If other unions can do it, so can we, and we should push for this within the union to make sure this is done.

Unions need to take coordinated action. I feel that this country is headed for a general strike. Now is the time to strike, and strike to win. It may not be long until we're in a recession, and the cost of living crisis means that we will soon be even poorer than we are now. Most importantly, Liz Truss will likely introduce new anti-union laws, which will be debilitating. The window of opportunity is now.

When we went on strike last week, management failed to communicate to the public that the office was closed due to the strike. There was no sign on the door. Some members of the public turned up to collect parcels and were angry that they couldn't. In my view, this lack of communication about the strike suits the management's interests because it turns the public against us. I am hugely disappointed in the Labour Party and Keir Starmer for failing to publicly support the strikes.

Royal Mail is a good example of how society is run based on what is profitable, not what is good for people. For instance, parcels are much more

profitable to them than letters are, so second-class parcels are prioritised over first-class letters. You could order some nice-smelling soap online and Royal Mail will prioritise delivering your parcel over somebody's NHS letter.

Loads of letters are parked to one side every day, and managers are told to do this.

Customers who pay more for what is advertised as better, faster delivery of letters are not getting what they paid for. Most posties work very hard, but we're being forced to let people down. The performance targets set by management are entirely unrealistic and we have no hope of achieving them, especially since Royal Mail refuse to meet staffing needs.

I have seen other delivery companies engage in bad practices – drivers leaving parcels in plain view so that they get stolen. But that, too, is because of the companies themselves and the conditions that they force their couriers to work under. All delivery workers need union representation and we need to all be in the same union, on the same terms.

Royal Mail has no regard for their workers' health and safety. Since they got rid of bikes, a postal worker might walk 12 miles a day, carrying pouches that often weigh 16 kilos each. You are made to do overtime. It is an extremely taxing job that will likely destroy your physical and mental health, in which case you've become a burden to the company and they will want to get rid of you. Staff are leaving in droves, some of them are people who have just joined, but others are people who have been on the job for a very long time and who have a lot of knowledge.

I'm a rep not because I want any prestige or comfort, but because I hate seeing workers being crushed by the bosses. I believe in being courageous and facing the bosses head-on. Union reps should not be given more benefits than a regular worker, but I do believe in release times. I want to be able to organise on company time, and I worry that release times are going to be the next target of attack as the strike heats up. □

RMT and Aslef to strike together



Off The Rails

September 15 will be a significant day, with drivers' union Aslef and general rail union RMT striking together. Aslef members will strike in several Train Operating Companies (ToCs), with RMT members on Network Rail, in ToCs, on Arriva Rail London (London Overground) and Hull Trains also striking. RMT members will strike again on 17 August.



So far, Aslef has given every indication of wanting to avoid coordination with RMT – even though many of their rank-and-file members clearly see the logic of coordination. RMT has

rightly forced the issue by calling a strike on the same day as Aslef.

Reps should form rank-and-file committees locally to organise joint picketing and discuss the next steps in the dispute, allowing members to feed proposals back into the structures of their respective unions.

Another rail union, TSSA, is due to strike on 26 September, and there's still time for the other unions to name action on that day too... □

London Underground dispute: we must strike again!



Tubeworker

There's a pretty clear consensus across the job that we need to strike again in response to the settlement with the government agreed by Transport for London (TfL) on 30 August that makes funding conditional on reforming pensions, holding down pay, making further operational cuts, and moving towards driverless trains.

Let's announce dates as soon as possible, and let's escalate beyond 24 hours. How about two days in September, three in October, four in November...?

With the cost-of-living crisis biting, we know a lot of us will feel the pinch, especially as Christmas approaches, but that can be mitigated by union hardship funds.

The attacks we're facing are becoming more intense; our action has to become more intense too.

Part of the funding settlement agreed between the Department for Transport and TfL says that future pay awards must "follow public sector pay policy."

With the Tories in power, that means below-inflation increases.

Centrally employed TfL staff have already been offered a measly 3%. We can likely expect something similar on LUL when our current deal expires in April.

We should counter-attack early by demanding a flat-rate, consolidated pay rise that's well above inflation. □



• Over a thousand packed into a RMT-organised "Save London Transport" rally on 31 August, with others turned away. Speakers from several unions plus disabled activist Barbara Lisicki, Labour MP John McDonnell, and Bernie Sanders from the USA were lively and spirited. Yet the meeting failed to project the next strikes or next steps in community campaigning. bit.ly/rmt-r

Women's Fightback and Solidarity 646

On 14 September *Solidarity* skips another week. Sorry! But this is to make room for an issue of *Women's Fightback* on that day. *Solidarity 646* is out 21 Sep, we skip a week on 28 Sep so production staff can go to Labour conference, and then we're back to the usual weekly schedule. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

WAGE SPIRAL TO BEAT BILLS SPIRAL

By Martin Thomas

Liz Truss was elected as new Tory leader, and so prime minister, on 5 September, with a programme of new anti-union laws, tax cuts for the well-off, a "bonfire" of EU-derived social standards, and more.

It is even more urgent to unite, accelerate, and spread the strikes now underway, to beat back Truss before she can settle into office and consolidate Tory support.

Truss said she was against "handouts". However, she has now promised, for Thursday 8 September, measures to ease the household energy shock.

It looks like Truss will go for something like the scheme of the energy retailers themselves – a freeze or semi-freeze on energy tariffs, thanks to government loans or subsidies to the retailers.

The Tory scheme will be inadequate; involve subsidising fossil-fuel prices relative to other prices, with bad environmental consequences; and be short-lived, though prices will probably remain high for years.

(An ongoing freeze, so the New Economics Foundation calculates, would cost about as much as the total NHS budget for England.)

The working-class answer is to unite and accelerate the current battles for wage rises and to spread them to other sectors; and to demand increases in benefits too.



We also want public ownership of the whole energy sector, extraction, production, generation, grid, retail. We have long advocated that as a necessary step for green conversion.

Public ownership would also reduce the price shock. Government regulation of energy retail prices is designed to mimic free-market mechanisms, setting those prices at the "marginal" rate (the price of the most expensive gas and electricity supplies drawn on). That yields special profits for many firms (renewables, nuclear, North Sea gas, etc.) when prices soar for world-market gas imports (about 50% of UK supply).

Absorbing those special profits would enable an easing of prices, and a redirection of revenues to building new low-carbon capacity (renewables, including onshore wind farms, rejected by the Tories, but the quickest to build; and nuclear).

The *Financial Times* reports that the Tories are also considering administratively pushing the prices to retailers off free-market levels so that cheaper producers and generators lose some super-profits.

Other relief schemes besides the energy retailers' include:

- Keir Starmer's: a tariff freeze, but only for six months, and in part financed by cancelling the £400 per household rebate on energy bills due in October. This is too short-lived, and would leave many people in small flats in high-rise blocks worse off even short-term.

- Lib Dems: similar to Starmer, but vaguer.

- [New Economics Foundation](#): a basic free energy quota for every household, a flat-rate boost to Universal Credit, and a flat-rate per-household relief allowance – all paid for increasing windfall tax and capital-gains tax, a profit-cap on energy suppliers... and an *increased* tariff for above-quota energy mostly consumed by well-off households, thus incentivising energy economy.

The NEF also advocates "a national mission to improve energy efficiency and clean energy generation", noting that basic household energy-efficiency measures "will typically cost under £1,000 per home and can be undertaken within a day".

The NEF's scheme is most like what *Solidarity* has advocated. But no good scheme will be won only by petitioning and pleading with the government. Accelerating the revival of working-class action already underway is crucial. □