

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STOP NEW TORY ANTI-UNION LAWS

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CWU strike rally, August 2022

Unite, accelerate, spread strikes

Post strikes again 30 Sep and 1 Oct, rail 1 Oct and 5 Oct

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Speak out against monarchy

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Far-right rallies 70,000 in Prague

Far-right rally cloaked in "anti-war" and high-prices agitation

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Connolly's answer to Partition

In the end Connolly had no alternative but "continue direct rule"

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The ideas that Starmer wants to ban

Protest now against new laws

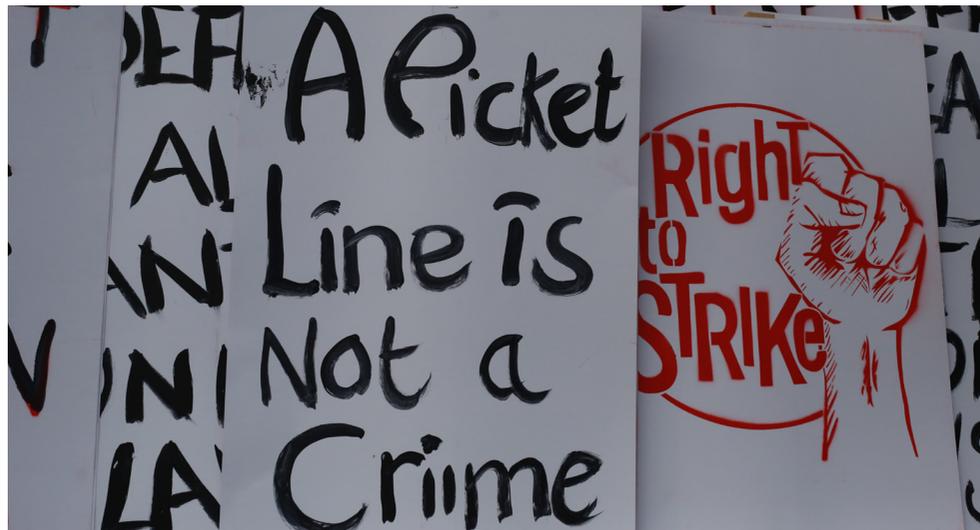


Briefing

From a briefing produced by the **Free Our Unions** campaign, bit.ly/fou-b

Free Our Unions is advocating for the unions to actively and energetically campaign against any new anti-union laws, and for the repeal of all existing laws.

This should include using union influence in the Labour Party to ensure that Labour MPs and the leadership publicly call for the scrapping of all anti-union laws and commit to doing so when in power. The party in government should also legislate to improve trade union



rights, including enshrining the right to strike in law.

We advocate for a public, union-led campaign against the anti-union laws.

This should include a national demonstration called as soon as the new proposals are formally unveiled.

While "political" strike action remains unlawful, there is nothing to stop unions co-ordinating the actions taken in their various trade disputes. Broad, co-ordinated action this Autumn, taking place while a new law is introduced into Parliament, will be the most effective show of force against such a law and provide national and local platforms for trade unionists to mobilise and argue against it.

This new round of anti-union laws pose an existential threat to the labour movement's ability to organise and win.

We need you to help us beat them back. □

Squeezing the right to strike

The exact details of any new anti-union measures remain to be seen. During a live BBC TV debate, both Tory leadership candidates answered "Yes" to the question of whether they would ban strikes in essential services outright. Liz Truss promised to bring in a new law within 30 days of taking office. Potential proposals include:

- Doubling again the notice unions must give employers before taking action, from 14 to 28 days
- Increasing the "support threshold" provision from 40% to 50%
- Expanding the "support threshold" provision from "important public services" to any strike ballot
- Introducing "minimum service provision" requirements during strikes. Perhaps even outright bans on strikes in some sectors
- Forcing unions to re-ballot

after a certain number of strike days have been undertaken

- Forcing workers to pay tax on strike pay.

The overall aim of these proposals is to make it as difficult as possible for workers to take lawful industrial action, and to reduce the effectiveness of any action that is taken.

Increasing notice periods will enable employers to prepare and mitigate the effects of a strike. Coupled with the lifting of the agency worker ban, it could mean employers find it easier to use scab labour to break strikes.

Expanding the support threshold will not only make it harder for unions to get the turnouts required to take action, but will also make it easier for employers to challenge ballot results in the courts and get injunctions to block strikes.

Minimum service require-

ments will undermine the effectiveness of strikes, the whole point of which is to disrupt the employer's economic operations. They may even force unions to be responsible for the minimum service, essentially making unions complicit in undermining their own actions.

Taken together, these proposals represent a major attack on workers' rights and a further shrinking of the boundaries of what constitutes lawful trade unionism.

Senior Labour Party politicians have condemned the plans. Since 2015, party conference has repeatedly passed policy to repeal all anti-trade union laws. Publicly, however, the party leadership tends to focus only on repealing the 2016 Act.

Union pressure did manage to remove some clauses from the 2016 Act. Many individual unions have their own policies opposing anti-union laws. The RMT and Unite both have policies to call demonstrations against the anti-union laws. Unison has launched a legal challenge to the government's agency worker proposals.

The Labour left group Momentum set up a "Labour for labour" campaign in August 2022 to advocate for the Labour Party to support striking workers. One of this campaign's demands is for the repeal of anti-union laws. □

The laws since the 1980s

Since 1980 a series of laws passed by Conservative governments have created one of the most hostile environments for union organising in any democratic society in the world. These laws:

- Prohibit workers from undertaking "solidarity" or "sympathy" strikes in support of workers in other industries
- Restrict strikes to "trade disputes" against their own employer, meaning workers cannot strike in support of wider social causes or against political decisions they disagree with
- Force unions to undertake the slow process of postal balloting before any action is taken
- Force unions to give notice to an employer before strike action is taken
- Restrict the definition of lawful picketing and encode criminal offences in relation to picketing
- Make it easier for employers to use court injunctions to prevent strike action and find unions liable for action
- Restrict how unions can use their funds and resources for political purposes

2016

The most recent piece of anti-union legislation is the

Trade Union Act 2016. This Act:

- Introduces an arbitrary 50% minimum turnout threshold for any statutory industrial action ballot
- Introduces a "support threshold" provision for "important public services" where 40% of all those eligible to be balloted have to support industrial action, for example on a 50% turnout, 80% have to vote Yes
- Doubles the notice a union must serve an employer before industrial action is taken from 7 to 14 days
- Forces unions to re-ballot every 6 months
- Forces unions to appoint "picket supervisors" on every picket, who must be contactable by the police
- Gives the government the power to cap union facility time in the public sector

In the summer of 2022, in response to strikes on the railways, the government finally overturned a long-standing ban on the use of agency workers during strikes. This met with opposition from not only unions but also many employment agencies. The move is open to legal challenge and it isn't yet clear whether it will be practically applied in many industries. □



Corrections

The date given for the RCN ballot in *Solidarity* 645 was wrong. Many of the dates given there were right at the time of printing, but became wrong because of postponements after the royal death on 8 September. □

Solidarity 647 is 5 Oct

Solidarity skips a week again on 28 September, because our production team will be at Labour Party conference. So 24 pages this week. *Solidarity* 648 will be out 5 October, and then we're back to the usual weekly schedule. □

Unite, accelerate, spread strikes

By Ollie Moore

The 2022 strike wave continues to spread, with workers in Further and Higher Education, in UCU and Unison, launching strikes. Dock workers at Liverpool and Felixstowe have also named further action, striking from 19 September to 3 October and 27 September to 5 October respectively.

GMB members at an Amazon warehouse in Coventry will ballot for strikes to win higher pay, in the first statutory ballot at any Amazon workplace in the UK. The ballot runs from 15 September to 19 October. Unite members at seven Arriva bus garages across north London have also voted for strikes, followed by a resounding vote to reject their employer's latest pay offer.

Refuse workers in Newham, east London, also in Unite, have announced a further two-week strike, from 20 September to 3 October.

And there are more strikes on rail and post (see box).

The sustained action taken by dockers, refuse workers, and criminal barristers – on indefinite strike since 5 September – is a better model than the pattern of monthly (or less-than-monthly) 24 or 48-hour strikes the CWU and the rail unions seem committed to. Few disputes are won by wearing down employers via short, infrequent strikes; and seeing rail and post workers as having had strikes for months but not yet shifted the bosses could dampen other workers' will to strike.

Especially given the pause in action following several unions' decisions to cancel strikes after the Queen's death, regaining momentum requires escalating the action. In the RMT's national dispute, at least in terms of intensity of action, things have gone backwards: the dispute began with an extremely well-supported three-day strike, but all strikes since have been of only one or two days.

As disputes drag on, workers are faced with the question of whether to give up, or step up. In the midst of the most significant strike wave in a generation, now is surely the time for courage and ambition. Unions can offset some of the financial impact of sustained strikes by an efficient system of hardship payments.

Many unions have national disputes funds, into which a portion of membership fees are automatically paid. After years of extremely low levels of



strikes, these funds must surely be relatively healthy. RMT has done the right thing by freeing up a sizeable amount of money from its national fund, which has been devolved to branches to administer to members. Larger unions, with greater resources, can surely do likewise.

In smaller disputes, particularly of lower-paid workers, unions may be able to pay full strike pay, or something close to it. In larger disputes, that will not be financially viable, and local union branches will need to administer targeted hardship payments to members who need it most.

In the period of "New Unionism", an explosion in class struggle which recomposed the labour movement in Britain at the end of the 19th century, many militant workers saw the distribution of strike pay, rather than the provision of services to its members, as the primary function of the union at an institutional level. Something of that spirit should be rediscovered now.

The need to coordinate action – to "unite the strikes", as *Solidarity* has put it – remains acute. A coordinated national strike involving all workers with live mandates would pose a serious challenge to a new Tory administration still finding its feet. Coordinating action is also the best way to "generalise" strikes, that is, to turn a collection of individual disputes into a class-wide fightback against the capitalist dogma that workers must pay for the cost-of-living crisis.

Senior trade union officials appear at rallies and on the picket lines of other unions' strikes, and share stages at Enough is Enough and People's Assembly events. Some have threatened

coordinated action as something that might be launched in the future. But there seems to be no urgent moves towards any immediate coordination. Rank-and-file union members can affect that by putting as much pressure as possible on their leaderships, and building a mood for coordination from below.

A key task is to establish forums in which strikers from different unions can discuss the direction of their disputes, building pressure for coordination from below. Strikers from RMT, TSSA, NUJ, and CWU in Nottingham held a joint meeting on 15 September to discuss building solidarity for their respective disputes, and working towards coordination. Similar initiatives in other cities, facilitated by Trades Councils where possible, can help unite the strikes. □

Strikes

Since 5 Sep: Criminal barristers on indefinite strike

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

20 Sep-3 Oct: Newham refuse workers (Unite) strike

Various days from 20 Sep to 11 Oct: Non-academic staff (Unison) strike at many universities (details: bit.ly/uni-unison)

26-28 Sep: FE workers (UCU) strike

27 Sep-5 Oct: Felixstowe dockers (Unite) strike

30 Sep-1 Oct: Postal workers (CWU) strike

1 Oct: Rail workers (Aslef and RMT) strike (according to Enough is Enough, TSSA too)

5 Oct: Train drivers at 12 TOCs (Aslef) strike

6-7 Oct: FE workers (UCU) strike

10-11 Oct: FE workers (UCU) strike

18-20 Oct: FE workers (UCU) strike

Ballots

Until 27 Sep: Cleaners and other workers employed by Royal Mail Property and Facilities Solutions (CWU) ballot for action over pay

30 Aug-27 Sep: NHS staff (GMB) indicative ballot for action over pay

6 Sep-21 Oct: University workers (UCU) ballot for action over pay, working conditions, and pensions

7 Sep-14 Oct: School support staff (NEU) indicative ballot for action over pay and conditions

15 Sep-19 Oct: Amazon workers in Coventry (GMB) ballot for action over pay

6 Oct-2 Nov: Nurses (RCN) ballot for strikes over pay

24 Sep-14 Oct: Teachers (NEU) indicative ballot for action over pay

26 Sep: Civil servants (PCS) ballot for action over pay, job cuts, and other cost-of-living issues

29 Sep-27 Oct: Midwives in Scotland (RCM) ballot for action over pay

27 Oct-25 Nov: NHS staff (Unison) ballot for action over pay □



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](https://workersliberty.org/events).

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

Wednesday 28 September, 6.30pm – Unite, accelerate, spread the strikes! AWL London forum, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London, WC1N 1AB

Sunday 2 October, 2pm – Socialist feminist reading group: *Three Women* by Lisa Taddeo, Hootananny Brixton, 95 Effra Road, London SW2 1DF

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



Trash Ukraine to curb prices?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* of 5 September finally came out openly with an argument that they and others have been hinting at and skirting round for months: that the war in Ukraine is a major cause of the cost of living crisis, so support for Ukraine must stop.

The paper cited the 70,000 strong “Czech Republic First” rally in Prague on 3 September as the model for the kind of movement it wants to see in Britain. The rally was organised by the far right with the support of the rump Czech Communist Party and aimed as much against the 400,000 Ukrainian refugees the Czech Republic has taken and Czech foreign policy in general (especially membership of the EU) as the cost of living. Anti-vaxxers and covid-deniers were also present.

Alongside banners bearing slogans such as “The best for Ukrainians and two jumpers for us”, Zuzana Majerová Zahradníková of the hard-right, anti-EU Trikolora party told protesters: “Fiala’s government may be Ukrainian,

it may be Brussels, but it is definitely not Czech.” Some demonstrators wore T-shirts praising the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, while others carried banners voicing anti-EU (and anti-Nato) sentiment.

The Czech Republic’s inflation rate is 17.5% (August-August). Fact-check: Hungary, where the government has refused to take refugees or give positive aid to Ukraine, is at a similar rate (15.6%).

The *Morning Star* has started coming out openly with this line since editor Ben Chacko attended the Unsere Zeit Press Festival (organised by the German CP) at the end of August, and was evidently impressed by people like the Die Link MP Sevin Dagedelen and German CP leader Patrik Köbele, both of whom called for “peace” (i.e. Ukrainian capitulation) as a key demand in any campaign against energy price hikes.

“Our own”

What the *Morning Star* conveniently ignores is that to oppose the UK assisting Ukraine because of the cost of living inevitably converges with the long-term line of the isolationist right-wing who say “we shouldn’t give a penny to refugees and people far away until we have looked after our own.”

Here are edited highlights from the



Placard denounces “inflation... the war... vaccinations, face masks, PCR tests ... immigrants”.

Morning Star editorial, headed “As in Prague, the left must link the cost-of-living crisis to climate change and war”.

“Mammoth protests in Prague at the weekend made the direct link between Nato’s confrontation with Russia and the cost-of-living crisis.

“It is a connection that needs to be made here as we gear up for mass demonstrations against a new Tory prime minister promising hundreds of billions more in military spending while millions cannot afford their energy bills.

“Czech communists were right to dismiss claims that because the far right were mobilising for protests the left should sit them out – instead rallying under their own banners and promoting their own, socialist solutions [...]

“[In Britain] we should be wary of narratives that separate the domestic from

international crises.

“All sides at Westminster oppose talks on ending the war in Ukraine, instead backing massive increases in military spending which will inevitably come at the cost of our public services”.

Blaming support for Ukraine for the cost of living crisis (a “line” now taken up as well by the Stop the War Coalition) is just the latest example of the *Morning Star* (and its political masters, the Communist Party of Britain), despite formal opposition to the invasion, in practice opposing Ukraine’s fight to drive out the Russians.

At a time in Britain where there is a rising tide of class struggle around wages and left wing campaigns like Enough is Enough are popular, the *Morning Star* advocates a massive step backwards towards an isolationist and nationalist approach that potentially could align the left with the far right.

There is a discussion to be had about how socialists in the Czech Republic (and also now Germany) should respond when the far right and other reactionary forces are prominent in the response to the cost of living crisis. But that discussion is not happening at the *Morning Star* or CPB, who don’t seem to even recognise that there is a problem. □

A spectre is haunting Europe



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of fascism. We caught a glimpse of that spectre in Sweden last weekend [11 Sep] and we are likely to see more of it next weekend [25 Sep] in Italy.

It is not just that right-wing parties are winning elections. That would be bad enough. What we are seeing now happening in some parts of Western Europe is something new and terrifying. Political parties that have their roots in Nazi or fascist movements have emerged as mass organisations – and as parties of government. This is something that should keep democrats awake at night.

In the Swedish elections, a party with clear roots in a neo-Nazi party, the “Swedish Dem-

ocrats,” won more than one in five votes. Over 1,300,000 Swedes supported a party which has spent the last three decades in the political wilderness. Now it will be part of the right-wing coalition government. It was a close election, and the vote for the Social Democrats actually grew – but it was not enough. Hundreds of thousands of Swedish voters shifted their allegiance from the traditional parties of the right and centre to a party with neo-Nazi roots.

Meanwhile in Italy, where elections are taking place on 25 September, all polls are indicating that the party known as Fratelli d’Italia (Fdl), is expected to win the largest number of votes. Polls show it winning nearly 25%, which is significantly higher than what the Swedish Democrats achieved. And like their colleagues in Sweden, Fdl has its roots in fascism. It is a direct continuation of the old Italian Social Movement (MSI), which

in turn grew out of Mussolini’s fascist party. Its leader, Giorgia Meloni, may very well turn out to be Italy’s next prime minister – the first fascist leader the country has had since 1943.

Fdl’s main rival on the left, the Democratic Party (PD) is several points behind in the polls. The PD has its roots in the once-powerful Italian Communist Party (PCI). But since it was founded in 2007, the PD’s vote has shrunk from 33% to barely 20% today.

The first task for the European Left, and indeed for all democrats, is to try to understand why this is happening.

One could rattle off a list of things that contribute to the rise of these fascist parties including economic crisis, globalisation, climate change, and mass migration.

But a key reason why they are growing is surely that their natural rivals, the social democratic parties, have not offered an appealing alternative in many cases.

Far right movements offer answers to working people who have seen their standards of living collapse and obscene levels of inequality grow. Sometimes, these far right movements are called “populist” – but left parties can also advocate for radical change, as they used to do.

At the moment, there is no fascist movement of any significance in Britain. But before we get all smug about it, remember that the Swedish Democrats and Fdl were small, fringe parties just a few years ago.

In some countries, such as France, the mainstream social democratic party (PS) has

nearly evaporated – just a few short years after it was in power. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) has also nearly completely disappeared, its vote collapsing from 25% a decade ago to just 5% today.

A Left that is willing to call for radical change at a time of economic crisis is one that might grow. Or maybe not.

But continuing with politics as usual at a time when fascist and neo-Nazi parties are on the cusp of power – that will surely fail. □

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

Second hand books

Workers’ Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the current stock and prices, and to order. □



Far right rallies 70,000 in Prague

By Alena Ivanova

On 3 September, a 70,000-strong crowd took to Prague's Wenceslas Square to demand action on the rising cost of living and energy prices.

The demands for governments to act rising across Europe give an opportunity for the labour movement to push forward a political agenda of social justice and workers' rights. But in fact the protest in Prague was organised by a vicious alliance of far-right forces pushing anti-immigrant and anti-vax conspiracy theories alongside demands to abandon Ukraine and support Russia for the sake of cheap gas.

The protest was called under the banner "Czech Republic First". The organisers included the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD), endorsed by the French National Front, the Dutch Party for Freedom, Austria's Freedom Party and Italy's Lega Nord. This supposed champion of working-class people advocates for shrinking the welfare state, doing away with positive discrimination – and of course attacking migrants.

Although SPD's anti-migrant agitation has long focused on Muslims, the demo was an opportunity for them to raise complaints against the 400,000 Ukrainian refugees that have been granted settlement in the Czech Republic since February. SPD politicians are experts when it comes to peddling hate; some of their leaders have previously called for the deportation and murder of Roma people, Jews and gay



people. Media outlets including *Al Jazeera* and the *Guardian* report speakers from other right-wing organisations, for instance Zuzana Majerová Zahradníková Trikolora, which pledges to fight its "Marxist and Maoist enemies".

Other speakers included prominent Covid-denier Jana Zwyrtk Hamplová and Jiří Kobza, formerly of the Czech Communist Party, but now of the SPD. And the Communist Party itself was represented too, by vocal Trump-supporter Josef Skála.

In the context of this "red"-brown alliance some on the left in other parts of the world, including the *Morning Star*, have hailed the demonstration.

The *Guardian* reports plans for another demonstration on 28 September, if the government does not resign by the 25th.

The real left should be deeply concerned – and not just because of the unsavoury mix of characters who organised this mobilisation. The energy and cost-of-living crisis is a prime opportunity niche for right-wing movements previously galvanised by Covid to spread misinformation and Putin-endorsed talking points among people angry with government policies because of their eroding living standards.

Though the war the Ukraine has undoubtedly contributed to the disastrous mess Europe's energy sector is in, the causes of the complex are complex, much wider and pre-date the conflict. Unfortunately simplistic narratives can gain traction. Simultaneously, while support for Ukraine remains strong across Europe, practical solidarity may become more difficult to ensure: look

at the threat of homelessness facing 50,000 Ukrainian refugees in the UK due to hosts feeling unable to heat extra rooms.

Pitching Ukrainians against working-class people in the rest of the continent is a shameful game that will only benefit the far right.

The way to end the conflict in Ukraine remains victory for Ukraine. We must stand with the Ukrainian resistance to imperialist aggression.

However, victory for Ukraine will not fix the economic crisis.

The fight for lower energy bills, food security and a shift away from fossil fuels demands opposition to the policies of governments that continue to serve the market and allow profiteering and speculation to flourish. □

Demand justice for Chris Kaba!

By Mohan Sen

It's good that protests for Chris Kaba, the young black man murdered by the police in Lambeth (South London) on 5 September, spread across the country despite the pressure not to demonstrate in the run up to the queen's funeral.

Around 10pm on 5 September police pursued Kaba to a road in Streatham Hill, blocked in the car he was driving, and when he attempted to drive out shot him through the windscreen; he died in hospital soon after. He was not armed. It seems the car was identified by an [automated system](#), which alerted police that the vehicle was linked to a previous "firearms incident" – but the car was not registered to Kaba.

There has been some labour

movement presence on some of the protests. But not much. We need to change that.

Alongside demanding justice for Chris Kaba through investigation and prosecution of the police officer or officers responsible, the labour movement needs to make wider demands to curb the power of the police and impose greater accountability – so the outrages they regularly inflict can be made less frequent and severe.

As long as we have a capitalist police force, part of the capitalist state, it will remain a force hostile to the working class and oppressed people, reproducing society's prejudice and oppression in concentrated form. We need to educate the labour movement and the working class in a spirit of hostility to the police

and a perspective of replacing them, and the state they are part of, with a radically more democratic system.

But in that struggle we also need demands for changes now, to limit the police's capacity to harm and to push forward the struggle against them. The whole labour movement should unite to demand such immediate reforms.

It's been hard to get the UK labour movement to discuss these issues – even during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020.

Workers' Liberty was involved in putting together the [motion](#) about policing and the right to protest that the Labour Left Internationalists group has promoted for this year's Labour Party conference. We think it provides some starting points for the necessary dis-



cussion; and it can be adapted for wider use.

Please raise the Chris Kaba campaign, wider issues of police violence and oppression and what demands we should be making in your union branch, Labour Party or other organisation. □



Activist Agenda

Labour Left Internationalists, Free Our Unions, Labour Campaign for Free Movement, and the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, will all be in Liverpool for Labour Party conference and the fringe event The World Transformed (Liverpool, 24-28 September).

They will be promoting motions and helping with compositing, distributing bulletins, running stalls and meetings.

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

• Campaign links all at workersliberty.org/agenda

The case against fracking



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Liz Truss has pledged to lift the ban on fracking. At a time when every scientific authority on earth is calling for an end to all new fossil fuel exploration, Truss is using the energy crisis to back an unpopular technology that will nudge us ever closer to the more apocalyptic climate scenarios.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is a way of extracting hard-to-reach fossil fuels from impermeable shale rock. High-pressure injection of fracking fluid (water plus chemicals plus sand) fractures the bedrock and allows fossilised methane gas and oil to rise to the surface. The process poisons soil and groundwater, triggers earthquakes, and adds further greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

The technique of “shooting the well”, literally dropping explosives down oil wells to fracture the bedrock and increase fossil fuel extraction, has been used since the 19th century. Hydraulic fracking (using high pressure water instead of “torpedoes”) was developed in the 1970s using federal research funding and has taken off in the USA in the last two decades. The USA has fracked over two million oil and gas wells, and fracking now produces two thirds of America’s gas and half its oil.

Fracking has been banned in a number of countries, and for good reason. Over 1,000 chemicals are used in fracking, including a range of biocides. This fluid returns to the surface along with heavy metals and radioactive materials dislodged from within the bedrock.

There is now a large [evidence-base](#)

to show people living near and working on fracking sites are more likely to have a high-risk pregnancy or a baby with a low infant health index. Workers are [exposed](#) to high levels of benzene and crystalline silica, both carcinogens that are lethal at high doses. In the USA, fracking workers are seven times more likely to [die](#) on the job than the average American worker.

Fracking in the UK has faced large and effective protest movements. The 2019 ban in England was introduced after fracking induced earthquakes. A recent government commissioned study found that the risk of earthquakes remains high. Fossil capital is lobbying for rules on earthquake limits to be relaxed so they can continue drilling through larger tremors.

Fossil methane, when burned, produces less CO2 than coal per kWh, but the methane from fracking is itself is potent greenhouse gas that leaks at every stage from extraction to end-user. Methane degrades within about 12 years (into CO2 and water vapour), but during its lifetime it is 82 times more potent than CO2 as a greenhouse gas.

Atmospheric methane levels have risen to levels not seen in 800,000 years because of the ever expanding gas industry and specifically fracking operations (plus our expanding cattle, sheep and goat herds). Reducing methane emissions is the [strongest](#) action available to slow global heating in the short term.

A recent [analysis](#) found that to have a 50% chance of keeping warming below 1.5 degrees C throughout the 21st century, 60% of oil and gas reserves and over 90% of coal reserves need to remain unburned.

Fracking is supported by only [17%](#) of the population and less than half of Tory voters (against 90% support for



solar) – and especially unpopular in the “red wall” areas that voted Tory in the last election.

The government itself admits that fracking will not make any difference to energy bills or to the global wholesale gas price.

Truss’ key argument is that shale gas will protect the UK’s “energy security”. But experts believe it will take [“many years”](#) before any significant quantities of shale gas can be extracted. Fracking advocates cling to a 2013 British Geological Survey (BGS) report that claimed fracking just 10% of shale reserves could make the UK “self-sufficient in natural gas for fifty years”.

Those figures have since been [debunked](#) by BGS scientists who say actual reserves are maybe a tenth of this volume. UK Onshore Oil and Gas, fossil capital’s trade body, predicts shale gas could contribute just 4.7% to domestic supply by 2027 if none of it is exported.

Other measures to reduce the UK’s dependence on fossil gas are known to be much more effective. Home insula-

tion, heat pumps, increased investment in wind and solar, turning down boiler flow rates and reducing thermostats by 1 degree Celsius would all deliver significant reductions in demand for gas with fewer ecological costs, and quicker. Instead of backing these measures, the government hands [billions](#) each year in subsidies to expanding fossil capital.

The Labour leadership has been silent on this issue. Labour is officially against fracking but that policy was opposed by the GMB union, with arguments and phraseology that are almost identical to those now being deployed by Truss.

The GMB has a joint [“charter”](#) with the fossil capitalists’ trade body “UK Onshore Oil and Gas”, which no doubt feeds the same lines to GMB general secretary Gary Smith as it does to the Tory press.

It is the duty of the rest of the labour movement to reorient the GMB to reality and build an effective opposition that can defeat extreme energy and our denialist government. □

Freeze rents, expand council housing

By Sacha Ismail

The Scottish Government has announced a rent freeze for both private and social housing tenants, and a ban on evictions over the winter. Some of the details are still unclear, but this is a major victory for housing campaigners in Scotland.

Gordon Maloney, an activist in Scotland’s Living Rent tenants’ union, has [described](#) in *Huck* magazine how these concessions – until the announcement resisted by the SNP government – were won,

what the limitations and questions are, but also a wider perspective for transforming housing:

“Living Rent has called for a comprehensive, national system of rent controls that doesn’t just freeze rents, but brings them down. The ‘points-based’ system the union proposes would also tie the amount a landlord could charge to the quality of the property, forcing them to make the repairs and improvements that Scotland’s housing so desperately needs.

“The point of this system is not to just curb the worst excesses of the sector, but to fundamentally and permanently reshape Scotland’s housing.”

He concludes:

“The response from landlords to the rent freeze has already been hysterical, wailing that they will be forced to sell up. Our response? *Good*. There should be no place for the rampant exploitation that we see in rented housing, and it should be the clearly stated purpose of a system of rent controls to shrink the sector.

“This rent freeze is an important step, but put bluntly: we must make landlordism unviable as a business.”

Sadiq Khan has called for the government to grant him powers to introduce rent controls in London (whereas the Scottish Government, despite its foot-dragging, already has the power).

Limited as the Scottish proposals are, they represent a major advance on where we are in England. Here the government says it will cap rents for social housing tenants only

for either one of two years, but it suggests that will mean increases of between 3% and 7%. Tenants’ organisations and social housing campaigns are calling for a freeze.

Meanwhile rent freezes in social housing mean less money for repairs and investment (including in energy efficiency). We need government funding to make up the difference. We need funding to start seriously expanding council housing again – as Gordon Maloney says, to start putting private landlords out of business. □

Ukrainian victories are step forward to liberation

By Dan Katz

Ukraine's armed forces have won a series of battles in the north east of the country which have liberated thousands of square kilometres of Kharkiv Oblast west of the Oksil river and north to the international border with Russia.

Reportedly, on 13 September, a bridgehead over the Oksil was established at Borova. So perhaps the Ukrainian attack may continue into occupied Luhansk. Fighting continues around Lyman.

The Russian military had expected a major Ukrainian offensive in the south, around Kherson, which the Ukrainians had been deliberately, openly signalling for two months, and had moved experienced troops to meet that threat.

Russian commanders were then taken by surprise by the offensive in Kharkiv. Beginning on 6 September Ukrainian tanks punched a hole in weakened Russian defences. Ukraine had secretly massed large numbers of troops and apparently outnumbered Russian forces eight to one.

The Ukrainian Kharkiv counter-offensive has captured hundreds of Russian troops, rail hubs and control centres, vast ammunition stores and over 300 armoured vehicles. More important are the positive political effects: a rise in Ukrainian self-confidence; some additional protection from those in the West who want to abandon Ukraine; further demoralisation and disorganisation of the Russian forces; political division inside Russia.

In the south the Ukrainian effort to retake Kherson city, defended by 20,000

dug-in Russian troops, also continues to take ground and in Donbas brutal Russian attacks on Bakhmut have been repelled.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has so far shielded himself from the only audible opposition inside Russia, that of the nationalist, pro-war right, by allowing others to take the blame for this setback. Russian pro-war commentators have bitterly attacked the army leadership and the Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, for incompetence.

The right-wing Russian blogger, Maxim Fomin, has called for a nuclear strike on Ukraine. Others have called for the execution of the responsible military leadership and a general mobilisation inside Russia to prosecute a "total war" against Ukraine.

Ramzan Kadyrov, the thug and windbag who rules Chechnya for Putin, called for martial law and forced conscription to "put an end to this scum [Ukrainians]."

Difficult

Indeed, Russia is finding it increasingly difficult to replace the 80 000 troops which the US military estimate have been killed or injured since Russia's February invasion. Since June Russia has been using prisoners who have been promised their freedom if they fight. The BBC has released a secretly-shot film of Yevgeniy Prigozhin, head of the Wagner private army, recruiting fighters in a Russian prison yard. Hundreds of prisoners listen as he promises amnesty for those who "serve for six months." Prigozhin is close to Putin.

The Russian anti-war movement has been largely silenced, for the moment, by repression. The independent Russian human rights group, O V D - I n f o , has recorded 16,437 arrests (to 17 August) of those Russians protesting against the war, the great majority of those before April.

As a result of these Ukrainian battlefield victories 150,000 Ukrainian citizens no longer have to live

under the lawless terror of Russian occupation. In village after village Ukrainian people emerged from basements to hug their troops, delighted and relieved.

The Russian retreat from north of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, in early April revealed mass graves and credible reports of torture, murder, theft and sexual assault carried out by Russian troops.

Similarly, reports are now emerging of 440 Ukrainian civilians buried outside Izyum, retaken by Ukraine. Maksym Strelnikov, a city councillor, said the city's medical facilities and 80% of its infrastructure had been destroyed.

In Balakliia reports suggest up to 40 Ukrainians were tortured in a basement. In Zaliznychne village a grave with four civilians apparently executed by the Russians has been excavated. Ukrainian authorities say they are investigating 200 violent war crimes carried out in recently liberated areas.

As Russian troops escaped the recent Ukrainian offensive many fled over the border to Russia. Some took with them goods looted from Ukrainian homes: private cars, computers, phones were taken. Gyms and schools were robbed of equipment.

Unfortunately, some of the British far-left continues to oppose Ukraine's war, believing the state to be acting as a proxy for US imperialism. *Socialist Worker* wags a finger at us and tells us not to "gloat as Russian forces lose in Ukraine." But what are the Ukrainians supposed to do, comrades? Suffer and die in silence? *SW* has no policy for the Ukrainian people, who for them, examining the matter from armchairs in London prior to going to the pub, are a tiresome detail in history.

And as a reward for their contemptible position *SW* (and Stop the War, with a similar policy) is rightly despised by the Ukrainian left and the trade unions.

Ukraine has the right to self-determination. It has the right to fight to defend that right. It has the right to ask for weapons from any state which will provide them, including the US.

Vietnam did the same in its war against the US, taking weapons and political support from the Stalinist USSR and China. Were the Vietnamese wrong to do so? No, they were not. And Ukraine is doing similarly to fight for its freedom and in opposition to the threat of its obliteration as a political entity.

And this war is not only a matter of national rights. In the Russian occupied territories elected officials are jailed,

the rule of law effectively abolished, terror is imposed, trade union and socialist activity become largely impossible. This is also a war to defend elements of workers' rights and democracy against the threat from Putin's authoritarian nationalism. □



Action on Covid-19

The two-and-a-half-week Covid lockdown in the 21-million-strong Chinese city of Chengdu is being gradually lifted from 18 September. Lockdowns in China are different from in other countries: workers are banned from leaving their workplaces, or residents from their blocks of flats, for weeks, and non-Covid patients are sometimes banned from hospitals. The human (and health) cost is unknown. The Chinese government insists that it will continue these lockdowns for as long as it takes to reach "Zero Covid". Even the World Health Organisation, which has to be diplomatic, thinks that is not possible, at least not with the highly-infectious Omicron variant of Covid. Maybe the scientists are wrong; or maybe China's lockdowns will eventually be overcome by an explosion of Covid which will take a heavy toll in a country with a lot of older people unvaccinated, relatively few having protection from earlier infection, and (as far as can be assessed) less effective vaccines. Covid isn't "over". And it may not be "over" outside China, either. We need:

- 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)
- requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how, to speed vaccine production and delivery world-wide. □



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On not sleeping with political contacts



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Philosopher Amia Srinivasan's essay collection *The Right to Sex* considers the politics and ethics of sex. In "On not sleeping with your students" she turns to the rights and wrongs of student-lecturer relationships. The article is interesting on its own terms but also serves as a starting point for the interrogation of relationships in left groups, a thus far superficially explored area for socialist feminists.

Coercive relationships exist in education, with academics using threats of gatekeeping of professional progression. Sometimes students consent to sex they don't really want because they are afraid of what will happen if they don't – bad grades, poor references, cut off from funding, or being overlooked. But Srinivasan's essay focuses on the more difficult question: women students who consent to sex with their professors out of genuine desire.

She argues that power differential isn't adequate to remove meaningful consent:

"To insist that the power differential between professor and student precludes consent is either to see women students, like children, as intrinsically incapable of consent to sex – or to see them as somehow incapacitated by the dazzling force of the professor."

If the problem isn't a lack of consent, then what is it? Her answer is "to suggest that instead of sleeping with his student, this professor should have been – teaching her". This has some bearing on how we should view our relationships with contacts. A new young woman turns up, is interested

and excited – shouldn't we be more interested in recruiting them to revolutionary socialism than sleeping with them? What are the opportunity costs of such relationships and what should the response of left organisations be?

The question isn't whether genuine consent or real romantic love is possible in these situations. Of course it is. Rather, it is whether if you sleep with contacts or new members you can be an effective organiser and educator.

Srinivasan starts with Jane Gallop's 1997 book *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* in which Gallop describes her own student-lecturer relationships and the consequences. "In her formal response to her students' sexual-harassment complaints," Srinivasan writes, "Gallop appealed to Freud's notion of transference, the patient's tendency to unconsciously project feelings... onto the analyst. Transference for Gallop 'is also an inevitable part of any relationship we have to a teacher who really makes a difference.' Falling in love with our teachers, in other words, is a sign that pedagogy has gone well."

Srinivasan argues that like psychoanalysts, teachers should be conscious that transference will likely occur at time, recognise it but not use it for their own emotional or physical gratification. We all know this experience and it is totally understandable – you offer someone something extraordinary, the keys to another world. Srinivasan asks us to redirect erotic energies from "himself" towards their proper object: knowledge, truth, understanding. Surely we must respect our role as teacher at least as much as the academy. It is the selfish revolutionary who absorbs the student's erotic energies into himself.

The question isn't whether "real" romantic love is possible in the pedagogical context, but whether real teaching is. All romantic love involves a degree

of projection. It is not somehow worse to love someone for being a great activist or left thinker, than for being beautiful or charming.

But like a student-lecturer relationship, our relationships to contacts are defined by a profound epistemic asymmetry. We understand and know how to do certain things; they want to understand and know how to do those same things. Implicit in this is the assumption the asymmetry will reduce, that you will become your teacher's equal.

"When the teacher takes the student's longing for epistemic power and transposes it into a sexual key, allowing himself to be – or worse, making himself – the object of her desire, he has failed her as a teacher."

Of course, we do not want to be on a left that interferes in people's sexual and romantic lives. People are right to be suspicious of a moralistic instinct to decide with whom and how we have sex. But we should not pretend that who we have sex with is simply a private matter.

Women's confidence is shaped by gendered expectations. Whereas men (as standard, this is not universal) want to like and replace their teacher, women are socialised to want to please and be with them. "This difference between women and men in how likely they are to see their teachers as objects of emulation rather than attraction isn't the effect of some natural, primordial difference in disposition. It is the result of gendered socialisation."

To sleep with people we should be introducing to revolutionary socialism, is a failure to redirect the student's erotic energies towards its proper object. It is not that in such situations romantic love is impossible; clearly it is, lots and lots of people are in happy loving relationships started this way. But women are socialised in a particular way, a way that restricts our confidence and makes us less able to see ourselves as political agents. We and you assume we are less intellectually capable.

For most men, seeing yourself as sexually desirable is an absolute positive, because it has never been the case that it is instead of something else. You do not go through life assuming people listen to what you are saying in order to sleep with you: it can have an enormous effect on your belief in yourself. If the beginning of your political life is defined by a love affair, there is a cost to that.

Our political relationships come with responsibilities beyond the ones we owe each other just as people. We should think our politics is worth more than our sex lives. □



Hereditary ruler is an insult

By Keir Hardie

Even under a representative system of government it is possible to paralyse a nation by maintaining the fiction that a reigning family is a necessity of good government. Now, one of two things must be – either the British people are fit to govern themselves or they are not. If they are, an hereditary ruler who in legislation has more power than the whole nation is an insult. Despotism and monarchy are compatible; democracy and monarchy are an unthinkable connection.

If we are for the Queen we are not for her subjects. The throne represents the power of caste-class rule. Round the throne gather the unwholesome parasites who cling to the system which lends itself to their disordered condition. The toady who crawls through the mire of self-abasement to enable him to bask in the smile of royalty is the victim of a diseased organism. No healthy, well-developed people could for one moment tolerate an institution which belongs to the childhood of the [human] race, and which in these latter days is the centre, if not the source, of the corrupting influences which constitute Society.

The great mind, the strong heart, the detestation of wrong, the love of truth whether in cot or palace will always command my respect. But to worship an empty form, to make pretence to believe a gilded mediocrity indispensable to the well-being of the nation – where is the man who will so far forget what is due to his manhood?

In this country loyalty to the Queen is used by the profit-mongers to blind the eyes of the people. We can have but one feeling in the matter – contempt for thrones and for all who bolster them up. □

• Keir Hardie, who became one of the first Independent Labour MPs (in 1892) and then first leader of the Labour Party (in 1906), wrote these words in 1897, at the time of Queen Victoria's 60th jubilee.

Abuse is easier online



Letter

While Stalinism obviously made its own execrable "contribution" to the standard of discourse within the left (Eric Lee, *Solidarity* 644), I think it's wrong to give it all the "credit" for cultures of aggressive meanness and apolitical paranoid accusations of bad-jacketing or conspiracy.

For one thing, online communica-

tion has made it easy and much more "risk-free" to spew insult and vitriol from behind a screen. It has also facilitated armchair sectarianism.

Being sharp in the cut and thrust of argument is one thing when you're engaged in a powerful movement and you both know you're comrades working together. Quite another when one or both of you do most of your "activity" online, and the movement is smaller and on the back foot. □

Ben Tausz, London

Pro-monarchy “consensus” is a fake

By Mohan Sen

Public support for the monarchy has got a small boost from the huge state-driven monarchist campaign following the queen’s death. On 14 September YouGov found that 67% said the UK should continue to have a monarchy, up from 59% in March and 62% in July.

The monarchy’s support got a boost at the time of queen’s 2012 jubilee, followed by sustained decline. It seems likely that this fillip will be temporary,

“Heeds not the shriek of penury”

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

Behold a gorgeous palace that amid
Yon populous city rears its thousand
towers
And seems itself a city. Gloomy
troops
Of sentinels in stern and silent ranks
Encompass it around; the dweller
there
Cannot be free and happy; hearest
thou not
The curses of the fatherless, the
groans
Of those who have no friend? He
passes on –
The King, the wearer of a gilded
chain
That binds his soul to abjectness, the
fool
Whom courtiers nickname monarch,
whilst a slave
Even to the basest appetites – that
man
Heeds not the shriek of penury; he
smiles
At the deep curses which the des-
titute
Mutter in secret, and a sullen joy
Pervades his bloodless heart when
thousands groan
But for those morsels which his wan-
tonness
Wastes in unjoyous revelry, to save
All that they love from famine; when
he hears
The tale of horror, to some ready-
made face
Of hypocritical assent he turns,
Smothering the glow of shame, that,
spite of him,
Flushes his bloated cheek.

• From [Queen Mab](#)

and soon the decline of monarchy will continue.

In 2012 YouGov found that over 70% of 18-24 year olds wanted to keep the monarchy, not far short of the overall figure for the country. Monarchism among the old has remained fairly stable, but among the young it declined dramatically, down to around 35% in recent years – though up to 47% since the queen’s death. Even with that shift, 33% of young people want a republic – if you eliminate “don’t knows”, over 40%.

34% of Labour supporters, 39% without “don’t knows”, want a republic.

In other words, the attempts to depict or impose an unchallengeable pro-monarchy consensus do not reflect reality.

And of course the queen was and her son is the head of state not just of the UK but of fourteen other “realms” around the world. In many of them, in the context of discussions about colonialism, imperialism and racism, challenges to the monarchy are moving faster.

Last year Barbados, one of England’s first colonies and crucial to the rise of its global empire, became a republic. Soon after the queen’s death, the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda promised to hold a referendum on ditching the monarchy within three years. In Jamaica there is rising public debate and polls show a majority for becoming a republic. Australia’s new Labor government has “a minister for a republic”.

In the UK, a substantial republican minority exists despite a lack of political leadership. In past decades, when significantly fewer people opposed the monarchy, more Labour MPs were openly republican: Willie Hamilton, a right-wing Labour MP from 1950 to 1986, was well known for his republicanism. Today more Labour MPs must be republicans, privately, but few are willing to admit it. (Well done to Norwich South’s Clive Lewis for writing against the monarchy just before the Queen’s funeral: bit.ly/lewis-r.)

The conference of rail union RMT recently passed policy to abolish the monarchy – but when the queen died its office put out on social media a fawning statement next to a picture of the queen (later deleted).



UK socialists should work to assemble an organised force in the labour movement to demand abolition of the monarchy. We should take encourage-

ment from the growing numbers of people questioning it in this country and far beyond. □

Social schemes against democracy

By James Connolly

Believing as we do that there is nothing on earth more sacred than humanity, we deny all allegiance to this institution of royalty, and hence we can only regard the visit of the King as adding fresh fuel to the fire of hatred with which we regard the plundering institutions of which he is the representative.

Let the capitalist and landlord class flock to exalt him; he is theirs; in him they see embodied the idea of caste and class; they glorify him and exalt his importance that they might familiarise the public mind with the conception of political inequality, knowing well that a people mentally poisoned by the adulation of royalty can never attain to that spirit of self-reliant democracy necessary for the at-

tainment of social freedom.

The mind accustomed to political kings can easily be reconciled to social kings – capitalist kings of the workshop, the mill, the railway, the ships and the docks. Thus coronation and king’s visits are by our astute never-sleeping masters made into huge Imperialist propagandist campaigns in favour of political and social schemes against democracy.

But if our masters and rulers are sleepless in their schemes against us, so we, rebels against their rule, must never sleep in our appeal to our fellows to maintain as publicly our belief in the dignity of our class – in the ultimate sovereignty of those who labour. □

• [Written](#) on the occasion of King George V’s visit to Dublin, July 1911.

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Why there are homeless in a rich society



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

In my last article I touched on housing. I want to explore the issue more.

I was born and have spent most of my life in Queensland, Australia. It is a big place, seven times the size of Great Britain and two and a half times the size of Texas.

For most of its history it has been governed by very conservative conservatives and very conservative social democrats. It is a conservative state today, ruled by the Labor Party for most of the last 30 years. That conservatism has held sway over housing policy for many decades, with the result that in a state which in many ways is very wealthy, there are 50,000 families and individuals homeless.

When I was a lad, and in fact for 32 years from 1957 to 1989, the state was ruled by the ultra-conservative Na-

tional Party, a party based on agrarian landowners and sections of big business. They had a type of weird agrarian socialism in which the egg board, the peanut board, etc. determined the price of products, rather than the capitalist market place. Many farmers loved this, as it gave certainty to crop prices.

State housing policy in Queensland prior to the 1989 election of the Queensland Labor Party was fundamentally aimed at poor working class families. Houses were built, not units. Many working-class families used the low rents to save up and springboard to house ownership.

Labor was elected in 1989, and has ruled for all but seven of the last 33 years. Public housing now became "social housing".

Units were built in greater numbers than houses. The long-term unemployed, people with mental-health issues, etc. were prioritised. An ill-thought-through sale of public housing to long-term tenants in the early 1990s was an unmitigated disaster which shrank the public stock and impoverished those who bought the houses



with massive interest payments. Meanwhile house-market prices became less and less affordable.

I'm an odd fit for a revolutionary socialist. I'm not much of a fan of state intervention in many areas. But the only way to house people decently and long term is through massive state intervention.

Here are some ways I think we can use the power of the state to make things better for those who need help with a roof over their head.

- Use state-owned land to build on
- The state recruits, trains, and uses its own workforce in the construction and maintenance of housing; use of sub-contractors kept to an absolute minimum

- Those who are accepted into social housing agree to also accept a high standard of care of the house or unit

- Rent is capped, maybe at 25% of household income. If your household is higher-earning, with an average of \$100,000 or more over a three-year cycle, you pay the market rate for rent or are given six months to vacate.

I know many socialists will not agree but with societal improvement come personal and societal responsibilities. Our pooches do not shit on where they live. The same care should be expected from those who live in well constructed, thoughtful social housing. Given the tools and chances we should all respect where we live. □

Armed struggle in Myanmar

By Hein Htet Kyaw

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, after Myanmar's military coup in February 2021, security forces killed more than 700 people within the first two months for participating in protests. In some cases, even children staying peacefully in their own homes were shot from the streets by the military officers.

Hatred towards the military rose as more and more people were killed by the military, and guns, submachine guns, and launchers were used against the mass strikes. Protesters were under surveillance and were raided at night for taking part in protests. If the protesters managed to escape from the raid, their family members, such as old people and young children, were arrested instead of them, in some cases, resulting in death because of inhu-

mane treatment in jail. With the anger and hatred against the military, the people had no choice but to defend themselves.

In Myanmar, people aren't legally allowed to own guns. However, there are some rural areas where some people own hunting guns because they hunt for their basic needs.

Hunters and people from those areas started to harass the professional-grade army with their hunting guns. As a result, the whole villages were burned down and attacked by air strikes. Such kinds of oppressive measures remind me of the Stalinist terror. The Stalinists claimed they were defending the socialist values of the October Revolution, whereas the Myanmar military junta claimed they were defending the democratic values of the last election.

However, both claims are as

true as the theory of the flat earth. Educated young people from the metropolitan area fled the cities and joined the ethnic armies to get military training. Some people had to sell all their life savings to buy a gun. Early in April 2021, poorly organised organisations started to appear, mostly in the hinterlands of western Chin State and the north-western Sagaing Region, where the Chin Land Defense Force (CDF) proclaimed its establishment on 4 April 2021.

By mid-July, approximately 125 distinct groups in both urban and rural areas had formally announced their opposition to the State Administration Council of the military. There had been a significant multiplication of groups with various capabilities in late April and early May. All these spontaneous, loosely connected militias declared an alliance with each

other and collectively adopted the name "People's Defence Force."

Some of them, but not all, also swore loyalty to the National Unity Government (NUG), the opposition's shadow government established in mid-April. The rest of the PDFs chose to struggle against the military junta on their own, without any allegiance to an exile government.

Urban PDFs, based on covert cells, have concentrated almost exclusively on targeted killings and bombings, using primarily crude improvised explosive devices. Most of their targets have been "soft" targets, such as local ward offices and other government buildings, civil administrators, alleged military informers, and members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the Tatmadaw's political proxies.

In the remote rural areas, the PDFs have emerged more brazenly as infant rebel bands with minimal weapons. They have repeatedly attempted to repel Tatmadaw incursions into villages with ambushes by local volunteers using hunting rifles and improvised landmines, in addition to hitting many of the same soft targets as in the cities. They have frequently claimed to inflict significant casualties on the military.

All these military struggles have been led collectively by the proletariat, peasants, and labouring people, including mothers, unemployed social workers, and students, rather than by the National Unity Government (NUG, exile government). The NUG government's "defence minister" has never actually visited a battleground. He has never overseen a battalion during this revolution. □

Students face cost-of-living crunch

By Sam Myerson

Students face rising rents, the revocation of previously agreed [fixed cost](#) contracts, and stagnant maintenance loans that are not available to all. For some of us this is the second “once in a lifetime” economic event in our lifetimes, with many mature students having lived through the financial crash of 2008.

Inflation is higher for poorer households. This is also true of students. In 2021-2, first year students in halls were spending on average at least 75% of maintenance loans on rent alone. It does not take an economist to realise that with the current surge in the cost of basic goods that we face acute financial hardship in the coming academic year.

It is important that we immediately raise demands specific to our movement, alongside the wider campaigns on the cost of living being led by workers taking industrial action to win wage increases.

A research briefing for parliament looking at the maintenance aspect of student finance stipulated that at current levels it wasn't sufficient to cover even accommodation costs. With a real-term cut in household incomes over the last decade, students face financial



hardship, and for some a choice as to whether they can go to university or not.

The government rejected the findings of the [Augar report](#), which at a minimum called for an immediate £3,000 maintenance grant for the most disadvantaged students. We call for the replacement of the maintenance loan by a grant for all, paid at a living-wage level.

Our aim should be to unite students and workers in the fight against exploitation and poverty pay. Students have, over the last year, demonstrated

our strength in support of striking university workers, food couriers, and many other struggles. We must organise and use our strength now to demand:

- An immediate £2000 payment to students to help with cost of living
- Replacing the maintenance loan with universal grants at the level of the living wage
- Abolition of tuition fees
- Rent cuts
- Public ownership of the energy companies
- Expropriate the banks

We need national coordination, a democratic campaign that meets in-person and fights for the future of higher education. That fight starts now by drawing students into action from the freshers' weeks at the start of term (late Sep and early Oct).

This means occupations, sit-ins, demonstrations, as well as pressing the fight in Student Unions and through the National Union of Students (NUS), and taking up our own independent fight, pressuring University management, the NUS, and the Department for Education. □

Labour conference: will unions rebuke Starmer?

By Martin Thomas

Keir Starmer plans to put a conservative, conformist stamp on the Labour Party conference (25-28 September) by opening it with “God Save The King”. (No, in 1952, when monarchism was much stronger, the Labour conference didn't do that. Its main event was big advances by the left in elections for the National Executive).

However, according to the *Observer* (18 September) “several motions backed by the country's most powerful unions have been submitted to the conference underlining the duty of MPs to support strikers”.

The unions' motions to conference are published only shortly before the event, so we don't know details.

Keir Starmer has had to back down from his plan to insist

that Labour front-benchers should not join picket-lines. But he himself still refuses to back the strikes himself, and even more pointedly he refuses to support pay rises sufficient to match price rises, even for NHS workers.

In the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), by far the most popular motion has been for proportional representation, a change which has democratic merit but which for many on the right and soft-left is tied in with looking to an alliance, maybe a coalition government, with the Lib Dems, and therefore to policies to suit. The Starmer leadership is resisting PR, and will be in trouble at this conference, since some big unions have shifted since they allowed him to win the vote on this last year.

Left-wing motions for a Green New Deal have been ruled out of order on the

catch-all grounds of “covering more than one topic”. Last year a similar ruling was overturned by protest. We hope for the same this year, and at least some motions for public ownership of energy may yet get through.

There may well be a motion from the unions on anti-union laws.

A forthright motion from Newark CLP insisting on Labour support for strikes has been ruled out of order on the same catch-all argument. But unions, in practice, are safe from that sort of ruling-out, so it looks like some motions on strikes, maybe vaguer-worded, will reach the floor.

There is a good motion from the National Union of Mineworkers on Ukraine, but a danger that it will be poisoned by compositing with motions from the GMB and from Holborn and St Pancras

CLP which insist on boosting military industries and on endorsing Finland and Sweden joining NATO.

Conference will debate 12 topics, six chosen by the unions, six by the CLPs.

The process of CLPs choosing motions and delegates has shown a decline since 2021. Most CLPs have chosen bland motions. Where there are sharp left motions, sometimes they come with less-left delegates, increasing the chance that content will be lost in compositing. And where there are left delegates, they often have only bland motions from their CLPs.

This reflects a general drop in activity and morale over the last year, also shown in the low turnout in the recent elections for the National Executive Committee.

A lot depends on what the unions do. A strong stand by

them at conference, together with the strike wave, could reactivate thousands who have faded over the last two years. A weak stand will help Truss to regain her balance and reconstitute Tory support against a Labour Party which seems to respond to great economic turmoil mainly by saying: “we promise, we really promise, that we will do nothing radical or decisive”. □

More online

The People Immortal

Len Glover reviews Vasily Grossman's novel about World War Two:

bit.ly/gr-p-i

The valuable, critical Ma



Book review

By Paul Hampton

Paul Le Blanc has been one of the most prolific revolutionary socialist authors in recent decades, publishing scores of books, articles and reviews, in large part devoted to the early twentieth century Marxist tradition.

Le Blanc's work has numerous virtues. He writes clean and readable prose, makes theoretical issues accessible, represents various points of view objectively, puts the historical material in context and explains its relevance to present-day activism. He is honest about his own mistakes and the evolution of his views. And Le Blanc takes an ecumenical approach, willing to engage with a wide range of Marxist authors and groups, including the AWL.

A consistent stream running through Le Blanc's writing is the pertinence of the rich, diverse Bolshevik tradition, in which Lenin and Trotsky remain the central figures, but other participants are also well-represented. His latest book, *Revolutionary Collective: Comrades, Critics, and Dynamics in the Struggle for Socialism* (Haymarket, 2022) adds to this research. A central theme throughout this book is the importance of developing Marxist cadres, the theoretically-educated and practically-orientated leaders necessary for working class self-emancipation.

The book consists of twelve chapters, mostly evaluating the contribution of an individual Marxist, with a concluding chapter drawing the threads together.

Lenin

The first chapter of *Revolutionary Collective* discusses the transformation in Lenin studies, in which much of the Stalinist deification has been sloughed off and a more contextualised Lenin has emerged. Le Blanc's own contributions, notably *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (1990) and *Unfinished Leninism* (2014) have added significantly to the rediscovery of the real Lenin.

Le Blanc credits a range of authors, including Nadezhda Krupskaya at the time and more recently Lars Lih. This review looks at the work of Tamás Krausz and Alan Shandro, and includes a useful critique of Toni Negri. Le Blanc is right to highlight Lih's book *Lenin Rediscovered* and his short biography as breaking new ground, especially on the pre-WW1 Lenin as strongly influenced by German social democracy and Karl Kautsky in particular.

However Le Blanc makes some im-

portant criticisms of Lih's other writings, especially around the events of 1917. Lih argues that Lenin remained a consistent Kautskyan and even disputes October 1917 as a socialist revolution. Le Blanc rightly defends the view that Lenin changed his views in the April Theses and drew closer to Trotsky's permanent revolution. Their shared perspective was the ideological guideline for October as a working class socialist revolution.

The second chapter makes the entirely valid argument that Bolshevism cannot be reduced to the personification of Lenin. The chapter discusses a range of other contributors and some of the debates that took place within the Bolshevik faction and later the Bolshevik party. The extraordinary lengths to which the Bolsheviks would go to clarify their collective views, including holding democratic, open, highly polemical conferences, goes a long way to explaining their practical effectiveness and capacity to adapt to realities as the situation changed.

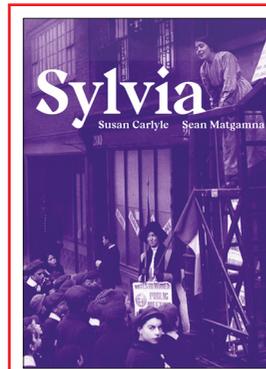
Trotsky

The third chapter of *Revolutionary Collective* is called "The Unoriginality of Leon Trotsky". Le Blanc previously published a very readable short biography of Trotsky (2015), valuable reflections with co-thinkers on Trotsky's views on party building and a co-edited selected writings volume. The chapter mimics Lih's work on Lenin, arguing that Trotsky was not so "original" and different from the wider tradition and is best understood in that context.

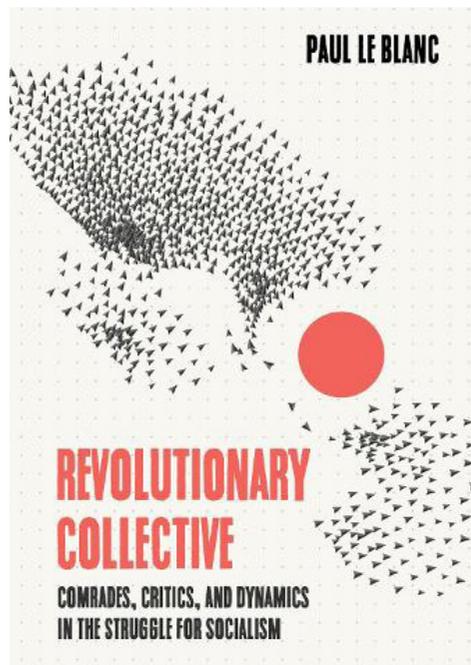
Le Blanc makes his case with judicious quotes from Trotsky himself, including warnings about schematism over permanent revolution. In *The Social Composition of the Party* (10 October 1937) Trotsky rightly warned:

"Many intellectuals and half-intellectuals terrorise the workers by some abstract generalities and paralyse the will toward activity. A functionary of a revolutionary party should have in the first place a good ear, and only in the second place a good tongue."

Le Blanc is right that Trotsky's most well-known contributions – such as permanent revolution, theory of Stalinism,



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



analysis of fascism and his transitional programme – all have precedents. However I think he overstates the case and thereby underplays Trotsky's distinctive contribution to Marxism that today's socialists still need to learn from.

On permanent revolution, it is clear Marx, Kautsky, Luxemburg, Parvus and even the young Lenin contributed to its formulation. But it was Trotsky who pulled permanent revolution tightly together, starting in 1905, into a direct strategy for workers to take power. It was Trotsky who had to fight for permanent revolution during and after 1917 and who applied it beyond Russia to China and elsewhere. He also underpinned permanent revolution with the concept of combined and uneven development, another significant theoretical advance.

Similarly, Trotsky was the principal Marxist theorist of Stalinism from its inception until 1940. His perspective and conclusions evolved, not least from reform to (political) revolution and he did indeed make many mistaken judgments. In retrospect the conception of a degenerated workers' state was only ever an adequate theory for the 1920s, when reform remained possible. The degenerated workers' state theory cannot explain high Stalinism after 1928, nor its development and decline. Nevertheless, beneath the formula there are still many unique insights that no theory of Stalinism can avoid addressing. Every genuine Marxist theory of Stalinism flows through Trotsky, even for those of us who reject his label.

I think the case can also be made with Trotsky's views on fascism, the united front, transitional demands and the workers' government. All his work was grounded in the early Comintern – especially in the often ignored and underrated work of Clara Zetkin. Yet it was Trotsky, almost alone, who

salvaged much of this rich theoretical heritage and more importantly, applied and developed these conceptions in new situations, when the Stalinists had long abandoned the originals and were actively working against them in the 1930s.

Luxemburg

The seventh chapter of *Revolutionary Collective* discusses Rosa Luxemburg. Le Blanc has helped produce several selections of Luxemburg's writings in English and has been co-editor on two of the five volumes of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*.

Le Blanc has conducted an interesting excavation into the expression "Social Democracy is a stinking corpse" attributed to Luxemburg at the beginning of the First World War. Lenin made reference to it in an article from 1922 and it has often been quoted in later debates. The exact quote has not been found in Luxemburg's writings, although Le Blanc and Helen Scott did find an unpublished fragment from 1918 using the word [decaying] "corpse" for social democracy.

Beyond the irreplaceable labour to publish Luxemburg's complete works in English for the first time, the chapter makes a powerful case for the continued contemporary relevance of Luxemburg's Marxism. Le Blanc locates Luxemburg within the wider general tradition from her time, in which she contributed both to the propagation of common Marxist ideas while also making her own distinctive, original and outstanding contributions.

Gramsci

The sixth chapter of the book discusses Antonio Gramsci, another central figure from early twentieth century Marxism, who belongs to our tradition and not to the Stalinists or the academic philistines who abscond with crumbs from his Marxist theoretical arsenal. Le Blanc is right to underline that Gramsci was the leader of a Marxist party and all his theoretical contributions can only be understood within the context of creating and sustaining a party capable leading the workers for socialism. For Gramsci, the key to politics as the question of leadership:

"The first element is that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led. The entire science and art of politics are based on this primordial and (given certain general conditions) irreducible fact... In the formation of leaders, one premise is fundamental: is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is it the objective to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary?"

The only slight disappointment is

Marxism of Paul Le Blanc

that Le Blanc does not explore Gramsci's idea of "permanently active persuaders", a significant contribution to Marxist thinking on cadres, what they are, their primary function within the working class movement and role in party building.

Dissident Marxism

Most of the remaining chapters of *Revolutionary Collective* concern what Le Blanc and others have referred to as "dissident Marxism". These are Marxist thinkers who intersect at some point with the classical Marxist tradition (although not generally with Trotskyism) but who made a significant contribution that deserves closer attention. Again, I think Le Blanc is right to broaden classical Marxism to incorporate such thinkers and recognise their contribution to the collective endeavour.

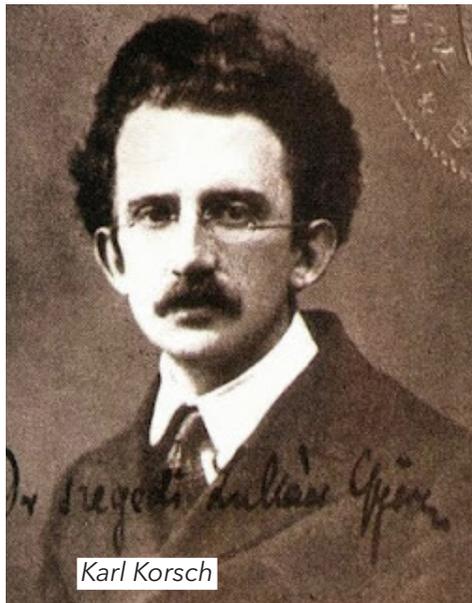
The fourth chapter of the book discusses Alexander Bogdanov, a one-time Bolshevik and heterodox Marxist, whose distinctive work has been acknowledged far beyond the ranks of the revolutionary left. More of Bogdanov's writings are now available in English, thanks to the Historical Materialism book series and Haymarket publishers, as well as the Alexander Bogdanov library website. There is also a recent, readable biography of Bogdanov by James White.

Bogdanov made a considerable contribution to Marxism, including the "new type of scholar" and the "ideologue", which intersect with more developed conceptions of cadres such as worker-intellectuals. From 1904 to 1911, he was a central figure within the Bolshevik faction. He dropped out of activism after rows with Lenin about political work (including intervening in the Duma) as well as philosophical differences. However he continued to contribute through his writings.

The fifth chapter of *Revolutionary Collective* discusses the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács. Le Blanc makes a very solid case for the importance of Lukács during the 1920s, including his book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), *Tailism and the Dialectic* (1926) and the *Blum Theses* (1929). He was a leader of the Landler faction of the Hungarian Communist Party, opposed to ultra-left Bela Kun.

Despite his undoubted intellectual talent, Lukács is marred by his long silence and accommodation to Stalinism. Le Blanc does not gloss over this failing, while explaining his dissidence in 1956 and subsequent years. The chapter is therefore a very useful overview for any young activist who wants to understand the strengths and limitation of Lukács.

The final dissident figure discussed in the eighth chapter is Karl Korsch, a



German communist writer from the 1920s. Some of Korsch's writings, such as *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923) and *Karl Marx* (1938) were translated into English in the 1970s, along with biographical essays. Le Blanc sets out Korsch's political activities and summarises his writings clearly. Le Blanc's assessment of his relative importance is right:

"Korsch's works do not compare well, however, with the richer and more substantial output of the other two. In the movement's early heroic years, all three were leading figures in their respective Communist parties (Hungary, Italy, and – in Korsch's case – Germany), yet Korsch was far less of a political leader, less consistent, in some ways less durable than either Gramsci or Lukács."

Korsch was a consistent ultra-left Marxist, in places verging on anarchism. However any assessment would have to include his critique of Stalinism and other writings.

Burnham

The ninth chapter of *Revolutionary Collective* departs in a completely different direction, charting James Burnham's descent from revolutionary socialism in the 1930s to one of the principal Cold War conservative ideologues for the remainder of his life.

Burnham's engagement with Marxism was brief, although fruitful – notably his critique of Trotsky's workers' state theory of Russia, from Trotsky's own premises. However he deserted the movement for neo-conservatism, and proceeded to denounce all his former Trotskyist comrades to the McCarthyite witchhunt in the 1950s.

Le Blanc underscores that Burnham was an influential writer for the US ruling class and that many of Burnham's arguments, such as those made in his book *The Managerial Revolution* (1943), are real and substantial challenges to Marxism that have to be met. I think

that stance has merit. Le Blanc also avoids using Burnham as the wicked fairy to scare away the curious from engagement with the heterodox Marxism of Max Shachtman and his group in the 1940s and 1950s. Although the chapter jars with the themes in the rest of the book, and probably belongs in different collection of Le Blanc's work, it is nevertheless an insightful and worthwhile interrogation.

Brutus

The penultimate figure discussed in the tenth chapter of this book is Dennis Brutus, the South African anti-apartheid campaigner and poet who lived in exile in the US and whom Le Blanc worked with both academically and politically.

This chapter is also out of kilter with the rest of the book and lacks the political sharpness of the other chapters. Yet Brutus, after some early connections with Trotskyism and his experience breaking rocks with Mandela in prison, emerged as a critical but loyal member of the South African Communist Party and part of the trinity with the ANC and COSATU trade union federation that eventually replaced apartheid in 1994.

Sadly, Le Blanc does not take the opportunity to interrogate the SACP strategy nor the stance various Trotskyist-inspired critics employed to evaluate the anti-apartheid struggle. I hoped for a discussion of the need for an independent workers' party in the 1980s, based on the militant trade union struggles, which could have been a counterpower of attraction, but this is not mentioned. Similarly, Le Blanc does not assess the experience of ANC governments, now for almost three decades, and what the revolutionary left should do to oppose them.

Bensaïd

The final Marxist discussed in the book is Daniel Bensaïd, the former leader of the Fourth International, the network which Ernest Mandel led for many years and with which Le Blanc has maintained strong relations. Bensaïd is an interesting Marxist thinker and in his later years began to re-evaluate some of the shibboleths of post-Trotsky Trotskyism.

As Le Blanc points out, in the late 1980s the Fourth International had significant groups in France, Mexico and Brazil. All have subsequently declined or unravelled. Le Blanc does not get to the bottom of why even the most open and intelligent of the various "Fourth Internationals" is in disarray. Le Blanc has written about these matters extensively elsewhere, but again this chapter was somewhat of a missed opportunity to connect the lessons drawn from the earlier classical Marxist tradition with

the problems faced by the current generation.

Conclusions

None of these criticisms detract from the value of Le Blanc's contributions nor the recommendation to read this book. Le Blanc has set his own bar high and, I suspect, prefers critical engagement to superficial endorsement.

Le Blanc draws two conclusions that I think deserve special merit. First, he argues that for all the valuable materials produced by the early twentieth century Marxists, their world and ours are very different. Le Blanc captures this very well in the middle of the book

"If we take these ideas of Luxemburg, Lukács, and Gramsci seriously, we must realise that all of them were referring to a context that no longer exists in the early twenty-first century. A hundred years ago there existed a substantial global labour movement, profoundly influenced by the theory of historical materialism, and with a dynamic and influential left wing infused with the sense of the actuality of revolution. That was obliterated between the First World War and the twilight of the twentieth century. Something like it remains to be rebuilt."

Second, Le Blanc underlines the irreplaceability of Marxist cadres to the future of socialism:

"Not everyone can answer such questions – but a cadre is someone who can answer some of them and can help create collaboration in which further answers can be developed and tested in practical action. A cadre is someone who can help ensure that the collective can be what it must be, who can help others see the need to become part of the collective, and who can help members of the collective (and even people who are not members of the collective) become cadres in the sense that is suggested here.

"With the proliferation of cadres, with more and more of us developing as cadres, we can see the growth of a mass movement that is capable of being effective in the fight against all forms of oppression, forging pathways in the struggle for a better world of the free and the equal."

This is the right place to start. Le Blanc's focus on rebuilding Marxism both theoretically and practically through cadres remains the road to working class socialist renewal. That's why this book and the rest of Le Blanc's publications deserve to be read. □

• Paul Le Blanc on our book *In Defence of Bolshevism*: bit.ly/idob; and on *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* and *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*: bit.ly/frt-tt

What was James Connolly



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

It is well known that James Connolly, and the Irish labour movement, and the whole of Catholic Ireland, were against Partition. It is less well known that Edward Carson, the leader of the Unionists movement against Home Rule, was against Partition.

Carson, an MP for Dublin University, and others were willing to use their Unionist majority in north-east Ulster. But they wanted by using it not to get a separate "Ulster" but to stop any Home Rule for any part of Ireland. The outcome of two states was not what they wanted before the First World War, and not what they expected to gain.

Even in 1920, when he reluctantly accepted the then British government scheme of two Home Rule parliaments linked by a Council of Ireland, Carson hoped to see: "Ireland one and undivided, loyal to this country and loyal to the Empire" (Commons Hansard, 11 Nov 1920). In 1921, debating the Treaty which nailed down Partition, Carson railed about the plight of partitioned Ulster and of the Protestants across Ireland (26% of the whole population), and against the surrender to Irish insurrection which he saw in the Free State (26 Counties). "What a fool I was. I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland, in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power" (Lords Hansard, 14 Dec 1921).

After January 1910 the Liberal government in London dependent for its parliamentary majority on the 80-odd MPs of the Irish Home Rule Party. For all of the marching, arming, drilling, petition-signing, and Provisional-Government-in-Belfast organising, the formal demand of the Unionists and the Tories on the British government was a full UK general election to vote on Home Rule and other questions. Partition was the Liberal government's alternative to that new election.

Determined to keep power in their own hands and spurred by the Irish Party to produce something they could call Home Rule, the London government pressed ahead, impervious at first to Unionist mutterings and threats. They had lost their 1906 Commons majority in the January 1910 general election, but they had completely defeated the Tory-Unionists on the matter of making the elected House of Commons the supreme Parliamentary chamber.

When many people within the claimed area for national self govern-

ment disagree – and here it was a big minority, and a majority in a compact area of the claimed territory, there are only two possibilities. Acquiesce, in one form or another, to the wishes of the minority. Grant the status quo ante, or some form of self-government for the minority, within the new state, or entirely outside it. That, or they must be forced.

Both Unionists and Nationalists in Ireland had been corrupted away from seeking mutual accommodation by the belief of each that forces in Britain would coerce or overawe its opponents in Ireland. The Unionists believed Britain could coerce the Home Rulers; the Home Rulers, that Britain could coerce the Unionists.

William O'Brien, the agrarian agitator, Home-Rule then All-For-Ireland MP, and future Sinn Feiner, thought that a less confrontational, less combative, less sectarian approach by the nationalists might have won the Unionists or some of them to a cleaner Home Rule, free of the influence of the Catholic Orange Order, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH).

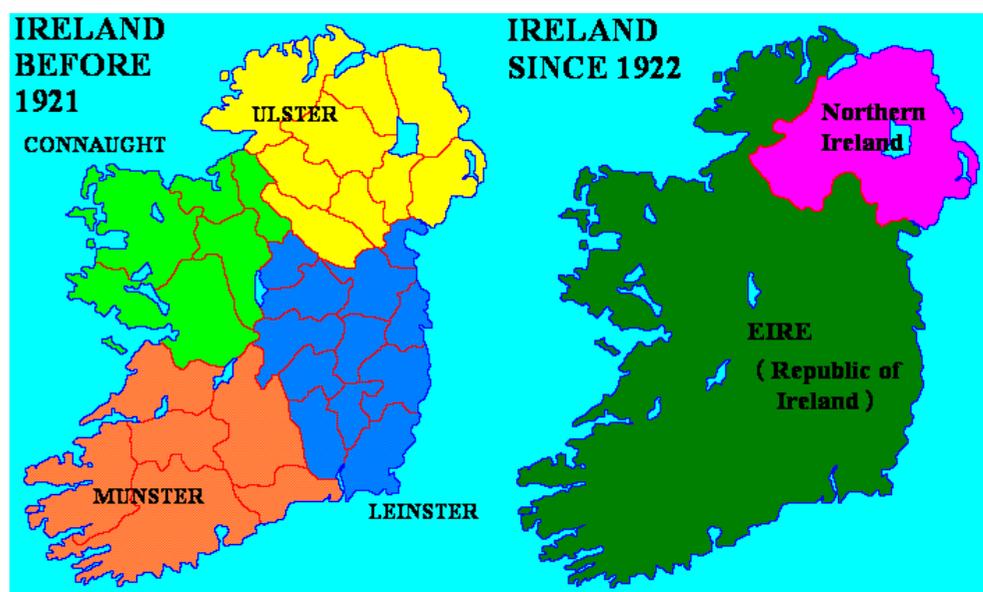
Split

O'Brien had split from the main Home Rule party in 1909, when the AOH took control. He had organised the 1902 conference of tenants and landlords which had agreed on the enormous 1903 Wyndham Land Act. He tried to generalise from that. But in 1912 and after Home Rule was what it was – rule from Dublin by John Redmond of the United Irish League (Home Rule Party) and behind him, so to speak, Joe Devlin and the Catholic Orange Order.

The whole situation was what it was: industrial Ireland against Home Rule; agricultural and semi industrial Ireland for it; a labour movement preparing for life and conflict in an Ireland ruled by the Home Rule party, and expecting to defend in that Ireland concessions won from the imperial Parliament like the recently-won payment of MPs. This was also a movement that would soon have to fight for its life against the Irish bourgeoisie, with the financial and other backing of the British labour movement, in the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14.

Liberal and Home Rule Ireland expected that the government in London would force through Home Rule. It would not be like the 1886 Home Rule Bill, defeated in the Commons, or the 1892-3 Bill, which won in the Commons but was blocked by the Lords. They were sure of a majority in the Commons; then, after only a two-year wait imposed by the Lords, it would be law.

The Home Rule reform orientations of the Irish labour movement, in this



period, even with the Labour War of 1913-14, and the things which the Irish labour movement tried to get the British labour movement (whose MPs supported the Liberal government in Parliament) to insist would be in the Home Rule Act, all point unmistakably to the expected dominance of Home Rule.

In the circumstances, that meant assuming that the Liberal government would use enough force to override the Irish minority, coerce them. It would keep to the apparent Home Rule – Liberal bargain, as the Tories would keep to their bargain with the Irish Unionists.

Patrick Pearse, in the Irish Republican Brotherhood paper *Irish Freedom*, wel-

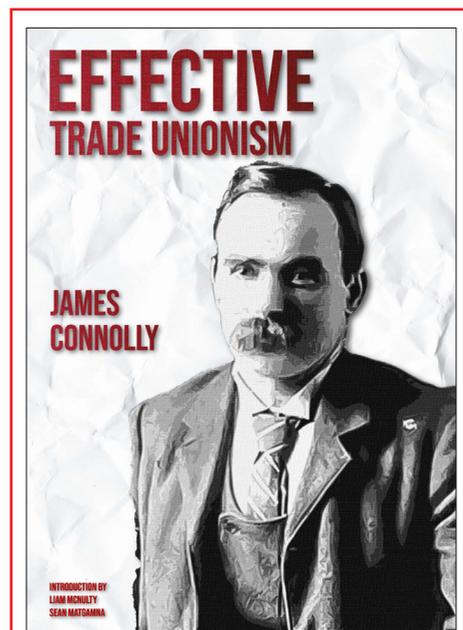
comed the arming of the North against Britain policy. Perhaps with the Protestant Volunteers of 1782 in mind, he rejoiced at guns in the hands of Irishmen! Britain's, or rather England's, Protestant Irish enemies were in his view Irish patriots. At least Pearse's were not Catholic-sectarian reasons. (*Irish Freedom* blamed the Catholic-sectarian AOH as much or more than the Protestant Orange Order for the situation that had developed in the North).

Connolly serenely mocked "the wooden guns of Ulster", sure that the London government could and would coerce them.

So what was Connolly's alternative to Partition, when in 1914 it loomed? It is there in the last sentence of a much quoted section at the end of his description of the likely effects of Partition:

"The effect of such exclusion upon Labour in Ireland will be at least equally, and probably more, disastrous. All hopes of uniting the workers, irrespective of religion or old political battle cries will be shattered, and through North and South the issue of Home Rule will be still used to cover the iniquities of the capitalist and landlord class. I am not speaking without due knowledge of the sentiments of the organised Labour movement in Ireland when I say that *we would much rather see the Home Rule Bill defeated than see it carried with Ulster or any part of Ulster left out*".

The Irish TUC statement of 17 March 1914 (of which Connolly moved endorsement at the Irish TUC Congress of June 1914) declared: "That this Committee, representing the Trade Union and Labour Movement of all Ireland, views with dismay and anger the attempt to divide Ulster from the rest of Ireland under the proposed amendments to the Home Rule Bill. We declare our belief that the suggested exclusion of Ulster (or any part thereof) will intensify the divisions at present



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. □

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's alternative to Partition?

existing and destroy all our hopes of uniting the workers of Ulster with those of Munster, Leinster and Connaught on the basis of their industrial and economic interests. We call upon all those who profess to have the well-being of the workers of Ireland at heart to vigorously oppose any form of 'exclusion', either temporary or permanent, and to insist that whatever measures may be enacted concerning Ireland's political future must apply to the country as a whole".

The issue wasn't sentiment or politics, or only that. It was practicalities. If it could be done, it was only the London government that could coerce. Without that, Connolly's policy and that of the Irish labour movement was that, rather than Partition, they would prefer no Home Rule for the rest of Ireland, but Direct Rule from London, as after the failure of the First and Second Home Rule Bills of 1886 and 1893.

Even the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in the Easter Rising of 1916 would, for example, promise the vote for women but would have nothing to say about Partition. The active will of the minority to resist had been clear for years. The Home Rule Party had in 1914 accepted the exclusion from Home Rule of counties or county boroughs which voted that way (on paper, exclusion only for six years, but the Home Rule politicians had no right on the facts to believe exclusion would be temporary). In June 1916 the Home Rule Party in northern Ireland would call a convention there and talk it into accepting "temporary" exclusion of six counties (although Lloyd George had simultaneously promised the Unionists that the exclusion would not be tempo-



Connolly and others (Punch cartoon 22 May 1912) mocked the Unionists' "wooden guns", but they soon had real ones.

ratory: the formula in any case receded, defeated by the Unionist leader in the Lords, Lord Lansdowne).

Only those able and willing either to coerce, or to propose a voluntary agreement with, the Protestant area of the North (not the same as the existing

Six Counties) could have something positive to say.

They were on different sides, one wanting Home Rule and the other fighting against it, but Connolly and Carson were on the same side on direct rule, the status quo ante, as the acceptable alternative to Partition.

The outbreak of the Great War at the beginning of August 1914 cut across everybody's expectations and hopes.

But no viable and democratic alternative to Partition, no alternative except the status quo, would become a political force before the fact of Partition in 1920-2. □

• Part of a series on "Connolly, politically unexpurgated": workersliberty.org/connolly

Ukrainian socialists hold conference

By Michael Baker

On Saturday 17 September, two members of Workers' Liberty (virtually) attended the national conference of the Ukrainian socialist organisation Sotsialny Rukh (Social Movement). The conference took place over one day, and was attended by politicians, supporters and labour movement activists from throughout the world.

The conference served as a chance for Sotsialny Rukh to reflect on the work they've done

since the outbreak of the war in February. Membership has grown. Though it is not a mass movement yet, the influence the group has had in terms of coordinating support for the Ukrainian working class and pushing for a socialist Ukrainian political outlook should absolutely be celebrated. The freezing of Ukraine's international debt that occurred several months ago could not have happened without the (ongoing) campaign to cancel Ukraine's debt altogether, run by Sotsialny Rukh and the Pol-

ish group Razem (with the full support and endorsement of Workers' Liberty).

A huge number of trade unionists and working-class people across Ukraine, including those in the occupied regions and those who have been internally displaced, have received financial or material aid from campaigns coordinated by Sotsialny Rukh.

Members of the group repeatedly expressed how grateful they were for international solidarity, and how working with organisations

across the world has enabled them to achieve far more than they would have thought possible beforehand. The spirit of internationalism was alive and well in Kyiv.

There were also interesting discussions on how Sotsialny Rukh addresses questions of internal democracy, transparency and education, particularly as the group grows in number. Several members took active interest in these discussions, wanting to ensure an accountable and healthy organisation that could do its

work properly.

Most importantly, the conference overall had a generally upbeat mood – this was a rare chance for Ukrainian socialists to celebrate the victories of the current struggle, amid what has otherwise been an impossibly gruelling year.

Workers' Liberty wants to express its solidarity with Sotsialny Rukh, and we look forward to continuing our work with them to build links between the Ukrainian and British labour movements. □

“” 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

More Trump mayhem and plots

By Tom Harrison

Want to gain easy access to Mar-a-Lago? Just drive through the gates in a brand new Mercedes and claim you are a Rothschild.

Inna Yashchyshyn managed it with ease, ingratiating herself with various Trump associates by passing herself off as Anna de Rothschild. Her word that she was a super rich scion of a historically famous banking family was enough to gain acceptance and get her a golf course photo op with Trump and his Georgia lickspittle Lindsey Graham.

Fake Anna was actually a Russian speaking Ukrainian immigrant whose dad earns a living as an Illinois truck driver. It is unclear who rumbled her, but possession of fake US and Canadian passports, a \$100K set of wheels and money enough to frequent Trump's expensive club led to well founded suspicions she's connected to Russian-organised crime.

You simply couldn't make it up! Ease in gaining entry to Trump's Florida resort makes it an obvious magnet for spies who probably go about it with greater subterfuge than fake Anna.

Trump's casual approach to possessing classified folders shows they are nothing more to him than a rich man's playthings, unless the intention is also to use them for blackmail or financial gain. An empty "classified" folder has reportedly been on display at Trump Tower's 45-themed bar. A further 48 empty ones were found in Mar-a-Lago. It strains credibility that these were packed up for transport from the White House empty. What was in them? Where are the documents now? Who has seen them?

America's espionage chiefs must be having kittens! A document of particular concern showed the nuclear capabilities of one country – in all probability North Korea. Trump's illegal possession of this was said to be a "game changer", but there's still no sign of him being charged with any crime. Indeed, as a new criminal investigation has been launched by the Justice Department into Trump's most recent gifting operation, the Save America PAC, which funnelled \$25 million into his coffers, no indictments have been issued for any of the others.

Meanwhile, Trump continues to deflect and delay, a strategy he's deployed in a lifetime playing the legal system. The latest wheeze is to have a 'special master' appointed to review his dodgy document stash, which will



delay the investigation for weeks if not months.

The request was controversially approved by judge Aileen Cannon who Trump appointed to the Florida bench in the closing months of his presidency. She has now returned the favour. Trump's remaking of the judiciary is now paying off for him personally and he's still got a big insurance policy in having three Supreme Court judges appointees.

If only the DOJ and FBI could be more compliant instead of insisting on investigating actual law breaking! Trump and his acolytes laughingly present the DOJ and FBI as ultra-liberal left-wing extremists pursuing a political witch-hunt on what has now become a myriad of legal fronts.

Stance

This stance chimes in with Schedule F – his plan on re-election to sack 50,000 members of the federal workforce and stuff their posts with those loyal to Trump and the "America First" ideology.

Max Berger, of pro-trade-union media group More Perfect Union, reckons this authoritarian power grab will be taken up by DeSantis or any other future Republican should Trump fall out of contention. "In a Trump or DeSantis regime, we'd expect them to purge the bureaucracy of individuals who respect the rule of law and refuse to be subordinated to their authoritarian impulses."

Plenty of people with authoritarian mind sets are of course already employed by the state and found in particular amongst those "special bodies of armed people". Those mindsets have always translated politically into a leaning to far-right or even fascist politicians.

In France well over half the French police force votes for Le Pen, the probable figure something like 80%. In America, police unions endorsed Trump in 2016 and 2020, rather ironically citing him as the "law and order" candidate! Five police officers died and 140 were injured as a result of the Trump-inspired Cap-

itol riot, yet this did not stop three dozen Pennsylvania state troopers posing with Trump for a photo op at his latest rally.

Several of those arrested in the months after the Capitol riot had either a police or military background. Fascist self styled militia groups are targeting people of those backgrounds for recruitment. Confirmation this has been going on has been confirmed by a recent data leak of the Oath Keepers membership list.

The Oath Keepers played an important role in the planning and execution of the 6 January insurrection and at least 26 of their members have been arrested in connection with it. There is strong evidence they acted in coordination with Trump's circle of plotters before and during the Capitol attack.

The group has focused on seeking institutional power by specifically targeting current and former members of law enforcement and the military. The intention is to use their presence in these institutions to obstruct any actions taken by the government which it deems "unconstitutional".

Yet the Oath Keepers aren't the only ones wanting to use their position in various branches of the state apparatus to overturn democratic norms. The legion of election deniers in the Republican Party standing for various offices throughout the country are intent on doing the same with much greater effect.

That's why President Biden recent efforts to draw a distinction between "MAGA Republicans" – contemptuous of democracy and the rule of law – and the rest of the party is way off the mark. The Republican Party remains thoroughly Trump's creature. Its desire to reverse long established rights such to abortion, contraception and marriage equality is now being largely achieved thanks to Trump's stacking of the courts.

Additionally their long standing undemocratic practices of election rigging methods such as gerrymandering have been enhanced by calling into question any elections which go against them and seeking to overturn them.

Democratic rights remain under serious attack in America today. They must be defended by the same forces which achieved them in the first place through mass movements and popular struggle. The upsurge in US union organisation must be linked to defending those rights, and socialists should be in the vanguard of such a struggle. □

Putin and his “conservative turn”

By Michael Baker

Second of a [series of articles](#) on Putin and opposition forces inside Russia

After regaining power from the more moderate Medvedev in 2012, Putin undertook a pretty clear “conservative turn” over the course of the 2010s. His rhetoric became more strongly Christian, more morally rigid, and more explicitly xenophobic.

The economic and political course for Russia had been seemingly set by the oil boom (making Russia a “peripheral”, export-based economy), and by Putin’s party, United Russia, ensuring a complete grip on parliament. This was partly due to a genuine stock of national support for Putin, who was seen as a “strong” leader even while only Prime Minister, and partly due to varying levels of election falsification and manipulation. Putin was clearly intent on not going anywhere.

The 2008 Georgian war lasted only 12 days, but very much set the tone for the coming period. Putin announced a “peace keeping operation” which in fact involved taking not only disputed territories but also entirely undisputed ones – the comparison to the current invasion of Ukraine is striking. This also marked the beginning of a new period of tensions between Russia and the West. Georgia was seen as a “buffer zone” along with the rest of the Transcaucasus region, and any suggestion of it losing that “neutrality” was deemed a dangerous threat. This was a pattern that would show up time and again throughout the 2010s.

In 2011, with Medvedev’s four-year term as president coming to an end, Putin revealed that he would be running for president once more. The largest mass demonstrations of the 21st century in Russia so far took place in multiple cities, often referred to now as the “Bolotnaya” protests, after the square in Moscow where the largest protests took place.

The Bolotnaya protests were an uneasy alliance of left and liberal, and a formative moment that would come to redefine the relationship between people and power in the country. The two most common chants were “Russia Without Putin” and “For Honest Elections”, a simple but powerful political demand, and some informal “protest infrastructure” like hotlines and legal aid began to appear in the country. Seemingly genuinely scared of a Russian “colour revolution” building out of the Bolotnaya movement, for the next few years Putin focused on ensuring that his voter base was on his side, and his opponents were clearly demarcated and vilified.

A famous example of vilification came in 2013 with the Gay Propaganda bill, not dissimilar from Section 28 in the

UK. The bill outlawed “propaganda of non-traditional life-styles” to anyone

under the age of 18, and was used as a pretext for a mass homophobic media campaign and rising homophobic attacks across the country. This was a two-pronged political manoeuvre in Putin’s eyes: it painted Russia’s queer community and those who supported it as dangerous and consolidated a Christian, conservative voter base, but it also acted as a cultural fuck-you to the West, a proud statement that Russia would not be subsumed into any notion of a liberal world order. The irony here is that the bill was largely advocated for, and partially drafted by, American lobbyists, in particular evangelical Christian group the World Congress of Families.

It is a topic far too large to cover in any detail, but Russia in the 2010s doesn’t make sense without some mention of the annexation of Crimea. After the 2013 Maidan protests and the ousting of pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich, in February 2014 Russian troops invaded the Crimean Peninsula and claimed it as Russian territory, followed by an eight-year conflict in the East of Ukraine, still very much ongoing. The annexation brought in the first major wave of economic and trade sanctions on the country.

Logic

Putin’s logic was once again steadfast: Crimea (and Ukraine as a whole) is historically Russian, the West is encroaching via territories surrounding Russia, Russia must retaliate to ensure its “buffer zones”. The seeming Ukrainian stalemate was a constant source of nationalist sentiment for Putin, an excuse to generate anti-Western narratives via the daily comforts that sanctions had taken away. Putin also blamed the general economic hardships of the Russian working class – which in fact were the result of an oligarchy that hoarded the country’s money and a complete lack of social infrastructure – on the persecution of Russia by Americans.

We’ll touch on popular opposition leaders in the following article, but briefly: another important event in this period was the assassination of Boris Nemtsov. In 2015 Nemtsov, then the most popular opposition candidate to Putin, was shot by an unknown assassin on the bridge leading over the Moscow River to the Kremlin. The death led



to mass marches of tens of thousands in the streets of major cities, a return of the public protest sensation of the 2011 Bolotnaya movement, and most importantly, an increasingly violent police response to political protest.

In April 2016 Putin founded Rosgvardiya, essentially a private military unit that responded to him alone, created partially to help with border control and gun control, but more importantly as a means of “preventing unrest”. Rosgvardiya are brought in for any major “unsanctioned” protest, and generally act as a more heavily-armed and rough-handed deterrent to any protester who wishes to put their head above the parapet.

In 2018, Putin raised the pension age from 60 to 65. This was a catastrophic policy for many: in some regions of Russia, the age at which you received pensions was now higher than the average life expectancy of the region – not only a barbaric policy, but a conscious economic decision to have members of the Russian working class die before receiving their pension pot, to “subsidise” those who actually make it to the pension age. This caused a wave of protests that began what many consider to be the “modern period” of Russian politics, with protests getting rowdier and police more violent, while Putin has gone all-out on a strongly conservative and vicious domestic policy.

In 2019, a member of Aleksey Navalny’s opposition party, Lyubov Sobol, tried to stand for election as Moscow Mayor. She was banned from standing, and that summer saw tens of thousands protest in the streets. In January 2020, Putin announced that he was “nullifying” the presidential term limits, amending the constitution to allow himself to serve as president for another 12 years.

Over the last four years, but particularly over the course of 2021, almost all of Russia’s independent media and any anti-government NGO were labelled “foreign agents”, many as a result chased out of the country for fear of prosecution.

In January 2021, after a failed assassination attempt Aleksey Navalny returned to Russia and was arrested and imprisoned, leading to an enormous wave of protests and the arrest of prominent young activists like the editors of the student newspaper DOXA, and the feminist activist Yulia Tsvetkova.

Finally, we have 2022. I have been covering the anti-war movement in weekly articles for *Solidarity* since the invasion began, and I recommend readers see those articles for far more detail on the current situation; what follows is a brief summary.

Immediate protests in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine were enormous, with 1,800 arrested on just the first day, and over 15,000 overall. After the government brought in stricter measures allowing long prison sentences and crippling fines for so much as holding an empty sign in a public space, protests died down, but other organisations and strategies for protest have grown.

One key organisation to have appeared is the Feminist Antiwar Resistance, a group of young feminist activists who have taken something of a leading role in the anti-war movement. Students have become one of the last bastions of public protest, campaigning for their universities to oppose the war and acting as hubs for organising within student accommodations and across campuses.

With sanctions hitting the economy, labour disputes are beginning to take centre stage. Factory workers are refusing to work without wages, and standing down their oligarch owners. Doctors and nurses are striking over insufficient pay, and to keep the country functional their bosses have no choice but to agree.

Russia is in an economically untenable situation currently, and Putin will have to find some way to stabilise the current collapse of multiple industries if he wants to keep power, but what form that will take is entirely unclear. □

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Russia's anarcho-communist rail saboteurs

Ruleta Proom reports their activities and views

"Izium was liberated today." These victorious words from the city's mayor, Valeriy Marchenko, made headlines around the world on Saturday, Sept. 10. Almost 200 days into Russia's war on Ukraine, this news was significant – it wasn't just of Russian fumbling or failure, but of Ukrainian advancement and success. Over the weekend more news broke: Ukraine's military reported Russian withdrawal in regions in Kharkiv and Luhansk – two major areas of contention.

But far from the frontlines in Ukraine, a different form of combat continues to take place. Боевая Организация Анархо-Коммунистов (БОАК) or the Anarcho-Communist Combat Organisation is a Russian organisation committed to taking direct action against the war. Here, the weapons are not guns and ammunition, but wrenches and levers – used to cause disruption to trains carrying ammunition to Russia's military.

"Our goal is to break down the system of oppression, and to rebuild society according to anarchist ideals," an anonymous spokesperson at BOAK said. "This is in order not only to stop this war, but to make any war impossible."

Initially, the organisation operated as a resource: a global protest information channel.

"We were active in distributing information about the methods and means of direct action, as well as ongoing actions," the spokesperson said. While organisational activities were directed inward and meant to develop and strengthen their own structures, the members of this original team were no strangers to resistance – it was this that led to the formation of BOAK.

"This specific act of Putin's aggression was a push that forced us to publish information about the existence of the organisation in order to increase the effectiveness of our actions," the spokesperson said.

Their actions typically include attempts to disrupt and destroy the efforts of the Russian military – or at the very least, to distract or to delay. The group favours acts of sabotage that are easily accessible to most, too.

For example, causing damage to railway tracks or cell towers. The mission is one that involves a number of people. Observers to keep watch, as well as those involved in the physical work.

Once a section of the track is selected (often at the turn of a track to increase the chance of derailment, and in a remote location, to increase the time it would take for repair teams to arrive) the group gets to work: a difficult task of using a wrench to loosen bolts which are often old and rusty, then unscrewing and removing them – an easier but more time-intensive task.

The rails are then connected with wire to keep signalling systems working, allowing their actions to go undetected for longer. Finally, the connecting plates which allow separate rails to operate as a continuous track are removed, and, with digging and the use of a level, the rail is raised and shifted.

For the saboteurs, their action could have a range of results.

Detected

In the worst case, sabotage is detected, and the transportation of military supplies is delayed for several hours or days. The best result here is the derailment of military trains, which can lead to even more damage of rails, trains, and military cargo.

Another form of sabotage is cell towers. Here, crowbars, hammers, chisels, fuel, and rags are used to crack open doors and set fire within the tower.

"As a result of the fire, expensive telecommunications equipment is damaged, and communications in border areas are disrupted," the spokesperson said, "This worsens the coordination of Russian troops."

Needless to say, this action is incredibly dangerous for anyone involved. Russia's laws have always been harsh on activists and any form of opposition; this has only increased since the start of the war. Despite this, the group is determined to press on.

"First of all, we cannot sit idly by because we know that every moment of delay leads to the continuation of this massacre, to the deaths of civilians and children," the spokesperson said.

Operating on Telegram, a favoured platform of anonymous users due to its encrypted messages and the ability to completely and quickly delete all messages and information, BOAK both organise and communicate here. The group makes it easy for anyone to get involved, too.

"We publish on our website and Telegram channel with recommendations on how to prepare, choose a target, and ensure safety before, during and after," the spokesperson said. "[Individuals] can read these tips, find allies in



their inner circle of trusted friends (or decide to go it alone, that's also possible), pick a target, and take action."

This action extends beyond Russia and the region. "We cooperate with many anarchists, both individuals, groups and organisations, both in the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine, and in European countries," the spokesperson said. "But, due to the nature of our business, many interactions are conducted on an anonymous basis to ensure the safety of all participants, and we cannot disclose details."

"We believe that wars are a direct consequence of the existing system of social relations," the spokesperson said. "Even in peacetime, anarchists, by their actions, are trying to ensure that ... everyone lives peacefully, freely, and happily."

Action

It is during times of war that anarchist action becomes even more important, the spokesperson said. "War exacerbates existing contradictions, making it more obvious to many that something is wrong, that it's impossible to live like this," they said.

"The actions of anarchists should show an alternative to the harmful factors that gave rise to the war, and at the same time eliminate them – during these periods of instability and upheaval, systems of oppression are weakened, which means that there are more chances for freedom."

When it comes to those who support the war, there is a need to distinguish two groups, the spokesperson said.

"For those like Putin who are the force behind this war, who feed on it and grow rich, we have nothing to say to them and only wish for them to die as soon as possible."

But for the second group – those poisoned by Russian propaganda and who are afraid to admit the truth and support the war as a result, the group has more hope: "For them to wake up as soon as possible."

For comrades around the world, solidarity is needed. And it is information that is of high importance. "Assistance in disseminating information about the actions carried out and the methods used is very important. And information about the fact that an anarchist underground operates in Russia," the spokesperson said.

The group says that it is also important to put pressure on their governments so that they do not weaken their opposition to Putin's aggression, and continue to support Ukraine.

Undeterred in their action, BOAK has a message for anarchists, anti-war activists, and allies around the world:

Comrades, know that the darkest hour is before dawn. Do not give up, no matter how hard it is! In the past behind us are generations and generations of anarchists who, through their own struggle, brought us to this moment. And in the future, generations and generations of anarchists are looking at us with hope.

*We cannot let them down.
If not us, who? If not now, when?
Viva la anarchia! □*

Last Times where “nothing has ended”

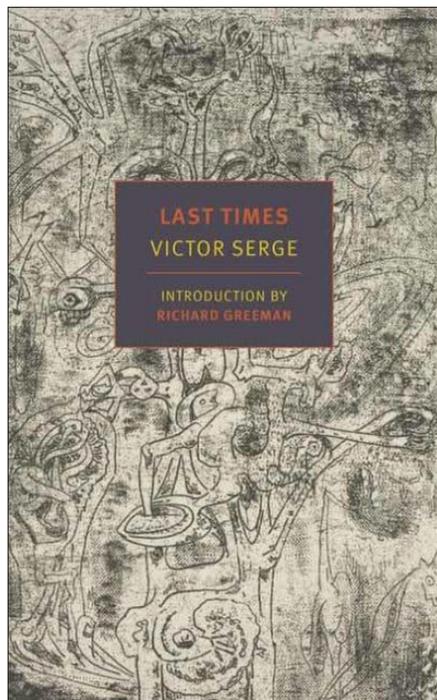


Book review

By Eduardo Tovar

Drawing on the author’s first-hand experience of the fall of Paris and the early French Resistance, Victor Serge’s novel *Last Times* (New York Review of Books, 2022) offers a bleak, immersive view of France under the German occupation and the Vichy government.

Written in the early 1940s, the novel covers a period of just over a year in 1940-41. Serge’s anti-fascist protagonists have an overarching goal that leads them to join the columns of refugees making the arduous journey to Marseilles and – they hope – to a ship that will carry them to the Americas, but one should not read *Last Times* expecting a definite plot. Rather, the novel offers a “slice of life”, providing connected, richly textured vignettes of an ensemble of characters navigating the morally ambiguous circumstances into which they have been thrown.



Admittedly, Serge’s characters are often closer to types than to three-dimensional personalities: the morose soldier, the Jew, the ingenue, and so forth. Nevertheless, as one would hope from a novel structured around a se-

ries of finely-detailed moments in the characters’ lives, much of *Last Times’* strengths come from seeing members of this diverse ensemble interact with each other.

Much like Petrograd in his earlier work *Conquered City* (1932), in Serge’s hands, Paris becomes a character in its own right. Indeed, one might say that the novel’s panoramic view, refusing to linger long enough on any single human character for the reader to latch onto them, makes most sense if one interprets the city as *Last Times’* true protagonist. This would be consistent with Serge’s noted dislike of novels of private life. He once remarked (ironically, in his own memoirs) that “individual existences were of no interest to [him], particularly [his] own”.

On several occasions, characters discuss or muse about philosophical ideas from Nietzsche, Kant, Heraclitus, and others. Yet this never feels as if Serge is simply showing off how well-versed he is. Rather, these feel like what people familiar with such ideas might be inclined to talk about in the gloomy conditions in which they find themselves.

One might take some issue with the novel’s generally pessimistic atmosphere. Whilst there are acts of resistance against the German forces and the new regime, these are sporadic and achieve little. Even characters who were once revolutionaries themselves come to see the situation as “natural and even irrevocable”.

Nonetheless, two points are worth stressing. Firstly, *Last Times’* greatest political import lies not in lessons of individual or even collective heroism, but rather as an unflinching look at the morally compromising conditions of military occupation and the ease with which one can slide into collaboration. Given how French nationalists even today essentialise the French Resistance as the “real” France and downplay continuities between the Vichy and post-war regimes, this is a welcome message. Secondly, for all its bleakness, the novel closes with a moment of hope: the single, parenthetical postscript “... but nothing has ended”.

In short, for reasons of literary, historical, and political interest alike, I recommend the novel strongly. □

Putin pushes railworkers to join army

By Michael Baker

A Russian human rights group has revealed documents which suggest that the Russian government are pressuring the railway companies to recruit ten thousand railway workers into the army to fight in Ukraine. Alexey Tabalov, head of the human rights group “Conscript School” (Shkola Prizyvnik), shared photos on Facebook of a document from a Russian Railways HR manager. The document claims that Putin has announced a quota for various companies and corporations for how many workers they

should recruit to the Russian army. For Russian Railways, the quota is ten thousand recruits.

Workers are to be encouraged to take six months leave, for which time their job in the railways (but not their salary) will be kept for them. There are two available forms of service: serving on the front lines, or helping protect technical equipment and transportation. Workers who agree to sign up will be paid a lump sum of 200,000 rubles (£2,855) by Russian Railways, and another 200,000 by the Russian Ministry of Defence upon signing their contract.

HR managers are expected

to perform “constant agitation” to encourage employees to join the scheme. The letter tells managers “not to force [workers to join the army], to discuss carefully, but not to dissuade either”.

This is not the first we’ve heard of workplaces being used as routes for recruitment since the beginning of the war: as reported in *Solidarity*, both state-owned and oligarch-owned factories had previously offered workers the “opportunity” of military service, sometimes with monetary recompense. However, it is the first sign of a planned recruitment drive being cen-



trally coordinated, and targeting working-class professions.

There have also been reports from staff at homeless shelters in St. Petersburg that govern-

ment officials have visited, and offered to recruit rough sleepers from the shelters to the front lines. □

Strikes at start of uni term



By Vicki Morris, Unison HE SGE (pc)

After a successful ballot 21 Unison Higher Education (HE) branches will strike at the start of the new academic year for higher pay against a paltry 3% offer.

The claim is for RPI plus 2%.

Branches that opted out of the first disaggregated ballot and branches who were unsuccessful will have the chance to vote in a second disaggregated ballot.

The date for the new ballot is subject to negotiation inside Unison. The

HE Service Group Executive (SGE) are arguing for the second ballot as soon as possible so any new strikes coincide with potential UCU action. Disgracefully, some bureaucrats in Unison HQ are arguing that the small HE service group might have to get in a queue for balloting behind bigger health and local government service groups.

Student campaigners and all HE trade unionists should support the strikes, building unity for decent pay rises at least in line with inflation across universities. Unison HE branches unsuccessful in the first ballot should join the second ballot and work to get the vote out so they can join in the fight.

- List of branches striking: bit.ly/uni-unison

Architecture workers could strike

By Gerry Bates

Workers at Atomik Architecture (Atomik) in London have informed their employer that they intend to ballot between 29 September and 17 October for strikes. It could be the first ever strike by private-sector architectural workers in the UK.

The workers are demanding a pay increase, reduced working hours, flexible working arrangements, paid training, and trade union recognition.

In June 2022, some workers individually raised the matter of pay in their annual reviews. When they were ignored, they wrote a collective letter outlining their demands.

A meeting produced no results, and Atomik then triggered a redundancy consultation, which could lead to dismissals. This came as a shock to

the workers, who until recently were under the impression the company was looking to expand the number of employees.

Jake Arnfield, Uvw-SAW representative, says that this is "a sector which has had stagnant wages for at least 20 years... If even a single strike happens, it could trigger a wave of strikes in architecture this autumn and winter".

Atomik workers are demanding:

- A pay increase of 10%, or 7% increase with a model of profit-sharing to be negotiated
- Working hours reduced from 9-6 to 9-5
- Two days of remote working per week
- Paid training (it's currently during unpaid lunch breaks)
- Trade union recognition. ☐
- More: bit.ly/at-uk



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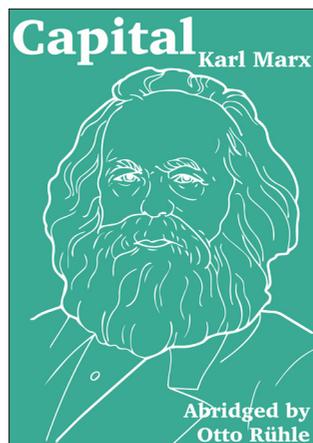
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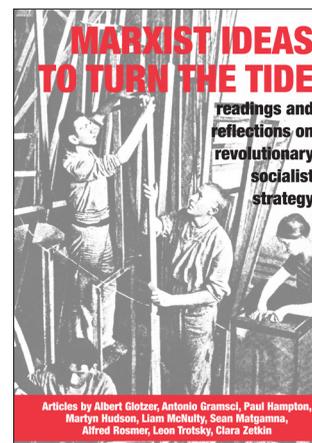
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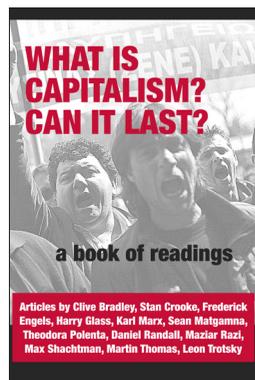
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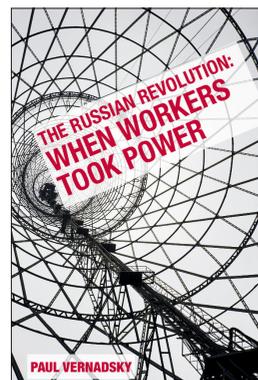
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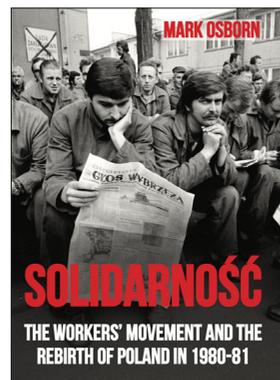
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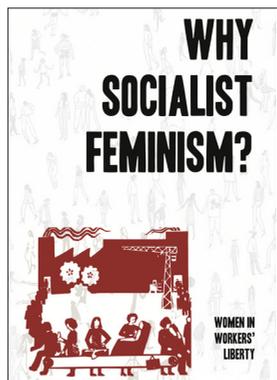
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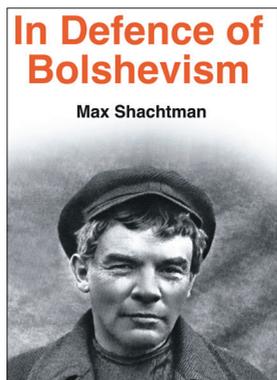
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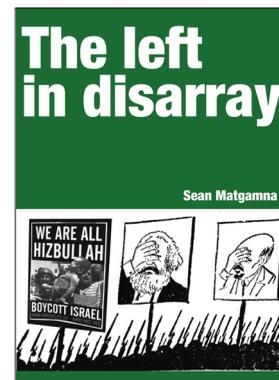
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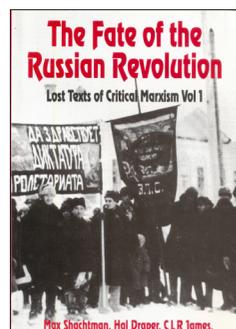
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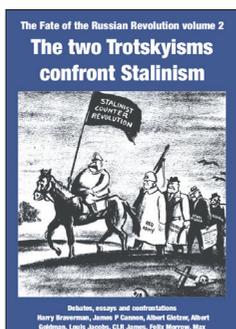
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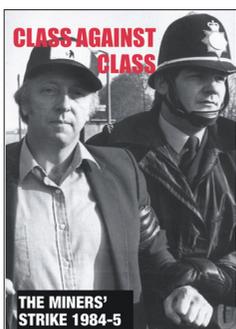
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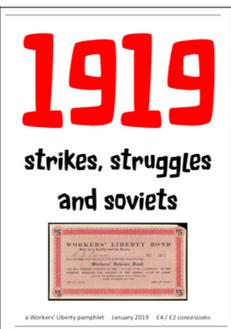
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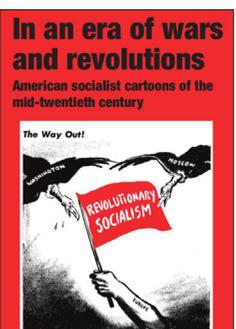
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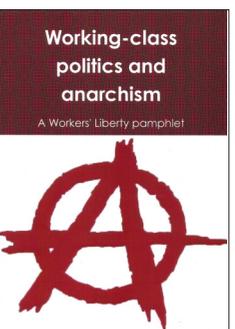
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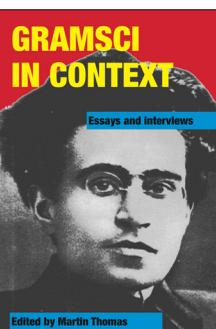
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Timing the next Tube strikes



From the Tubeworker blog

There is ongoing discussion in reps meetings, union branch meetings, and most importantly in workplaces – about if and when RMT should launch further strikes in the dispute on London Underground (LUL) over pensions, job cuts, and conditions.

Since our last strike on 19 August, we've seen a funding settlement agreed that commits Transport for London (TfL) to hundreds of millions of pounds worth of cuts, as well as to accelerating the process of pension reform. Meanwhile, LUL is pressing ahead with job cuts on stations, with reduced staffing levels set to be imposed in some locations within a matter of weeks. It's surely time to name more strikes.

The 30 August funding settlement set out a timetable for pension reform that committed the company to specifying options for reform by 30 September, with an implementation plan by 31 January 2023. Bosses have informed unions that the impact of the Queen's

death and funeral arrangements have pushed that back by two weeks, so we're looking at 14 October before we know the details. Given statutory notice periods for industrial action, if we wait until after that announcement to call further strikes, as some have argued, that means taking no more action until 28 October at the very earliest.

What's the sense in waiting that long? TfL has been told by the Department of Transport to cut £100 million from our pension scheme. It's there in the funding settlement, in black and white. Whatever the specific options for reform proposed on or around 14 October, they're going to be bad for workers.

Meanwhile, station job cuts are taking place, with staffing levels in other areas, including fleet and engineering, explicitly under review.

It's clear some see this dispute as being mainly, or even solely, about pensions. Pensions is unquestionably a major issue, one that affects all functions and grades across LUL and TfL. And in a sense it's understandable that people's first instinct is to think in terms of what immediately affects them.

But part of the purpose of common organisation, especially all-grades in-

dustrial unionism of the type RMT aspires to, is to make the connections between issues affecting different workers. Drivers will surely be impacted by 600 station job cuts, which include numerous detrainment duties, the removal of which clearly makes the driver's job less safe.

Only striking again in late October or early November could leave us playing catch-up, and make station staff feel abandoned. Station workers could strike again on their own, as they did very effectively in June, but many might legitimately ask, "why bother being part of an all-grades union if, despite having an all-grades dispute and an all-grades ballot over three issues, we're expected to fight alone over one of them?"

Against the backdrop of the most significant upsurge in workers' struggle for a generation, now is surely the time for courage and ambition. All we will get on 14 October, or whenever the pension reform options are announced, is detail on exactly how they plan to attack us. We already know that they will – and in fact, if we remember that the dispute isn't only about pensions, they already are.

Delaying our response only benefits the bosses. □

Vote Daniel Randall for RMT NEC

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 □

Good results so far in NHS

By Alice Hazel

Results in the health unions' consultations over pay have, so far, been positive. The Royal College of Midwives voted 75% yes, on a 66% turnout. In Scotland threshold targets were also met in consultations with good majorities for industrial action: RCN

90%, Unison 91%, GMB 97% and Unite 89%. A further year of pay cuts, the increased NHS crisis, and the context of strike action in other sectors is making a significant difference to voting numbers this year.

Consultations for Unite and GMB (England) will be complete by the end of this month, 11 Sep and 27 Sep respec-

tively. Formal ballots will open in the bigger health unions in the next two weeks – RCN 6 October to 2 November (delayed by Queen's death), and Unison 27 Oct to 5 Nov. Reports from the health executive of Unison are that results of the pledge campaign will be used to determine whether the ballot is disaggregated.

This has taken too long. The ballot process should have started when no award was forthcoming in April; but now it is here union branches and activists need to build for high turnouts. Campaigning is needed to engage members in the dispute as well as to reach thresholds. Organising effective action in health,

including convincing members to strike, discussion of emergency cover and organisation of picket lines needs involvement at workplace level. We should be establishing cross-union campaign committees, to be continued as strike committees, so that there is rank and file input into the course of the dispute. □

Nurses: the mood is shifting

By Kelly Rogers

The Royal College of Nursing is balloting its members in all four nations, from 6 October to 2 November. The demand is inflation plus 5%.

The RCN is historically a very conservative union: its constitution prohibited strikes until 1995, and this will be the first time in its history that it is recommending its members vote yes in a UK-wide strike ballot.

Nurses in Britain have very rarely struck, and there is a widely-held pride in self-sacrifice and stoicism in the profession, with nurses I've met expressing the need to "just get on with it"; or that

they do it because it's their "calling" or "a labour of love".

That being said, the mood in favour of action is clearly there. Nurses who by their own admission "would never have even thought about striking before", are saying that things are now so bad that they "have no choice". I have yet to meet a nurse that is outright hostile to the prospect of strike action, and everyone wants to talk about the ballot.

It's also the case that this mood has been generated in part by the strike wave led by the RMT and CWU. It's not uncommon to be in discussion with a group of nurses on a ward, where one is expressing concerns or fears, and an-

other replies with something like, "the posties are on strike. Everyone is doing it! Why not us?"

The cost of living crisis is hitting nurses extremely hard. Hospitals often have food banks on site. One of the questions we field from members is whether strike action will affect their ability to claim universal credit. The union is offering £50 a day strike pay, and lots of nurses will really struggle to make ends meet if they strike.

And yet, if my snapshot of the workforce is a good indicator, a significant majority are ready to do it – because, as member after member has said to me, they can't afford not to. Years of

sub-inflation pay rises, the hardships brought by the pandemic, and now a cost of living crisis: these are all things that are driving nurses out of the profession, and leaving those that remain working in unsafe hospitals and utterly exhausted. They're angry and up for a fight.

The question now is whether the RCN, and Unison, who will be balloting alongside, can reach their members in large enough numbers to meet the ballot threshold. If they can, and it's no small order, then I believe nurses will be joining the rail workers and posties on the picket lines very soon. □

“Even I’m going on strike”



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

The plant is a construction site. A small crane blocks off the main traffic route to the yard, and what remains of the empty tarmac is full of steel girders, ladders, scaffolding, tools and gantry fittings. Another section of the yard has been dug into a shallow trench to install new drainage, and contractors cabins line the stores and boiler houses behind them. Vehicles delivering chemicals – urea, lime, caustic soda – or collecting residues – ash, metals, pollution control – have been directed to leave and enter site via the exit, following a traffic-light system. It’s busy and space is tight – already an HGV driver has reversed into the boundary fence.

The Energy Recovery Facility is preparing to accept clinical waste from hospitals across the region. Some of this waste will be compacted and mixed with household waste in the Pit for normal incineration. Some infectious waste will be transferred to a hoist and deposited directly into the furnace – this is to minimise contact with people and equipment. Some hazardous clinical waste will also be brought here, weighed, logged, checked, then transferred out to a High Temperature Incinerator (HTI), which burns hazardous

waste at the legally-required 1000+ degrees Celsius.

The place where the weighing, logging, and storing takes place is the Transfer Station; a large warehouse in the yard which is soon to be completed and handed over to the ERF operators. For now though, the empty, clean building is barriered off while construction workers finish the details. Around the back of the building, a shipping container has been re-purposed as a walk-in fridge – this is for storing “red bag” waste; anatomical remains which need to be kept cold. I’m told this waste will come to us frozen, if it comes here at all, and then must be sent for HTI within half a day...or the results are messy.

I’ve gained a lot of new colleagues in my new job. The company has hired four assistant-operators to handle Clinical Waste: check bins, scan documents, store, empty, compact, load the hoist, move bins into the bin washing machines, scan the bin again, and repeat. The clinical team also has two new administrators and a manager – P – promoted from District Energy. The new workers are all young, friendly, interested in everything to do with the plant. L, one of the new guys, is from the railways and we discuss the strikes at lunch. P and G are the first women I’ve shared an office with in five years, and during our first week together we’ve been completely run off our feet – P has excellent tattoos, so I have high

hopes of that as a conversation starter.

Considering the Summer of Strikes, the plant has gone very quiet regarding GMB unionisation. The old rep has retired, which seems to have left some bad feeling among the drivers. My branch emails speak about “poaching” Unite recruiters who “cannot represent your interests and are breaking TUC policy”. The new GMB rep needs to bed in with the drivers’ depot and then promises to visit members at the plant. One of the older Fitters checks in with me each week, trying to find a time and date for a union visit that will avoid management oversight.

Even the Environment Agency (EA) is discussing strike action. This week marked the end of a large piece of my work – prepping for the Agency to inspect our controls against fire. I’ve been scrutinising accident reports, checking escape routes and grilling the maintenance manager about the different fire extinguisher and detection systems in place to keep the fire in the furnace. The greatest and most likely source of fire is waste; in the past old disposable barbecues or gas canisters have ignited inside bin wagons, then been tipped into the pit with thousands of tons of combustible waste. The Assistant Operators activated fire cannons, but the building was soon opaque with smoke. The fire service dropped a hose in the canal and pumped water in through the tipping chutes. The Ops manager and I discuss the Operators’

safety in the control room if this were to happen again:

“We need to seal the Control Room. Last time smoke was getting in through the window. We can’t shut down the plant or control the fire if the operators can’t breathe.”

The EA inspector is a friendly, slightly eccentric, chemist. He asks about everything calmly, methodically, pressing for more information in areas we haven’t focussed on. We also discuss the Clinical Transfer Station, the Carbon Capture projects, the supply problems and the energy crisis.

“Even I’m going on strike later this year!” he laughs “We’re about to ballot.”

“What union are you?” I ask

“Prospect,” he says “always been that way. The Agency can’t hire new people you see, got tons of vacancies, but the pay on offer is too low. Especially in the current climate – who’d want to work for the Environment Agency!”

This has been my first diary entry in a long time, due to the pressures of life and work. I hope this entry has reassured you that I haven’t moved to the political right, or dropped out of activity! There’s more work to do than ever, and I’ll be able to report good news and unionising progress in time. Until then, many thanks for reading! □

• Emma Rickman is an engineer at an Energy Recovery Facility.

Jean-Luc Godard, 1930-2022



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

When film academic David Bordwell wrote his classic *Narration in the Fiction Film* he brought together various directors under headings – Montage cinema, Classical Hollywood etc. – but only the Franco-Swiss Jean-Luc Godard had a chapter all to himself.

Bordwell, like many others, saw Godard, who died on 13 September, as unique. His career spanned sixty years but he will be best remembered for his early films, which were an important part of the French New Wave and a major influence on filmmakers such as

Bernardo Bertolucci in Parma, István Szabó in Hungary, Jiří Menzel in Prague and Quentin Tarantino in Hollywood.

Not all was what it might seem. Godard claimed to be a Marxist but his “Marxism” was little more than an incoherent jumble of “Third Worldism” and shreds of Brecht and Maoism, laced with vague sounding “radical” clichés. The truly dreadful *La Chinoise* (1967) is an example. In later life he professed that he was never a Marxist (something this author is quite prepared to accept).

His first feature film, *Breathless (A Bout de Souffle)*, 1960, with Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg, brought him to world attention and kick-started the New Wave, alongside Francois Truffaut’s *The Four Hundred Blows*. It was followed by *Vivre sa Vie*



(1962); *Le Mépris* (1963); the private-eye parody *Alphaville* (1965), one of my favourites, with the wonderfully named Lemmy Caution (Bogart crossed with Albert Camus); *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967); *Week End* (1967); *Tout va Bien* (1972) with Jane Fonda; and too many others to list here.

His films were nothing if not innovative. As his career

developed, the innovation sometimes morphed into waywardness, as in his version of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. As the New Wave faded and directors such as Jacques Rivette, Claude Chabrol, and Agnes Varda went their separate ways, Godard had an ill-tempered rift with Truffaut, who had moved into more mainstream filmmaking. It ended with Truffaut calling Godard “a piece of shit on a pedestal”.

In later life he simply lost his way. Yet some of his earlier films have stood the test of time and, for those of us who look back to those heady days on the barricades, are worth revisiting. Readers unacquainted with him should have a look at the early films I have mentioned. □

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

PCS ballots go out soon



John Moloney

We are rapidly approaching the beginning of our national ballot over the cost of living (which includes pension costs), protecting jobs and redundancy pay. The votes will start going out on 26 September and the ballot will run from then for six weeks.

The ballot is unusual in that our members are not all in one voting block. Instead the voting is disaggregated by what we call the employer. This means there will be over 200 ballots, ranging from very small voting blocks, all the way up to the tens of thousands of

members in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Given the nature of the ballot, and the crucial importance of winning those votes, the union is trying to pull out all the stops to get members to vote yes.

In that regard, the feedback as to members' mood is very encouraging. We are recruiting new members and probably more important, we are taking on board a new layer of young activists which will not only stay us in good stead for the ballot and industrial action ahead but of course for the future of the union.

Whilst the TUC Congress has been put back, wrongly in my view, to 18-20 October, it is still highly likely that there

will be a great deal of coordination between unions as the ballots are taken and hopefully won.

Certainly where the employer is in essence the government, the need for such coordination, to bring the maximum pressure to bear, should be plain to all.

Mixture

The union has also begun discussing the types of industrial action that could be taken if the ballots were won, i.e. the mixture between selective and general industrial action. Clearly flesh on those particular bones will have to be made in the next weeks.

Our immediate focus is on winning the ballot, and winning it well, but we have to keep our eye on the bigger

picture and not forget the climate crisis and the recent announcements by the government that are moving us away from the already weak 2050 net zero target. The cost pressures that we all face are really symptoms of an underlying economic system which is now being put under increasing pressure by climate change. We are seeing rising temperatures, and we face the prospect that certain parts of the planet will become inhospitable for humans.

I will be making those points in messages to members. □

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

Royal Mail: a stand against bullying

A CWU rep from south-east England spoke to Solidarity

The vast majority of us were very unhappy that the 9 September strike was called off with less than 12 hours' notice because of the Queen's death. A lot of us had to scramble to arrange childcare at the last minute. Many hadn't got the message at all and showed up at the gate to picket.

The moment the strike was called off, the manager thought it was my job as the rep to contact everybody and tell people to go to work. It wasn't.

In any case, the moment the Queen's death was announced, my phone was ringing non-stop with reps and workers asking me what was going to happen with the strike. A lot of people thought that we should have called off the pickets but continued to stay out on strike. Less than half of us turned up to work, but some offices had full turnout.

What really annoyed people was the email from Royal Mail. "Tomorrow will be a normal working day at Royal Mail, and so staff should return to work as usual. Any strike-related pay deductions already made will be rectified." The employer had taken wages off people before they even went on strike!

The email also said "we understand that some people may be unable to attend work tomorrow at short notice so we would like to clarify that no disciplinary action will be taken..." I'm on my knees with gratitude! Despite having a monarch as a figurehead, Britain is a liberal democracy, but our workplaces are dictatorships.

Prince Charles showed his support for Royal Mail during Covid, so the



CWU leadership simply didn't want to cause any upset and didn't want to lose the public's support by continuing to strike when the Queen's death was announced. But we had already spent money on food to feed people on the picket line.

We workers suspended our strike, but bosses didn't stop exploiting people or firing people. King Charles's own staff at Clarence House were made redundant within days of him ascending the throne. In my view, it goes to show that we blue-collar workers have higher moral standards than the ruling class.

CEO Simon Thompson (who, by the way, was booted out of the Peterborough Delivery Office during the time of the ballot) says that Royal Mail will play an important role in delivering letters of condolence to the Royal Family. Surely he knows that his managers are instructed to prioritise parcels over letters, because parcels are profitable while letters aren't. Surely he knows that important letters, from the NHS, or from someone's grandma or granddad, often get parked to one side while frivolous parcels get delivered.

You have to understand the effect that the job has on the psychology of a postie. For a lot of people, their postie is the only person they ever see, their only friend. When you are a postie, you don't want to let people down. You be-

come very customer-oriented. On the other hand, if you're a manager and your life is in the office, you won't feel that way.

Managers sometimes remark on what a great day it's been, because we have only failed a certain number of duties. If you're a postie, you never want to fail any duty. But we are forced to, because we have far more work than we have workers. There are numerous vacancies that are deliberately kept vacant, to cut costs.

Trying to meet our targets is like trying to beat Usain Bolt at a race – impossible, demoralising, and incredibly taxing on the body. So virtually every postie works beyond their contracted hours to try and clear the backlog, especially if we've been on strike.

I think the union should tell everybody to work to rule and leave work on time, but they haven't done that, and this is wrong. First of all we deserve time to ourselves and time to rest. But also, working to rule would make our strike more effective. It is a form of industrial action in itself, in a way. Especially because Royal Mail only profits off overtime.

Since my last interview with *Solidarity*, I've read more about Workers' Liberty's politics. I hadn't realised that there was a difference between Marxism and Stalinism, and I feel very positive about

the work that this group is doing. I'm a trade unionist, I don't consider myself hugely political, but communism in principle is absolutely right.

The gap between the wealthy and the workers is vast and it must be narrowed. We must stand up for the weak, for workers who are bullied by the bosses. Workers should have a share in the wealth that they create. □

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Truss: foolish but dangerous

By Martin Thomas

Like Truss's energy-bills measure will give people high bills instead of huge ones. The tax cuts predicted by Kwasi Kwarteng's "mini-Budget" on 23 September will give £30 billion more relief, mostly to the well-off.

What's not to like? A lot.

The Tories moved under the threat of worse-placed energy retailers and businesses with high gas usage going bust, and Tory or floating voters with big houses being alienated by huge bills. The energy-bills measure will also save the government some billions in interest payments on RPI-linked bonds by reducing the predicted rise in measured inflation rates.

But from the point of view of the working class:

- The 4.3 million mostly-poorer households on pre-payment meters will suffer most. Direct debits spread costs over the year.

Ownership

Pre-payment meters mean more spending in winter, when it's colder – and maybe twice as much this winter as last. Solidarity advocated a crash insulation and energy-efficiency drive, and a free basic quota of energy per household, paid for by taxing the rich and by taking the whole energy industry into public ownership and so confiscating profits.

- Price rises, e.g. for food, still remain high.
- We face the prospect of paying in other ways longer term.

Truss and Kwarteng are essaying a big shift in Tory economics. For decades the dominant ideology among capitalist market enthusiasts has been "budget-balancing".

But now Truss is doing probably the biggest "handout" (subsidy) in British history, and tax cuts, and "putting it all on the credit card", with the plea that these measures will increase growth from which to pay off the increased debt.

The precedent is Ronald Reagan in the USA, after 1980. Reagan cut taxes for the well-off, ran huge budget deficits, and claimed that would unchain new growth which would "trickle down". It didn't in any short term, though Reagan rode

out resistance and by 1984 the slump had turned round sufficiently to get him re-elected.

Truss's energy tariff relief is done by a handout to the energy retailers. Immediately the handout is "paid for" by adding another £150 billion of government borrowing (about the same as the NHS annual budget) to a government debt which already stands at £2,400 billion (up from under £1,000 billion in 2009-10, before the Tories came in). Fact-check for those blaming aid to Ukraine: for that Truss promises £2.3 billion in 2023, small change in government-spending terms.

Surge

The Truss plan could force an extra-big surge in interest rates to enable the government to continue to sell bonds, especially if the pound continues to decline relative to other currencies as it already has done since June 2021 (\$1.42 to \$1.14) and the balance-of-payments deficit continues to widen. Expect moves later down the line to recoup the debt by cutting benefits and public-service jobs and pay.

Also, much of the consumer benefit will go to better-off people with big houses, incentivising them to continue wastefully high energy consumption instead of going for insulation and other energy-efficiency measures.

Ecologically the policy is bad for that reason and because it comes in a package with fracking, more North Sea gas extraction, and a block on onshore wind and solar farms.

Much of the benefit of the £150 billion will go to capitalist firms in the energy sector. Before the plan, Bloomberg News [estimated](#) £170 billion excess profits over the next two years for gas producers and electricity generators, from higher world-market gas prices and marginal pricing. The handout means they can continue to expect those profits despite tariffs being limited.

The Tories have strong incentives to rally round Truss short-term, but many know her economics is quackery.

If the current strike surge accelerates, it has a good chance of pushing Truss off balance. □

Energy: make Labour demand public ownership!

By Sacha Ismail

As Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, put it: "Public ownership and democratic control of our energy system provides the answer to a whole series of problems faced by working-class people. Public ownership and workers' control make the perpetrators of the energy crisis pay for the damage they have done, while giving democratic power back to those who produce this wealth and those who need it."

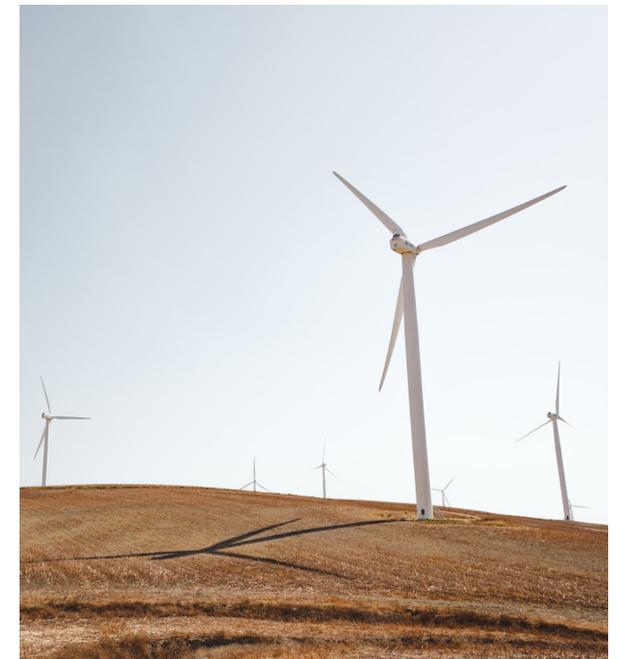
The last two Labour Party conferences, in 2019 and 2021, voted overwhelmingly for public ownership of energy. In August the TUC came out for taking the energy firms (retail only, sadly) into public ownership. But Keir Starmer's Labour leadership – despite what Starmer said in the 2020 Labour leadership election – opposes any version this policy, as it opposes public ownership of water, Royal Mail and, in all but name, rail.

As prices surge, what Starmer advocates is a small windfall tax to part-pay for an energy price freeze lasting only six months. It would be a variant of big subsidies for the retail companies; would leave bills still high for the poorest, and very high after six months; and includes no quick plan to run down fossil fuels and boost energy efficiency and renewables.

Despite Labour's pathetic stance, and a general lack of labour movement campaigning, public ownership of energy is already popular. In August pollsters Survation found 66% supported the demand, with only 22% opposed; that included not only 74% of Labour supporters but 60% of Tories (with only 30% opposed). This month Survation found 87% of Labour members in support.

This year's Labour conference (24-8 September, Liverpool) will once again discuss motions on public ownership. It should be the start of a real labour movement campaign for public ownership, forcing the Labour leadership to come on board.

We need public ownership and democratic re-organisation of the entire energy industry – not



just the retail companies, but those that run the power stations, the grid and North Sea fossil fuel production. That would allow us to:

- Stop bailing out private energy companies at public expense;
- Redistribute billions in profits into new low-carbon energy production and energy efficiency measures including house insulation;
- Restructure bills to provide a free or very cheap energy allowance for households to cover basic needs, while avoiding the climate-destroying trap of subsidising prices for higher-level energy consumption. □

• The socialist Labour Party grouping Labour Left Internationalists will be campaigning for these demands at Labour conference and in the months afterwards. More: bit.ly/mo-int. Get in touch: team@momentuminternationalists.org. Fire Brigades Union pamphlet on public ownership of energy: bit.ly/fbuenergy. We Own It campaign briefing: bit.ly/weownenergy



Solidarity

For a workers' government

SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE MONARCHY!

By Sacha Ismail

A hundred and twenty-five years ago, for Queen Victoria's 60th year on the throne, Labour's first leader Keir Hardie wrote:

"If we are for the Queen we are not for her subjects. The throne represents the power of caste – class rule... [The monarchy] is the centre, if not the source, of the corrupting influences which constitute Society... In this country loyalty to the Queen is used by the profit-mongers to blind the eyes of the people. We can have but one feeling in the matter – contempt for thrones and for all who bolster them up". (More of Hardie: page 9).

Today, too, the monarchy is not a harmless bit of pageantry, let alone a positive national institution. It is a problem. The labour movement should fight to abolish it, as part of a wider fight to reshape government and society in working-class interests.

The royal family's wealth is only a small fraction of the vast wealth our ruling class enjoys at the working class's expense. Still, the monarchy is a show-symbol of privilege and inequality. The extravagant ceremony around the queen's fu-

neral, while 70% of food banks say they will have to turn people away or reduce rations this winter, should drive home that point.

For centuries the monarchy has been bound up with colonialism and with the UK's efforts to project global power even after colonialism. After Elizabeth's death, debate about the monarchy is breaking out first in former British colonies that still have the monarch as head of state, notably Jamaica.

The monarchy is closely connected to various undemocratic aspects of the UK's politics. In a social or political crisis it can be used against democracy and working-class interests – as in Australia in 1975, when the queen's representative kicked out a reforming Labor government.

If Parliament is deadlocked, the monarch's power to choose who gets the first chance to form a government can be important.

Even now, through a host of mechanisms, the royal family exercises influence, including for instance to prevent laws that would require them to reveal their wealth.

Last but not least, the idea that working-class people have something in common with the



royals and other billionaires and millionaires, as Hardie puts it, "blinds the eyes of the people".

It seems every union of any size put out a tribute to the queen, with the honourable exception of the Fire Brigades Union. Unions rushed to say they were cancelling strikes and conferences out of "respect".

And the Labour Party leadership has been wretched, tweeting "God Save the King" (so it's not just a monarchist party, but a Church of England one?) Police repression of small anti-monarchy protests has brought [complaints](#), but mostly not from the labour movement.

Already a substantial – long-growing – minority opposes the monarchy. Probably in the years ahead the minority will grow further.

Silence from the left will slow that growth. Now is the time to speak out confidently. □

• More: bit.ly/againstmonarchy