

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



CAPITALISM: A NEW CRISIS

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Capitalism: a new crisis



A slump is coming. There will be an economic “crisis”, not just in the sense of bad times, but in the more precise sense of a wave of collapses, failures, unemployment. It will come together with high inflation and social cuts.

It may be mild or it may be sharp. Maybe it will be mild enough to be just a slowdown, rather than a crisis, but that looks less and less likely.

The signs are bad worldwide, and worse in the UK.

The price inflation which many central banks, early this year, thought might be a temporary result of supply blockages, is now well “embedded”. Central banks are increasing their official interest rates to curb inflation.

Capitalism can, in general, live with inflation; but it seeks moderate and predictable inflation, to frame its investment plans.

In the 1980s, high interest rates did eventually push down inflation; but, as the economists say, with “long and variable lags”. They did it by reducing market demand, i.e. by promoting recession; and with very high interest rates for long periods.

Meanwhile, even with aid of rising prices, profit rates, generally rising since the mid 1980s, are sagging. The *Economist* reports: “corporate titans everywhere are now warning of profit hits... The decades-long rise in corporate earnings no longer looks inexorable”.

Profit rates rose on the rebound from the Covid lockdowns, as pent-up spending power of the rich and bet-

ter-off was released. That process has probably reached its limit. New pressures on profit have come from union action and from labour shortages (some due to increased long-term sick rates).

A system already overloaded by expanded government and private-capitalist debt is being shaken by the Ukraine war and the wave of Covid ultra-lockdowns in China.

Higher interest rates will hit poorer and middling capitalist countries, making it harder for them to cover their debt payments, while many of those countries also face higher prices for food and energy imports.

In the nature of capitalism, spirals of increasing debt and credit like since early 2020 are always at risk of ending in snowballing breakdown rather than slow readjustment.

Britain is especially close to crisis for two reasons. Brexit has diminished trade and labour supply. Truss and Kwarteng made a sudden push for big handouts to energy companies and tax cuts for the rich, explained by vague promises of getting economic growth which would quickly balance the books.

That alarmed “the markets”, in other words, the big capitalist operators who buy government IOUs (bonds). Even after Jeremy Hunt’s reversal on 17 October of “almost all” of “Trussonomics”, “the markets” will demand double reassurance, double austerity.

We face hard times. We face them, however, with a labour movement more mobilised than it was on the eve of the previous crash in 2008.

Socialists will explain that the crisis comes not from inevitable or astronomical factors, but from the innately haywire workings of a system which makes human welfare depend on



Pic: @gewman

“trickle-down” from the competitive battles among a few of the ultra-rich to grab markets, coin profits, make good on speculations.

We will argue for the labour movement to turn to policies around which workers can organise to save our livelihoods, increase our power, and hasten the day when we can oust the profiteers.

- Public ownership of the whole energy industry, allowing for free provision of a basic quota of energy to each household, acceleration of energy-efficiency, and rapid conversion to renewables and nuclear

- Public ownership of high finance, running banks and insurance and pensions as a public service, allowing for

democratic control of investment decisions and reducing the vulnerability of public policy to “the markets”

- Restoration of public services, in the first place the NHS, and reversal of privatisation and marketisation

- Wage and benefit rises to match inflation, with “escalator clauses” bringing further monthly rises in line with price rises

- A programme of public works and reduced work hours which ensures good jobs with good pay for all who want them

- Stop new anti-union laws; repeal the existing laws back to Thatcher; and establish the right to organise, to strike, and to picket. □

Private affluence and public squalor



By Martin Thomas

The idea that socialism is about workers getting the “full proceeds” of our labour was influential in the 19th century, enough so that a version of it appeared in the old (1918-95) Clause Four of the Labour Party rulebook.

Karl Marx debunked it in

his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Many items must be deducted from the “proceeds of labour” before an individual distribution. Notably “that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc. From the outset, this part grows considerably in comparison with present-day society, and it grows in proportion as the new society develops”.

Capitalist economics prioritises the production of things which can be sold at a profit.

Even modestly well-off workers can buy new smartphones. No-one can “buy” a sustainable environment, because it can’t be packaged as a commodity for sale. Thus, as the liberal US economist J K Galbraith put it, “private affluence, public squalor”.

Remedial health care can be packaged as a commodity for sale, but with difficulties. Preventive care largely can’t.

Thanks to the efforts of labour movements, and also to the assent of capitalists who want cities when they

can move around easily and securely, and hire labour smoothly, capitalist governments always organise some “public” goods. Even the USA spends billions on Medicare.

Under the rule of capital, that provision is always at risk.

The National Health Service now is more overwhelmed than it was during the worst of Thatcher’s cuts – longer waiting lists, great staff shortages – even before winter and a probable new Covid wave, small or large.

Jeremy Hunt’s cuts an-

nouncement indicates that will get worse.

As well as striking for wage rises, the labour movement should be campaigning for restoration of the NHS – at least as energetically as we did in the 1980s, when we did in fact force some turnaround from Thatcher’s policies.

In a socialist society, ruled by solidarity rather than profit, improvement of “public goods” will be primary, and individual acquisition of more “stuff” beyond the basics only secondary. □

Strikes still stepping up

By Ollie Moore

Ballot results from some civil services, from university academic staff, and from some health workers, are due in the next few weeks. Postal workers' strikes over pay, jobs, and conditions are now entering what some activists have called a "crunch time" for the dispute. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has named 19 days of strikes running until early December, covering days such as Black Friday (25 Nov) and Cyber Monday (28 Nov).

Royal Mail management has responded with significant escalation of its own, announcing plans to cut 10,000 jobs. In turn, CWU members will need to prepare to escalate their strikes again in the run-up to Christmas, perhaps the most important time of the year for Royal Mail in commercial terms, if the

19 days don't force concessions. The overall picture, then, is of a strike wave continuing to spread and draw in more workers. National disputes, such as the rail unions' fights and the CWU's battles with Royal Mail and BT, are becoming entrenched.

Some partial victories have been won (some bus workers, Scottish local government, barristers), but in the big national disputes there is still no sign of meaningful concessions from employers.

To break through, unions should try to "shorten" disputes wherever possible by calling forms of action likelier to produce results than, for example, the sporadic 24-hour strikes still pursued by the rail unions.

And the potential to cohere a class-wide fightback against inequality is

growing. The first step towards that is conscious coordination of strikes – unions communicating directly, on as democratic a basis as possible, to co-ordinate their actions and strike at the same time.

Cross-union committees, linked to the existing local structures of the labour movement, such as Trades Councils, can also discuss local coordination – joint demonstrations, fundraising for strike funds, public activity such as street stalls in town centres during strike days. Rallies of the Enough is Enough campaign have been well-attended: we want that energy translated into ongoing democratic organisation on the ground.

Despite government disarray, senior Tories remain determined to implement new anti-union laws, including



their 2019 manifesto commitment to impose minimum service levels during transport strikes. The TUC has called a lobby of Parliament and rally on 2 November, which includes opposition to the new laws as one of its demands; a far more expansive campaign is needed, organised directly by unions themselves. □

One-day, indefinite, and other strikes

By Ollie Moore

The current wave of strikes has seen the reappearance of a trade union tactic once standard, and stronger than series of one-day or few-day strikes: the indefinite strike.

Three indefinite strikes have been called in the current wave so far – criminal barristers, Arriva bus drivers in garages in north and east London, and housing maintenance workers for Barnet council (strike only just started). The barris-

ters' strike lasted just over a month, and secured a 15 per cent increase. Unite called off the Arriva strike a week before it was due to take place, after the employer offered 10-11 percent, which workers voted to accept. The lesson: indefi-

nite strikes, or even the threat of them, can win.

For many years prior to the current resurgence, strikes had become often more a token protest than an effort to win concessions. Strikes that lasted more than a day were rare. But increasingly, unions seem to be leaving that approach.

The CWU's 19 days of strikes in Royal Mail, although sporadic, is a significant escalation. Unite members in Liverpool docks are striking for two weeks, with West Midlands Metro workers striking for 52 days through to January. From PCS we have reports of a consensus on the union's executive that sporadic 24-hour strikes don't work.

Rail union RMT is still seen by many as representing the vanguard of the strike wave. But the pace of action it has set in its disputes with Network Rail, mainline Train Operating Companies, and London Underground, has now been radically outstripped by other unions.

Of course, RMT's strategy would be justifiable if there was evidence it was likely to be effective. Unfortunately, that evidence is scant.

Escalation must be sustainable. Few unions may be in a position to call indefinite strikes in the immediate future. But union leaders who say they don't want to "exhaust" members by escalating too quickly

do their members a disservice by assuming they have energy for nothing more than sporadic 24-hour strikes (and endless energy for those sporadic strikes).

RMT is now re-balloting in its national dispute. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said at the TUC (18 Oct) that more strike dates will be announced soon, but we don't know for sure. The balloting period can however be used to discuss and win support for escalation: for example, striking for three days one month, then four, then five...

As Christmas approaches and the cost-of-living crisis intensifies, workers may be understandably worried about the financial impact of sustained strikes. Unions can mitigate those worries with effective use of strike funds and hardship payments.

Unite has done best on that, guaranteeing strike pay of £70 per day, with plans to increase the amount. Smaller unions with fewer resources will need to make targeted hardship payments to members most in need rather than paying across-the-board strike pay. RMT did well to allocate £500,000 from a national disputes fund to branches, and CWU has taken a good step by setting up a national strike fund. Local branches and committees can also set up fundraising efforts. □

Strikes

Since 15 Oct: West Midlands Metro workers (Unite) strike for 52 days (non-consecutive), up to start of Jan

Since 17 Oct: Housing repair workers in Barnet, north London (Unison) on indefinite strike, the first ever sanctioned by Unison's Industrial Action Committee

18-20 Oct and 1-3 Nov: Teachers at Calverton school in Newham (NEU) strike

20 and 24 Oct: BT workers (CWU) strike

20, 25 Oct and 28 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

18-20 Oct: FE workers (UCU) strike

From 21 Oct: Arriva bus drivers in Jesmond (Unite) strike

22-30 Oct: Workers in 65 magistrates' courts in England and Wales (PCS) strike

24-28 Oct: Woolwich ferry workers (Unite) strike

24 Oct-7 Nov: Liverpool dock workers (Unite) strike

28 and 31 Oct: Stagecoach bus drivers in Sunderland (GMB) strike

2, 8, 14, 23, 30 Nov: Department-specific strikes of Royal Mail workers (CWU)

3, 5, 7 Nov: RMT strikes on Network Rail, and (3 Nov) on London Underground

3, 9, 15, 24 Nov and 1 Dec: Department-specific strikes of Royal Mail workers (CWU)

4, 10, 16, 25 Nov and 2 Dec: Department-specific strikes of Royal Mail workers (CWU)

Ballots

18 Oct-15 Nov: Rail workers at Network Rail and 15 Train Operating Companies (RMT) re-ballot for continued action in their dispute over pay, jobs, and conditions

Until 19 Oct: Amazon workers in Coventry and Doncaster (GMB) ballot for action over pay

24 Oct: Announcement of ballot results of Higher Education workers in UCU

Until 27 Oct: Midwives in Scotland (RCM) ballot for action over pay

28 Oct-13 Jan: School workers (NEU) ballot for action

Until 2 Nov: Nurses (RCN) ballot for strikes over pay

Until 10 Nov: Unison members at the Environment Agency ballot for action over pay.

19 Oct-19 Nov: Prospect members at the Environment Agency ballot for action over pay. (GMB and Unite are also expected to ballot their members there.)

24 Oct-29 Nov: Ambulance workers across 11 trusts in England and Wales (GMB) ballot for action over pay

27 Oct-9 Jan: Teachers (NASUWT) ballot for action over pay

Until 7 Nov: Civil servants (PCS) ballot for action over pay, job cuts, and other cost-of-living issues

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

Around 9 Jan: Junior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay □

Paul Mason is wrong, but he's less wrong than Nick Wright



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Nick Wright is a frequent contributor to the Morning Star and prominent member of the Communist Party of Britain. Back in the 1980's he was one of the unreconstructed Stalinists grouped around the *Straight Left* newspaper in opposition to the then leadership of the Communist Party. The Straight Left people reckoned the CP had gone soft ("revisionist"), distanced itself from the Soviet Union and other "socialist" countries, while at home it was paying insufficient attention to workplace and union organisation. Things would get even worse, as the openly reformist Eurocommunists gained control of the party and then dissolved it.

Since then, the "revisionists" and Eurocommunists have mainly disappeared, the CP has been re-established (as the Communist Party of Britain) and former Straight Left-ists like Nick Wright and Andrew Murray are happily back in the party (Murray after a brief sojourn in Labour so that he

could join Jeremy Corbyn's inner circle).

But the battle against "revisionism" continues and the ever-vigilant Wright has identified a new enemy: Paul Mason. In a *Morning Star* article (13 October) taking up most of a centre-page spread and denouncing a *New Statesman* article (bit.ly/ns-pm) by Mason, Comrade Wright denounces him for "consigning to invisibility all those uncomfortably proletarian elements – the actual working class in its complexity and movement – ... who refuse to fit into Mason's new Nato-friendly constellation of EU-enamoured liberals."

We'll come on the stuff about Nato and the EU in a moment, but first let's deal with the claim that Mason (an ex-Trotskyist who has undoubtedly moved rightwards and has massive illusions in Starmer) now – unlike the proletarian champion Wright – ignores "the actual working class".

Here is what Mason wrote (in the *New European*) in June: "... it's essential to support the strikes. They are one way – if not the only way – to redress the fundamental sickness facing the economy... As you hear the mouldy old rhetoric come out – about union bullies, di-

nosaurus and barons – remember: almost everything workers have, from the time-limited working day to anti-harassment rules to the very existence of the weekend, was won by doing what those teachers, railway workers and baggage handlers are about to do."

In other words, what Wright says about Mason "consigning to invisibility" the "uncomfortably proletarian elements" is simply rubbish – and, given that Wright can read and is not unintelligent, deliberately dishonest rubbish.

Wright's evident hatred of Mason has nothing to do with the proletariat – it's about Europe (Wright's hostility to the EU is obsessive, even by the standards of the CPB and *Morning Star*) and about Ukraine.

The *Morning Star* is formally opposed to Russia's invasion, but Wright is among many contributors who make little secret of where their sympathies lie. In an article published on 24 March, Wright gloated that anyone joining the military defence of Ukraine would "encounter a trained military force [i.e. the Russians] equipped with armour, superior communications and effective air support ... this cause is attractive

principally to an international alliance of the foolish and fascist."

By 9 April, he was asking, in obvious disappointment, "why the Russians did not deploy their undoubted capacity to take out Ukraine's air defences and deny the Ukrainian airforce the capacity to intervene? And despite the highly visible material damage why are civilian casualties so low?"

That tells you all you need to know about Wright's denunciation of Mason: little or nothing to do with Mason's rightward drift, or his illusions in Starmer or, indeed, Nato: it's because Mason is pro-European and backs Ukraine, whereas Wright is a Stalinist isolationist who hates the EU and has (shall we say) a lot of sympathy for Putin when it comes to Ukraine. □



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](#).

Saturday 22 October, 10.30am-6.30pm: Student cost of living conference 2022, University of Sheffield Students' Union

Sunday 23 October, 6.30pm: Ideological roots of the Truss government

Tuesday 25 October, 6pm: Solidarity with Iranian women, Cafe Nero, Laidlaw Library, Leeds University, LS2 9JT

Wednesday 26 October 7pm: South Asian Women Workers Fightback, SOAS, 10 Thornhaugh St, London, WC1H 0XG

Wednesday 9 November 7pm: Woman, life, Liberty: Iran rises up for women's rights, Marchmont Street Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London, WC1N 1AB

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



Halfway house on healthcare



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

I was by no means a sickly child but I got pneumonia each year from when I was two to seven. This meant trips up to the public hospital. I was usually given some physiotherapy and an injection of penicillin.

I'll try to explain to readers about the healthcare in Australia: the good, the bad and the average.

When I was young, and prior to the election of the Hawke Government and the introduction of Medicare in 1983, apart from a brief period of Medibank in the Whitlam years 1973-1975, Australia had a system where if you could not afford a doctor you waited in the emergency room of the hospital.

In Australia today, GPs will either "bulk-bill" the patient (meaning they charge only what the government refunds) or the GP will demand a payment (on top of the government rate). My GP charges \$86 for a consultation. I pay it and get a refund from the government of approximately \$37, so I'm out of pocket \$49.

GPs tend to bulk-bill the elderly and those who depend on social welfare benefits.

Anyone in Australia can be treated in the hospital system for no charge. However the waiting times can stretch out for years for non-life-threatening conditions, e.g. a hip replacement. Specialist care in Australia in the private sphere is expensive.

So the Australian health system is somewhere between the British and US systems. Its emergency care is some of the best in the world. The percentage

of national income going to health care has increased steadily for many years. But worse-off people can still face

heavy care costs, or be unable to get care in good time.

A small majority of Australian adults have private health insurance. It is not cheap. I'm in my early 60s. My bill for the next 12 months is \$3,320 – about \$60 or £30 a week.

Private insurance is especially important for mental health. Major depression has been the bane of my life for last nearly 30 years. Beds for mental health patients in the public sphere are extremely difficult to get, and your psychiatrist may not be able to treat you should you get ill in a public hospital. So to be confident of getting care, I must have private health insurance.

Ambulance costs in Queensland are paid for by a levy on electricity bills. In other states, if you don't have insurance, you may well have to pay for using an ambulance. I think that is just plain wrong. □



www.workersliberty.org/all-the-rage

Where next for environment activism?



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

An oak sapling was planted in Parliament Square. Orange paint was daubed on a luxury car show room. Tomato soup was chucked at Vincent Van Gogh's Sunflowers painting (not damaging it, nor likely to). Two people closed the Dartford Crossing. A fossil fuel company got its windows smashed. Milk was spilt over the cheese counter at Fortnum and Mason. Those were some of the stunts that peppered Extinction Rebellion's weekend of action (14 October).

The weekend attracted fewer people than previous mobilisations. Since April, the Just Stop Oil splinter group has been blockading fossil fuel distribution centres. Over 1,600 activists have been arrested. It's thought that their brave efforts have slightly reduced fuel deliveries. But the use of injunctions and more aggressive policing has pushed back JSO. JSO led many of the high profile stunts on 14 October, but those increasingly look like stunts in place of a coherent political strategy rather than to promote one.

In the environmental movement "activism" is too often reduced to making noise to "raise awareness". "Direct action" becomes high-stakes performance art. Even those "direct actions" that lead to real reductions in CO2 emissions are short-lived and symbolic. Previous waves of environmentalism, like Climate Camp, failed to tackle the



issue of going beyond the symbolic, and ebbed and dispersed.

Even more ambitious direct action, like blowing up an oil pipeline (as Andreas Malm has advocated), would take us no closer to building a real movement on climate change and ecological collapse. The ecological crisis demands a political strategy to replace market control of economic life with democratic economic planning.

Only the workers' movement has the potential strength and interest to stop the escalating ecocide and confront the rule of profit. Activist energy would be better spent organising to transform the workers' movement into a force that can confront and overwhelm our ecocidal bosses. □

41 dead in Turkish mining disaster

By Len Glover

The carnage at the Amasra coal mine in the Northern Turkish Province of Bartın has again highlighted the appalling safety record of Turkish mines. By mid-afternoon Saturday 15 October the death toll had reached 41. It may get higher.

It is the worst disaster since that of the Soma mine in 2014 which killed 301; while back in 1992, 263 miners perished at the Zonguldak mine.

Records show that between 2000

and 2014 there have been more than 1,308 deaths in Turkish coalmines. This puts the Turkish mining industry's abysmal safety record on a par with that of China (although statistics for China are unreliable).

Coal is important to the Turkish economy. In 2012, 55% of Turkey's domestic energy production came from coal and lignite. Most mines were privatised in 2005 (the Amasra mine, however, is still nationalised), and most commentators blame the privatisation for the prevailing lack of

adherence to safety regulations and inadequate inspection procedures.

Whether this carnage is allowed to continue depends on the response of the miners' union, other unions and public opinion. Under the government of President Recep Erdoğan past manifestations of working class unrest, protests and strikes have been brutally suppressed. The struggle to re-nationalise the mines and introduce an effective system of mine-safety and inspection will be a hard one. □



Threats force trans-rights cancellations

By Zack Muddle

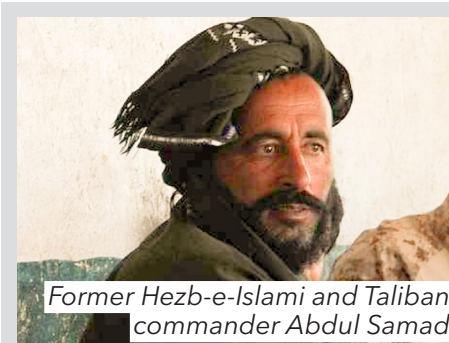
Transphobes have prevented two events through threats and intimidation. The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, a LGBTQ venue in South London, was forced on 13 October to [cancel](#) a fundraiser for Mermaids, a charity who support trans youth, after "severe threats" to the safety of the venue's staff by transphobes.

Local Labour councillors have spoken out in solidarity with those targeted. This comes after a barrage of transphobic attacks on Mermaids by the right wing press and the prime minister, with The Telegraph likening much-needed support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming young people to child abuse.

The same day, Katy Montgomerie, a pro-trans-rights commentator prominent on Twitter, announced that her planned talk at Warwick uni had been cancelled or postponed at short notice due to "controversy surrounding the talk [requiring] increased security".

There was a less successful campaign by far-right activists and transphobes this summer against "[Drag Queen Story Hour](#)".

Transphobes and the far right are getting more confident, censorious and aggressive. The left and labour movement must respond by loudly championing trans rights and free speech. Events threatened should not be cancelled, and we must mobilise to physically defend them. □



Former Hezb-e-Islami and Taliban commander Abdul Samad

More on secularism



Letter

I agree with Hein Htet Kyaw's main argument, but want to register a few initial queries and reservations.

The USA assisted Islamist movements in Afghanistan in their battle against the Russian occupation (1979-88). But it was not "resurrecting" them, and did not have a control over them it later lost. For the US strategists, it was enough that the Islamist movements tied down and undermined Moscow.

The rise of political Islam as a right-wing force channelling social rebellion in the Middle East and elsewhere was, as Hein says, "locally rooted". It was not invented by the USA, any more than movements like Trump's and the Evangelical right in the USA, the Brexiters in Britain, Le Pen in France, etc. were invented by Vladimir Putin (who nonetheless helped them).

I think I know what Hein is saying, but using the term "privileged" to describe white middle-class young people in Western Europe, USA, Australia, etc. is wrong, I think. Those people are much better off both materially and in civil rights than people in Myanmar. But that is not a privilege (a "peculiar benefit, advantage, or favour" granted by an authority, as the dictionary defines it).

It is a victory: the residual result of decades of labour-movement effort on the basis of the possibilities opened up by capitalist development. Privileges, we seek to end; those improved conditions, we seek to level everyone up to.

And beyond. Those middle-class young people are more "free to choose their own genders and lifestyles, free of social pressures" than poorer people in poorer countries. But still far from entirely free. And young people in migrant communities in countries like Britain sometimes suffer more religion-based conformist pressure in their families and communities than their counterparts in their parents' countries of origin. □

Martin Thomas, London



A new world food system



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

In the second half of his new book *Regenesis*, George Monbiot explores alternatives to the Global Standard Farm. (See previous articles on the book in *Solidarity* 647 and 648).

Monbiot rejects the commonplace green advocacy of low-tech, small-scale localist food production. "The systems we should favour are those that deliver high yields with low environmental impacts".

He argues for moving away from our unsustainable dependence on livestock farming and liberating grazing land for ecological restoration, while finding low-impact ways to replace the protein currently provided by domesticated animals.

Monbiot explores a variety of agricultural methods that are restoring soil health and biodiversity whilst producing yields that match or exceed the Global Standard Farm. The most radical food technologies do away with agriculture altogether.

Farm-free food is produced in fermentation tanks by energised bacteria which turn organic waste into nutri-

ent rich protein. By my reading this is a technology that has the potential to close the "metabolic rift" that Marx described in volume 3 of *Capital*.

It doesn't sound very appetising, but "if Moses had promised the Israelites a land of mammary secretions and insect vomit, [few] would have followed him to Canaan". Monbiot says that in terms of taste and texture, microbial protein could be made to be indistinguishable from meat and dairy alternatives. Microbes already produce a lot of our food, including alcohol, bread, cheese, yoghurt, and Quorn.

Microbial protein can be engineered to contain many nutrients currently scarce in a vegan diet, like vitamin B12. It can produce huge amounts of food on a tiny amount of land with minimal waste. The inputs are abundant waste products. Unlike plants with their annual growing cycle, microbial protein can be harvested eight times a day, every day of the year. Fermentation tanks can be located anywhere, and production is not dependent on climatic factors. There is an energy cost, but food systems could be integrated into solar and nuclear energy systems to use excess energy when demand is low. In any case, the energy inputs are a fraction of those used by the Global Standard Farm.

Currently such technologies are extremely marginal, poorly funded and

their advocates are up against some powerful vested interests. But Monbiot argues we might be about to see "an alignment of technological change, systemic fragility and public disquiet" that "could allow us to recast our relationship with the living planet".

The profit margins on beef, for example, are extremely slender. Most of the market is in ground beef for burgers and ready meals. If part of the ground beef market is captured by cheaper vegan alternatives, then the cost of the prime cuts will need to increase to compensate. At some point there may be a tipping point where the cattle industry is sent into a spiral of collapse, potentially liberating vast tracts of land.

Market forces rarely behave in such predictable ways, and capitalist control of the technology may squander this potential, but it exists.

Monbiot himself is a vegan, but he is sharp against "Microconsumerist Bollocks" as an approach to ecological questions. His starting point is that the survival of our civilisation relies on finding low-impact ways to produce our food. Large-scale livestock farming is incompatible with a sustainable future. Ethical meat – such as pasture-fed beef – is more resource-intensive than factory-farmed alternatives. Small herds of large herbivores can play a role in ecological restoration, but Monbiot debunks Allan Savory's [claims](#) for the re-

generative effects of intensive grazing.

Monbiot rails against unregulated neoliberalism but stops short of advocating common ownership, a planned economy, or any political strategy rooted in class politics.

However, he presents an interesting revision of the old socialist project of abolishing the distinction between town and country. He does not advocate dispersing city populations into smaller settlements; instead, densely populated cities, surrounded not by "the country" as a site of food production with its villages, but rather by large areas of wilderness alongside low-impact plant farming.

Monbiot's careful study of the current global food system, and his mapping of alternative futures, should start a serious discussion in the left and labour movement.

Too often, for the left and the labour movement, based mostly in the cities and working in profoundly human-generated environments, the work of food production is out of sight and assumed to be beyond our expertise.

The success of the Green Revolution in massively raising crop yields, and other agricultural innovations that have proved Malthus wrong, have led many of us to assume that the farmers know what they were doing. Monbiot's book shows us that we should have been paying more attention. □

Thakin Soe: Burmese Trotskyist?

By Hein Htet Kyaw

Thakin Soe (1906-1989) is known as one of the founders of the Communist Party of Burma. He was also the leader of the Red Flag Communist Party of Burma, a radical split from the CPB. Since Thakin Soe was critical of Stalinism, Mao Zedong's thought, and the CPB's leadership, he was called a Trotskyist dissident by most Stalinists, Maoists, and so-called Burmese communists of his time.

In the 1930s, Thakin Soe became a member of the nationalist Dobama Asiayone (Our Burma Association). In 1939, he founded the Communist Party of Burma with some other left-wing activists. At that time, Myanmar had two major left-wing tendencies, Stalinist and social-democratic. Thakin Soe belonged to the Stalinist camp initially. He later split from that group and became a third camp in Myanmar's poli-

tics. He denounced the CPB for using parliamentary means as the only mean for communist revolution. He correctly criticised the Browder parliamentary approach.

During the final years of Burma's independence struggle, the colonial British government tried to persuade Burma to join the British Commonwealth. The CPB's main theoretician, Hamendrnath Goshal, denounced that, and so did Thakin Soe. The Communist Party of Burma officially followed Maoism and a "popular front" of all progressive forces within the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, the dominant political alliance of that time. Thakin Soe's Red Flag Communist Party opposed working with non-communist groups and called for direct armed confrontation with the British to achieve independence.

Thakin Than Tun, a political leader of the Communist Party

of Burma, described the positions of the Red Flag Communist Party as "left adventurism".

But Thakin Soe's political conclusion there doesn't represent Trotskyism or Leninism at all. With the unilateral focus on armed struggle as the only tactic, he can be considered an ultra-leftist according to Trotskyist theory.

In his later books, Thakin Soe came over to the idea of a two-stage revolution. He suggested that in order for socialism to thrive, capitalism had to be matured first. Because the contradictions of capitalism would eventually cause the system to fail, he demanded that capitalism be advanced rather than a socialist revolution. That approach contrasted with the Permanent Revolution theory of Leon Trotsky and the April Theses of Lenin. His later writings suggest that Thakin Soe believed in peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism by means of parliamentary

action alone. Thakin Soe never qualified as a Trotskyist during his life. Perhaps his only understanding of Trotskyism was that Leon Trotsky opposed Stalin's "Marxism-Leninism". How-

ever, Thakin Soe was one of those Marxists who was willing to stand out from the crowd by speaking out for what he believed to be true. □



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On 18 Sep US president Joe Biden [declared](#) that “the [Covid] pandemic is over”. His chief medical adviser, Anthony Fauci, has rebuffed the claim, and Fauci is right. The USA has not yet reported an autumn-winter revival of infections, but is likely to follow the pattern of other countries, including Britain, where hospitalisations have tripled since 10 September (though levelling off since 4 October). A group of US health experts has [written](#): “We need a robust national booster campaign, more investment in tests, treatments, and next-wave vaccines, better protections for the immunocompromised and other high-risk groups, and healthier buildings that protect against Covid and other diseases”. Though the UK is further ahead with boosters, the same imperatives apply here:

- 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 public clinics for post-Covid conditions, more research, and recognition of the conditions 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. □

How Tories won a huge swing amidst Truss debacle

By Mohan Sen

Believe it or not, the Tories have just won a council by-election on a huge swing – in Leicester.

On 13 October, in North Evington ward, Leicester East parliamentary constituency, they took 49.6% – up 32.7%. Labour was down 49.8% to 22.5%; and the Greens up 20% to 25.8%.

In an area dominated by people of Indian background, this dramatic result seems to stem from a rise of the Hindu nationalist right and from pandering to it by Labour – who ran a Hindu right-sympathetic candidate, Rajul Tejura, in a predominantly Muslim area recently targeted by Hindu right activists.

Labour is also betraying the great numbers of Hindu and Hindu-background people who dislike the nationalist right and its attempts to divide, whether or not currently confident to be vocal.

About 40% of Leicester’s population is of South Asian background, predominantly Indian. Twenty years ago there were more Hindus than Muslims; both communities have grown but there are now more Muslims. North Evington is more heavily Muslim-background: already in 2011’s census 46.5% self-declared themselves Muslim, 21.6%

Hindu. It seems many Hindu-background voters, influenced by the Hindu right or by claims Labour is “anti-Hindu”, swung to the Tories; while a significant number of Muslim-background voters, in protest against Labour’s actual pandering to the Hindu right, voted Green (the Green candidate was also Muslim-background). This built on earlier shifts towards the Tories, who as elsewhere intertwine with the Hindu right.

The Labour candidate, Rajul Tejura, in 2019 organised a public celebration to mark Indian prime minister’s Narendra Modi and his right-wing BJP party’s re-election – a disaster for oppressed groups and the labour movement in India. Instead of fighting Hindu nationalism, Labour has tried unsuccessfully to annexe part of its support.

The by-election comes shortly after communal clashes in the area in which provocation by right-wing Hindu activists seems to have been central. There is growing Hindu right activity in Leicester, including by the far-right, Muslim-hating paramilitary group linked to the Indian government, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteer Organisation).

The most prominent of several Labour politicians at the 2019 event was



Keith Vaz

soon-to-be-ex-Leicester East MP Keith Vaz, who has an extensive record of supporting Hindu nationalism – and who appeared prominently on Tejura’s campaign literature.

Victorious Tory candidate Sanjay Modhwadia is a local “property investor” with connections to Leicester’s notorious textile industry; but Vaz and co. are deeply intertwined with the city’s capitalist class too. It is in the vacuum created by a lack of principled political divisions and strong working-class organisation that communalist politics of various sorts has grown.

But Labour’s pandering to the Hindu right is not limited to Leicester... □

- More: bit.ly/leicesterlabour

67% of Labour voters want to rejoin EU

By Sacha Ismail

Of those who voted Labour in 2019, YouGov found 67% would support a campaign to rejoin the EU; only 16% would oppose. 55% positively say Labour should campaign to rejoin the EU, with 28% opposed.

Meanwhile wider public opinion is shifting too. For a long time polls found a narrow majority or plurality against rejoining. The last five national polls have an average “rejoin” lead of 10.2%; in the five be-

fore that it was only 3.6%...

This in the absence of pretty much any leadership, including from an anti-Brexit left that feels deflated.

Yet, despite some buzz about the Labour leadership shifting on Europe, it is still effectively backing the hardest of Tory hard Brexits.

Only three months ago Starmer ruled out the UK even rejoining the European Single Market, despite the mayhem trade barriers are causing. He and his lieutenants have denounced freedom of move-



ment. But the new polling should give confidence to the anti-Brexit left to push back.

We must make the case to reverse Brexit. Yes, that would require negotiations which

might be long. But the way could be paved very quickly by rejoining the Single Market and restoring and extending free movement. □



More Black History Month reading

Martin Luther King and the Memphis sanitation strike

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Return to Gate Gourmet

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Marcus Garvey and the socialists

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School history and Black Lives Matter

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Shifts in the

By Martin Thomas

The longer-term background to the current moves towards slump in many countries is that economic barriers between countries are growing. The world is less “flat” than it used to be, in the sense of being a free-fire zone for capitalist trade and investment with negligible barriers to surmount at borders. It is more “multipolar”, in the sense of differentiated political and economic networks, each with its own centre or centres.

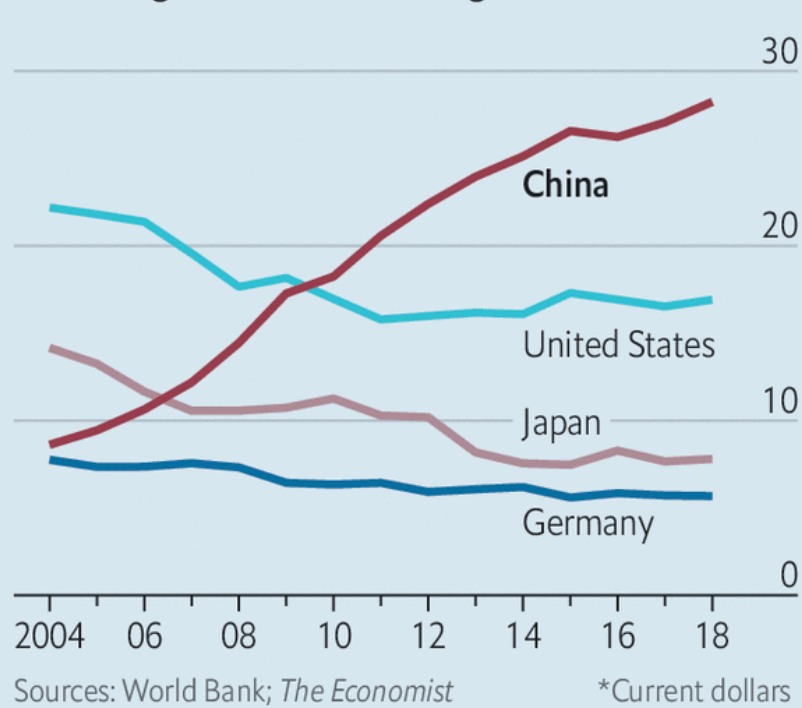
How far has this gone? What, in more exact terms, are the trends? What should socialists make of it?

Between 1945-7 and 1989-91 the world was, in broad terms, divided into two blocs. One bloc was dominated by the USA. Within that bloc, the old colonial empires withered (not without wars and horrors) and an “imperialism of free trade” grew, hegemonised financially, institutionally, and technologically by the USA. The other bloc was dominated by the USSR, mostly not through through any “dull compulsion of economic relations”, but politically and militarily (East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Afghanistan 1979). Many countries balanced between the blocs. Those include important ones like India, or China after 1972.

In 1989-91 the USSR-led bloc, and then the USSR itself, collapsed. By then an increasing number of poorer countries in or on the edges of the US-led bloc had generated (at least in part

Making gains

Share of global manufacturing value added*, %



of their territories) the infrastructure (electricity supply, transport, communications, a sufficient range of industrial supplies, available educated workforce, moderately stable conditions of law) which enabled the capitalist development in them of significant parts of global industrial production-chains (the “new international division of labour”). The countries formerly in the USSR-led bloc and now re-marketing their economies often suffered “shock therapy” trauma, but nevertheless were quite quickly integrated into that new international division of labour and into the institutions of the USA-led bloc: GATT (expanded in 1995 to WTO), IMF, EU, etc.

1991 to 2008 was the heyday of US-led globalisation. Foreign direct investment and complex global production chains burgeoned. The chief criterion of economic policy for most governments was more and more to make their countries attractive territory for footloose global capital to perch in (good infrastructure, educated workforces, favourable tax and legal regimes, low overhead costs), rather than the creation of national integrated industrial complexes.

Although the USA had gone into deficit in manufactured-goods trade from the 1970s, and in the 1980s many in the USA feared that Japan was “in the passing lane”, the USA remained the superpower. It was central financially, institutionally, politically, and militarily.

Since then criss-crossing develop-

ments have cumulatively modified the world system.

One: the rise of Chinese industry. Under Deng Xiaoping, from about 1978, the Chinese regime essentially returned agriculture to private plots and licensed foreign investment (initially, mostly, by overseas-Chinese capitalists) and private industry.

After the shock of 1989, the regime speeded privatisation while retaining a tight political grip.

In 2000 mainland China’s exports-plus-imports were still scarcely half of Japan’s, and not much more than Hong Kong’s. In 2001 China joined the World Trade Organisation. By 2004 it accounted for 9% of global manufacturing value-added, still way behind the USA at 23%. By 2018 China did 28% of global manufacturing value-added, and the USA 23%. The growth is as dramatic as Japan’s from the Korean war to the 1980s, or South Korea’s from the 1970s onwards, but on a much larger canvass.

Despite

Despite its current slowdown and property-sector slump (both linked to its ultra-lockdown Covid policy) China is now a leading centre in the highest technologies, and a leading centre of industrial research and development. It has also become a leading exporter of capital, through its Belt and Road Initiative, which (since 2013) provides loans and often construction capacity for ports, railways, roads, bridges, airports, dams, power stations, etc. in other countries.

Two: the USA’s debacle in Iraq. After the US’s easy victory against Saddam Hussein over Kuwait in 1991, and its apparent victories in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosova, and Afghanistan in 1996-2001,

a decisive section of the US ruling class became convinced that they could smooth out kinks in the fabric of the world “empire of capital” through measured and affordable deployment of US military power, and with small US casualties. In 2002-3 the USA’s Afghanistan venture looked like a success.

Within a year it was becoming clear that the US strategists’ hope for a quick, benign outcome in Iraq was delusory. US troops withdrew in 2009-11 leaving Iraq unprosperous, unstable, and closer to Iran and China, geopolitically, than the USA. Iraq abstained in the 141-5-35 UN vote on 2 March 2022 to demand Russian withdrawal from Ukraine.

In August 2021 the US conceded defeat in Afghanistan and withdrew. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosova stumble on without war, but with little success.

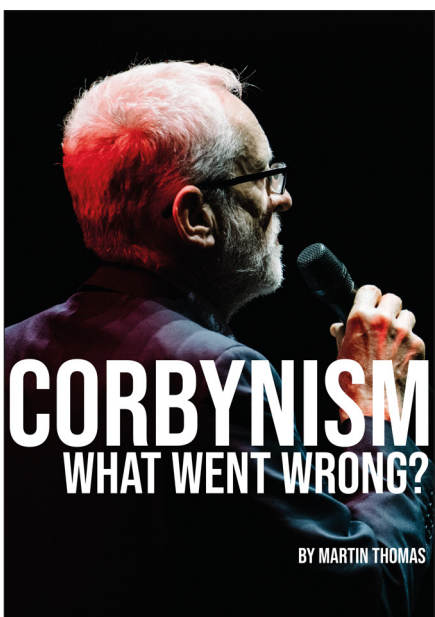
The US spent about \$2 trillion each on Afghanistan and Iraq, and maybe as much in associated ventures, with no favourable result to show for it. The US is still the world’s biggest military power, but it does not have the military hegemony it had in 1991-2004. The US is reluctant to go to war – essentially, it let Russia and Iran have their way in Syria – and its adversaries view it as less likely to win if it does go to war.

The hesitancy about war imposed on the US is surely a gain. But not an uncomplicated one. With it, states at odds with the US, like Putin’s Russia, become less hesitant (Syria, Ukraine).

Three: the 2008 credit crash, spreading out across the world from the USA. The world’s strongest governments, when they met to discuss the crash, were clear essentially only on one thing: they should avoid an escalation of protective tariffs. On the whole they did.

Many feared or hoped that the crash would destroy Wall Street’s centrality in world financial networks. It did not do that. As Adam Tooze puts it, those financial networks still have as central: “the sinews of finance, law and contractual construction knit by key players above all in Wall Street and... in London. The systems of English law and the legal code of the state of New York, are the preeminent codes for big debt deals... 90 percent of global forex transactions – \$6 trillion per day! – include the dollar as one currency in the pair.

“The dollar system is not a giant anachronism with a bulls-eye on its forehead... It is a sprawling, resilient network of state-backed, commercially driven, profit-orientated transactions, lubricated by the easy availability of dollars, interwoven with American ge-



Lessons for socialist activists and the Labour left from the Labour Party under Corbyn 2015-20. 60 pages, £4. □

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world order

opolitical influence”.

The 2008 crash turned Chinese industry towards internal demand, a shift executed through huge infrastructure and property spending, and made possible by the development of that industry to more complex forms. China's exports have not decreased in absolute terms, but as a percentage of China's output they have gone down from 35% in 2006 to about 20% from 2016 onwards. Previously they had risen from 2.5% in 1970 to that 35% in 2006.

Partly as a result of that shift by China, the proportion of world trade to world output, which had gone up steadily since World War Two, with an acceleration since the 1980s, has stagnated since 2008.

Four, another offshoot of 2008: the rise of Trumpism and the like. Syriza in Greece, the Indignados movement in Spain, Corbynism in Britain, were all defeated or neutralised, and right-wing populist-nationalism became the major beneficiary of the discrediting of the status quo. Thus Trump, Bolsonaro, Orbán, Le Pen, Erdogan, Modi, Meloni, etc.

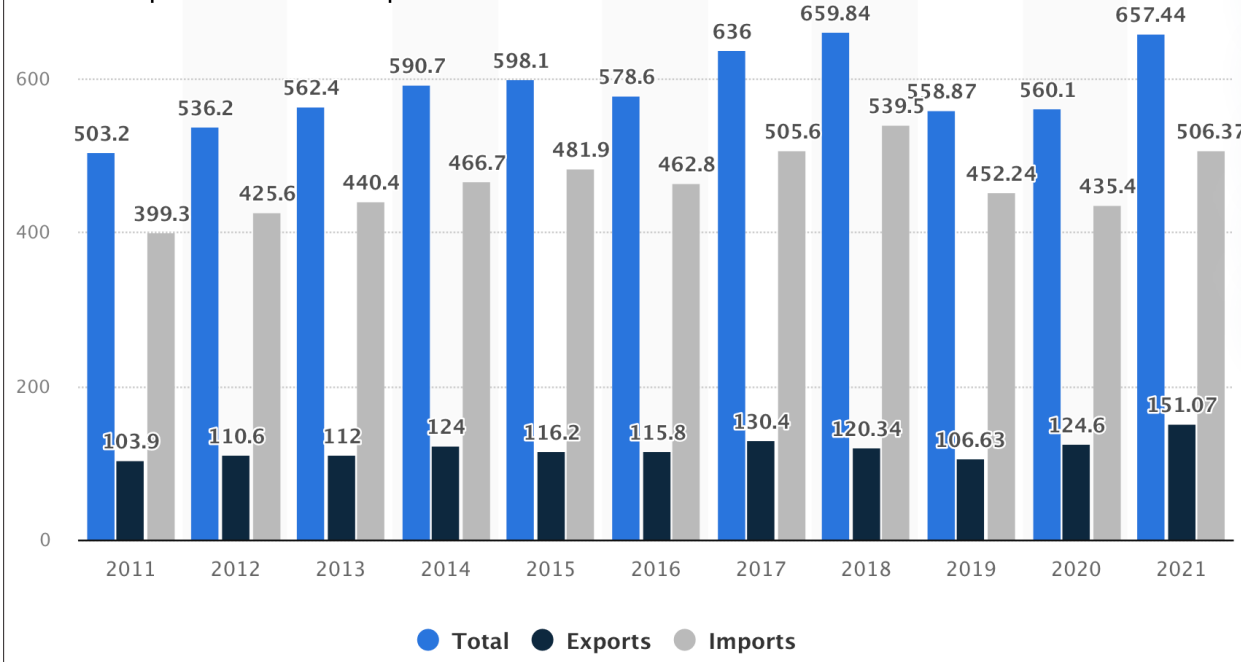
Against China, Trump moved into outright protectionism, increasing tariffs and seeking to block export of technology to China and Chinese access to some high-tech contracts in the West. Trump signed a “phase one” deal with China in January 2020, but at best only levelled off the conflict. Biden has continued Trump's course, and Europe has more or less gone along with Biden.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen talks about “friend-shoring of supply chains to a large number of trusted countries”, code for finding sources alternative to China, though she has smoothed it by also saying: “I really hope that we don't end up with a bipolar system... We need to work very hard and to work with China to try to avert such an outcome”.

Semiconductors are a major terrain. Advanced semiconductors are produced in the US, China, Japan, and (the most advanced) in South Korea and above all Taiwan. The US passed the Chips Act in July 2022, aiming to use state subsidies to nurture advanced semiconductor production in the US, including by the world's leading producer, Taiwan's TSMC. How well this effort will work is doubtful.

The tariff contest between the US and China has not escalated into a general

US exports to and imports from China



world tariff surge. It has not stopped US-China trade increasing (though the US's trade-output ratio has stagnated more than others' since 2008). But the contest shows no sign of ending.

Five: Russia's change of course under Putin. From 1945 to the late 1980s, the USSR was the world's second superpower. As late as the 1960s and even 1970, editions of the USA's standard economics textbook, by Paul Samuelson, carried a graph suggesting USSR economic output would outstrip the USA's some time between the mid-1980s and the late 90s.

The 1991 collapse of the USSR re-

vealed its economy to be, as right-wingers had described it, “Bulgaria with Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles”. Mass pauperisation and oligarchic looting followed “shock therapy” privatisation. By the late 1990s that crash had bottomed out. World oil prices rose fast from 2002 to 2008 (then crashed, then recovered, but not to the same height). In his early period, Vladimir Putin, who became prime minister and then president in 1999-2000, navigated an economic revival (to 2008) based on rising oil and gas exports, Western foreign investment within a framework of crony capitalism, acquisition by Russian oligarchs of foreign assets especially in “Londongrad”, and cautious political rapprochement. A “NATO-Russian Council” was set up in 2002, building on a NATO-Russian treaty of 1997, and lasted until 2014. From 1998 to 2014 Russia was added to the G7 cabal of world powers, making it the G8.

At the best of the revival between the late 1990s and 2008, Russia never looked near to recovering superpower status. In 1991 it had been a bigger factor in the world economy than China; by 2008 it was a much smaller one. But it still had great military clout. Putin turned Russia to a new form of military-based imperialism (Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, Ukraine in 2014, Ukraine in 2022). None of those military ventures has been or looks like being particularly lucrative for the Russian state. But they make it a power to be feared, an ally to be sought, as Tsarist Russia was too, despite its economic poverty. Russia now has more military forces in Africa than France or the USA or any other power.

Six: The United Nations was set up at the end of World War Two essentially as a way to police the world order through economic sanctions concerted by the big powers, thus avoiding the costs of war. The soon-sharpening rivalry between the USSR and the USA made the UN unable to work that way, but the USA has gone on to use sanctions widely, especially from the early 1990s.

Now it targets two powers which are both, each in its own way, big: China (big economically and militarily) and Russia (big militarily). By default the effect will be to push the world towards bloc rivalries.

I don't know the significance for the system of some other shifts: the eclipse of the “BRICS” as a group, but the economic rise of India; the possible effects on world trade if environmentalist pressure on governments rises enough, to reduce oil and gas trade.

Pandemic

The Covid pandemic and lockdowns brought big short-term disturbances, but I don't know how much they have changed the system for good. The “Spanish Flu” pandemic of 1918-20 passed quickly into private memory after killing more people than Covid (50 to 100 million, the equivalent of 200 to 400 million today as a proportion of world population, and mainly young otherwise-healthy people; for Covid, the official figure is 6.5 million, the real one maybe 20-odd million).

But a new slump, unless very mild, will heighten all the dangers developing today, notably protectionism, the rise of illiberal nationalist politics (with or sometimes without protectionism), and war. As well as economic crises, more and more weather disturbances, accelerated by global warming, will add to the tensions and conflicts.

The prospect of China smoothly overtaking the USA to take over as the centre of the world economy, as the USA took over from the UK, seems small. In any case, the UK-US transition took place not through smooth evolution alone, but was pushed along by two world wars; and there are grounds for predicting economic difficulties for China beyond its current ones.

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→ from page 9

There are some counterweights and relatively stabilising factors in the US-China clash. For all the talk of “friend-shoring”, for any foreseeable future the US capitalist class needs China, as a supplier of essentials (the bulk of the world’s capacity for refining cobalt and other essential metals is in China), as a node in the global production chains of many of its biggest corporations (not just Apple), as a lucrative destination for investment, and as a market. The Trump tariffs on imports from China hit many US corporations hard, and they will want them eased or at least not increased.

China needs the US, too, as a market, to some degree as a source of technology, and as where \$1 trillion of its wealth is stashed as US Treasury bonds. It knows that it lost its war against Vietnam in 1979, and its military clout is less than the USA’s.

But the counterweights are limited.

In the Cold War, many leftists used to describe the danger of large-scale, widespread war – as distinct from the endemic localised wars – as a matter of “the US war drive”. In fact neither the US nor the USSR positively sought war to expand their sphere. Each had a big enough sphere to get along with, and saw war as a limited measure to block losses from its sphere, especially losses which they feared would snowball (Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan in 1979, etc.)

The same was true of the big European powers in the run-up to World War One. They were happy to use localised war to hold on to their existing colonies, as Germany did in Namibia in 1904-7, or to use wider war, if it came, to gain more colonies. In the top ranks of many big powers there were “pro-war” people, but a minority, and their pitch was more that war was inevitable, that the balance of forces was moving adversely, and so they would do best to bring it on sooner.

Way to war

The way to World War One was paved by deals designed to avert or postpone war, by mutual-defence alliances designed to make war more difficult because more risky, and by expanding mutual trade. When war came, each state saw itself as primarily defending itself and its acquired sphere.

Now Russia has invaded Ukraine, presenting that as necessary defence against NATO encirclement of Russia. China threatens Taiwan, presenting that as necessary defence against the pulling-away of an integral part of its own territory. The barriers are flimsy against the current Ukraine war, or a future Taiwan war, escalating into wider or even nuclear war.

In short, a world of turmoil and danger. We do not oppose or ignore moves by the big powers to reduce barriers and do deals, as the Marxists in the run-up to World War One did not oppose or ignore such moves. But, again

as for those Marxists, the only reliable answer to the turmoil and danger is the mobilisation of the working class for socialism and internationalism (and the greening of economic life).

Some on the left see it as positively good that the world has become more “multipolar”, compared to the “unipolar” regime of 2008. Some excuse or defend Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, on the grounds that it is a revolt by a country producing only 2% or 3% of world output against the greater powers. (But Japan produced only 2% or 3% of world output in 1913. That did not make its conquest of Korea, or attempt to conquer China, less imperialist). Some, even those who have long described China as capitalist or state-capitalist, see conflict over Taiwan as a matter of the US bullying China, a smaller power. They ignore the people of Taiwan and their rights and wishes, and describe Nancy Pelosi even visiting Taiwan as “provocations by the United States over Taiwan... a deliberate attempt to impose a new US dominance in the region” (*Socialist Worker*).

Programme

As part of our programme for democracy and workers’ unity, revolutionary socialists support the right of nations to self-determination and therefore the revolt of oppressed nations (like Ukraine) against oppressors and invaders. That stance is different from, and often is contradicted by, an “anti-imperialism” geared to backing weaker capitalist powers against stronger. Because they are economically weaker, and thus less able to gain and manage with informal economic sway, those weaker capitalist centres may even be more likely to resort to direct military-conquest imperialism than the stronger powers.

We have no brief for the “unipolar” world of 1991-2008 globalisation. The “flatness” of the high times of globalisation did not stop wars. Yet the danger of war and economic disruption is increased, not decreased, by growing rivalry for resources and by drives for “secure” supply chains and “friend-shoring”. An “anti-imperialism” focused on making the world more “multipolar” and backing weaker would-be imperialist centres (or sub-imperialist, regional-imperialist, proto-imperialist) against stronger centres (mostly the USA) is no better than that of those Italian leftists, mostly revolutionary syndicalists, who backed Italian conquest of Libya in 1911 on the basis that Italy’s lack of a colonial empire like Britain’s or France’s or even Portugal’s defined it as a “proletarian nation”.

In a speech *On The Question of Free Trade* (1848), one of the few of his early writings which Marx cited as important in retrospect, he followed a denunciation of the social effects of world markets with this:

“Do not imagine... that in criticising



freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection. One may declare oneself an enemy of the constitutional regime [i.e. bourgeois government where government powers are restrained by entrenched laws] without declaring oneself a friend of the ancient regime [autocracy]... In general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone... that I vote in favour of free trade”.

Marx discerned the revolutionary potential of disseminated capitalist development even under the misdeeds (which he flayed) of British rule in India:

New elements

“All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do [in the way of constructing railways, industry, etc. in India] will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both.

“Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?

“The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether...”

This internationalist viewpoint became widespread in the early Communist International, after the Russian Revolution of 1917, but was then bowdlerised or buried by Stalinism. The deadweight of that Stalinist bowdlerisation still afflicts the left. Trotsky contested it when the German Communist

Party (CP) began using the indisputable fact that Germany was disadvantaged among the big powers (after its World War One defeat and Versailles) to reorient policy towards backing the weaker capitalist (Germany) against the stronger.

“At the most important place in his conclusion, [CP leader] Thälmann put the idea that ‘Germany is today a ball in the hands of the Entente’ [the victors of World War One]... All these questions nevertheless occupy second place. Our policy is determined not by the fact that Germany is a ‘ball’ in the hands of the Entente, but primarily by the fact that the German proletariat which is split up, powerless, and oppressed, is a ball in the hands of the German bourgeoisie. ‘The main enemy is at home!’ Karl Liebknecht taught at one time. Or perhaps you have forgotten this, friends? Or perhaps this teaching is no longer any good? For Thälmann... Scheringer is substituted for Liebknecht...”

Stalinist

For the Stalinist movements from the 1950s to the 1980s, and for many leftists sincerely anti-Stalinist by their own lights yet waterlogged with the overflow from Stalinist ideology, “anti-imperialism” and “peace campaigning” meant essentially siding (sometimes critically) with the weaker imperialist power (the USSR) against the strong (US). That cut across efforts to develop the working class as an independent “Third Camp” in politics, standing against imperialism and class exploitation of all varieties.

The shifts towards “multipolarity” since 2008, coupled with the continuing weakness of workers’ movements since the defeats of the 1980s and the quick-footed restructuring of industries in recent decades, has alimanted that old “enemy’s enemy is our friend” ideology on the left. A solidly independent and consistently-democratic “Third Camp” effort is needed in response. The revivals of worker militancy in some countries – USA, France, UK – since the Covid lockdowns may give some tentative footholds for building that political answer. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/s-w-o

Workers' Assemblies for aviation



Environment

By Finlay Asher

Finlay Asher from [Safe Landing](#) spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity

Unions in the aviation sector have policies and practices that often make them blockers rather than agents of necessary changes – for instance lobbying in favour of airport expansion. That's not going to change by workers having it dictated to them but by workers figuring out the way forward themselves. That's why we're advocating for Aviation Workers' Assemblies.

And there's the fact that you have unions, right there in the industry, which are potentially brilliant instruments for putting pressure on those in power at the end of the process. For me that's very exciting.

What's less clear than with a Citizens' Assembly is who are the participants? I think in fact it's worth doing various kinds of assemblies with various "sortition boundaries", and seeing what the different results are. There's value in doing local Workers' Assemblies to envision a positive future for a local factory or airport.

We're proposing national aviation workers' assemblies in every country – and in fact internationally, it's a global industry – but what we're doing immediately is going in at a grassroots level in the UK, talking to BALPA [the UK pilots' union], talking to Unite, and to people in those unions, about what's possible. National assemblies would be good, but it's likely where we'll be starting is in a particular company or even factory.

Say you're a factory in Airbus or Rolls-Royce, and at the moment you're producing gas turbine engines for

combusting jet fuel. Maybe the future is hydrogen fuel cells? So perhaps you want to be pushing that at a point in the future, when the factory gets updated, you'll produce Y technology rather than X.

How do you work those things out? Do you need to get experts in in order to inform your discussion, so that you can come to well-rounded recommendations to push for?

We want lots of assemblies, the more the better, and we're all for diversity in how they're constituted and run. If others, for instance unions or sections of them, want to take this up and go in a different direction, that's fine with us. Obviously, we do want to push for certain standards in the way they're run, so there's a good facilitation, a balanced selection of expert evidence presenting different viewpoints, time and space for genuine discussion and deliberation, and some genuine independence from the people who currently wield power.

We have also discussed initially holding a weekend where any aviation worker can come along, to get a group of participating in a process, get them excited, and send them back out to organise in their industries and companies.

But I also want to stress we're very keen to get the unions on board with developing this project, and a dialogue with and among unions and their activists about what it means. We absolutely do not see this as a way of bypassing unions and their democratic structures – rather it's producing policy to feed into that structure. This is about better engaging members and supercharging existing worker democratic processes.

We are very much about supporting workers' struggles. We've made an effort to support non-aviation workers, and to take people to their [picket lines](#) and so on, to stress and instil the idea that we are part of the wider workers' movement.

In aviation, often when things have been in the offing and we've reached out, the companies have buckled and conceded workers' demands. For instance Airbus workers asked for a 10% pay rise and immediately [got it](#) back in April. These are workers with a lot of power currently, as aviation firms have had to increase wages to retain and recruit staff after Covid.

As I explained, we began as a pilots' group, then I brought in some more engineers. We've also involved members who work in factories and some cabin crew. We don't have a lot of the workers in the sector who tend to be lower paid and more vulnerable, but make up the biggest workforces, the very varied groups of workers who work in airports. Of course, some workers are less viscerally connected to the aviation industry – say if you work in a shop in an airport, you may not think of yourself as an aviation worker at all. But we need to find ways to reach out and make those links.

Unsure

We do get new people who are unsure, who don't make the connection between climate and workers' struggles; who for instance think of trade unionism as just a matter of people wanting more money. In some cases they may themselves feel they're well-paid and not think they should be demanding more. So we have discussions to explain the connections, about the climate-worker relationship but even just the basics of why workers need to fight, that people have higher wages because unions have power and leverage. Also about solidarity and about any victory creating better conditions for others to fight.

If we look down we can always find people worse off than us; even those struggling to heat and eat in the UK are much better off than many in, say, [Somalia](#). The thing that's crushing people is the same systems we live and work under here. We can only challenge and change them by organising, mobilising, bargaining collectively and ultimately exercising power by withdrawing our labour. If people can do that over pay, it can be scaled up to exercising power over larger systemic issues.

Generally those arguments make sense to people. We have quite a lot of discussions like that. When we put out solidarity messages with other people on strike, or show support in person, we use that to have discussions too.

I'm in Unite, from when I worked in Rolls-Royce; we've got members who are in BALPA; we're less engaged with

PCS, even though they do organise parts of the sector and are the most progressive on these issues. Unite is the big fish and BALPA are smaller but I guess pilots are sort of iconic like firefighters. But we try to engage in as many places as possible.

In Unite we're taking a multi-pronged approach. We're in touch with some staff who are responsible for these issues; with various committees and taskforces; and also with various groups of workers, in a range of sectors. That includes some workers who are in jobs that are already climate-friendly, for instance insulating buildings, but also of course in aviation.

We've made our [arguments](#) about how we can reduce air miles but increase the number of jobs, and lots of people in Unite have basically said they hadn't thought of that and been enthusiastic about taking it up to open up discussions in the workforce.

I've had some very good discussions with reps at Rolls-Royce Barnoldswick, who had a big dispute and part of the agreement to keep the site open was about developing [green technology](#). So they could potentially have an assembly to discuss what that means in practice, which has a climate angle but also is very much a question of self-interest, even existential self-interest for their community there.

They invited us along to their Unite regional industrial conference, which was relatively small but had people from BAE Systems, shipbuilding, Safran, Rolls-Royce... I presented on Workers' Assemblies and it got a pretty good response, and we need to follow that up.

In BALPA there's an environmental study group, and we have members involved there. They also presented on Workers' Assemblies, including to members of the national executive.

One important angle is about how important all this is for involving younger members and changing the demographic of unions. We've now had shipbuilding reps in Unite ask for us to come and talk to their apprentices that are joining in Preston.

We've also been working to develop links with aviation workers' unions and campaigns in other countries, in Germany, in the US, and particularly in France... □

• [Safe Landing](#) is a climate-oriented group of aviation workers campaigning for long-term employment by challenging industry leaders to conform with climate science. First part of interview: [Solidarity 648](#)



Our videos

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- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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New mood in Further Education

By a UCU activist

Further Education workers in the University and College Union (UCU) are striking at several colleges across the country over pay. A UCU activist in London spoke to Solidarity about the dispute.

We voted for 10 days of strike across our group of colleges, the biggest strike we've ever had. All but one of the sites are involved.

There's an ebullient mood around the strikes. We're organising bigger picket lines than we've ever seen before, with many workers joining pickets for the first time. We've had good support from the local labour movement, with many other unions bringing banners to our picket lines.

We have called escalating action, stepping up from two to three days a week, so we're effectively striking for over half the week. UCU has paid strike pay from day one of the strike, a break from past practice where strike pay only kicks in after a certain number of strike days. We've also set up a local strike fund to supplement national strike pay.

Management has responded extremely aggressively to the dispute. For workers who already identify closely with the union, that has had a galvanising effect. But others may be somewhat cowed.

It's vital the union reaches out to those

members and draws them in. Some of that is about doing the bread-and-butter of trade unionism; the branch has a regular newsletter which is distributed around workplaces, keeping members informed about the dispute. We have regular members' meetings, and reps are making additional efforts to talk to members worried about the bosses' response. If the size of the picket lines is any indication, the intimidation tactics are not succeeding overall.

At site level, the union functions very democratically. As our college is made up of multiple sites, we have group-wide members' meetings via Zoom, which might involve lots of members in one room at a particular site participating together. That has helped maximise participation, and people who are in the workplace still attend collectively. It does make counting votes a bit difficult, but we get it done. We also hold reps' meetings, which draw up proposals on things like demands and strike strategy, which are always put to members' meetings for ratification.

Our demand is for a £3,000 flat-rate pay increase across our group. We're also fighting to level up some contractual conditions. The demands were drawn up in reps' meetings prior to the dispute, and ratified by wider members' meetings.

Within FE, there's a lot of diversity in terms of people's employment status – some are on fixed-term contracts, some



on zero-hours contracts; some are agency workers. There's a wide range of terms and conditions, with disparities between teaching staff in different roles, and between teachers and other workers, such as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs).

LSAs are the equivalent in FE of teaching assistants in a school. At my site, almost all the LSAs are black; most of the teachers are not. Quite a number of LSAs have teaching qualifications, but are working below their qualified level for various reasons. They have even less control over their time than teachers, and can have their work schedule changed throughout the day at very little notice.

LSAs are able to join UCU, and some are members. However, it's fair to say that, in the past, they have not necessarily seen UCU as being a union that represents them. UCU can sometimes function a bit like a craft union for so-called "professional" staff.

In the first week of the strike, the LSAs at my site went to work. But in the second week, roughly a dozen LSAs joined the strike collectively.

To consolidate that, we need to show the LSAs that the union is for them. We have a window of opportunity to help these workers organise. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/new-fe

Anger and resolve in Royal Mail fight

By a CWU activist

A postal worker and CWU activist spoke to Solidarity

The response to the strikes so far has been superb, the resolve of the members is terrific. The strike have been totally solid everywhere. In my office, there are over 550 staff, and we've the worst we've had on any of the strike days is four or five people going in. We've had some agency staff go in, but even then, most of them have decided not to work during the strikes.

So there's a lot of determination, but also some exasperation and anger. Royal Mail is now threatening mass redundancies, and they've declared that they're withdrawing from the national agreement. Faced with a management which has upped the stakes in this way, we need to keep up our action.

The next phase is key, with

strikes up to and around Black Friday (25 Nov), where we have a lot of leverage. I think coordinating action between different unions is also very important.

We're not opposed to all change; I've worked for Royal Mail for 33 years, and there's always been changes, new ways of doing things, new bits of kit and technology. But that should be negotiated, and change needs to be implemented in a way that rewards workers for the advantages the change brings. I work every other Sunday, so the proposal to do away with payments for Sunday working would hit me particularly hard. It'd essentially mean the value of any pay increase would be wiped out for me. Imposing changes aimed solely at maximising profit is not the way forward. The way forward is to negotiate.

Prior to the union announc-

ing the 19 days of strikes, there was a clear need for escalation. There is a democratic culture in CWU within Royal Mail, with strong traditions of local democracy via gate meetings. There was also a national reps' meeting in London on Tuesday 11 October – part of that will have been about reps being briefed by the leadership, but it will also have involved reps bringing proposals from the shop floor. At the moment, there's a significant degree of unity amongst the members, and between the rank and file members and the union leadership. There's a feeling that the whole union is pulling in the same direction.

There is a clear feeling that we're part of something that goes beyond Royal Mail, people see our strike as part of a more general fightback against an assault on working conditions and pay, with workers fighting back across

the economy. There's a clearer awareness of that than I can remember for a very long time. That hasn't yet translated into a conscious movement towards a general strike, but people are positive about the prospect of coordinating with other unions and would support the union executives getting together to work that out. The fact that employers and the government are being so brazen about their attacks on workers has also helped to galvanise people, and as we see some groups of workers start to win their disputes and secure significant pay rises, that gives people the confidence that we can win too.

We're now facing a period of sustained action. Over the years, we've had discussions at branch level about a strike fund or hardship fund, which we've not felt able to set up and administer directly, but unions do need to have pro-

visions in place, especially as disputes become drawn out. If a member needs financial assistance to be able to afford to strike, and it enables more workers to strike for longer, then of course that help should be there. □

More online

Ibrahim Dogus

Ibrahim Dogus is out of the [shortlist](https://bit.ly/shortlist) for Labour's parliamentary selection in Barking. An article from the Labour left *Clarion* indicates it's no loss. bit.ly-cl-dogus

Spinoza, democracy, and socialism

bit.ly/rebelspinoza

NHS pay ballots begin



By Jayne Evans

Health workers were eagerly awaiting September's pay day, as the backdated pay increase was due to be paid. The NHS Pay Review Body recommendation was for a full-time-equivalent £1,400 rise, effective from 1 April 2022, for staff in Agenda for Change [the main NHS pay system], increased to 4% for staff at the top of band 6 or in band 7.

The increase also included the National Living wage adjustment made on

1 April 2022, which applied to Bands 1 and 2.

However, what was seen in pay packets didn't meet expectations. One work colleague whispered to me: "Can I have a word? Do the union know about this?" as she had found she was worse off by £100 a month. Another saw a £11 a month increase!

Pension contribution changes were the main cause of the decrease.

Everyone knew they will still struggle to pay energy and food bills.

Over the next few weeks workers in the NHS will be voting on strikes over this year's pay claim. The RCN ballot runs to 2 Nov, and Unison's begins on the 27 October. Both are disaggregated ballots, with a push on reaching thresholds in key areas such as the

ambulance service. The GMB will be balloting 15,000 ambulance workers and Unite will be balloting 2,700 ambulance workers across England.

Turn-out and rejection ran high among ambulance workers in the consultative ballots. Unite is also balloting in Scotland.

Targeting key sections of workers could be an effective strategy. If key sections strike, then others may be convinced to join them.

We do need to make sure that this doesn't lead to a break-up of national pay agreements and a shift to local or role-specific action.

The structural changes currently being made in the NHS could lead to a breakdown in national pay bargaining; we should warn the movement against



putting short term local gains before the maintenance of national structures.

There is more at stake here than just pay. Vacancies remain unfilled. Many parts of the NHS are at breaking point. Maximise the votes for action! □

How Arriva bus drivers won 11%

By a bus driver

Arriva bus drivers in north and east London won a 10-11 per cent pay increase, after calling an indefinite strike from 4 October. A bus driver and Unite rep spoke to Solidarity about the background to the dispute.

Recently, there's been a concerted effort in Unite to change the way we organise in the bus sector. Historically, the way pay talks would go is that the company would string things out for as long as possible, and the closer it got to Christmas, people would be looking at the amount of back-pay they'd get, and they'd be

more inclined to accept even a pretty low offer. We call it the "Christmas carrot."

As a group of reps, with the support from Sharon Graham's leadership, we said we wanted to do things differently. We put our pay claim early, and made it clear that we'd ballot early too, so if the company didn't meet our demands, we'd be in a position to call strikes.

It didn't mean we weren't willing to negotiate, but we wanted to have a strike mandate in place so we could take action as soon as we needed to. Anti-union laws make that process slow and difficult anyway, but we still had our ballot in place in September.

That meant we could say to the company in talks, "give us what we want, or we're calling a strike." That's leverage we hadn't had before, and the company knew we could follow through because we already had the mandate.

We got an initial offer, which members firmly rejected, so we called a strike. Within two days, the employer called new talks, and tabled the offer that members eventually voted to accept. We won a 10% pay increase from April-October 2022, with an 11% increase going forward. Crucially, we also ensured the uplift was applied to additional payments.

As bus drivers, we get var-

ious add-ons, for things like having your meal break away from your home garage, or having to work at a garage other than your own. Historically those add-ons haven't been included in pay settlements, so they've always stagnated. This time we ensured they were part of the deal.

The strike we called, which would've started on 4 October, was an indefinite strike. There was a clear understanding amongst drivers that striking for one day here and there wouldn't work. The company can just ride that out. With Unite guaranteeing strike pay of £70 per day, members were confident about taking indefinite action.

The consensus was, if we're going to do this, let's do it properly, and hit the company with the kind of action that could actually win. The proposal to call an indefinite strike came from our reps' committee, but it was rigorously consulted on amongst members, at branch meetings and in garages, so we knew there was support for that proposal.

Since Sharon Graham's election, we've established a national combine committee in our sector, which is a body made up of reps from across the bus industry. We're meeting on a national basis, discussing problems that affect us all: lack of air con in the summer, lack of heating in the

winter, lack of toilet facilities...

25% of London bus routes don't have an accessible toilet at both ends, which is a particular problem for women drivers who may have additional needs. So the establishment of the combine gives us a forum to talk to each other about these issues and coordinate joint campaigning. It's a slow process, but the ultimate aim is to be able to submit a single claim on pay and conditions to all companies across the sector.

In the context of the current strike wave, we were definitely thinking about coordinated action. The most logical coordination for us is to coordinate with Tube workers' strikes; when the Tube is on strike but we're not, it just pushes more passengers onto buses, and vice versa. If we strike together, we can bring London to a standstill. We are actively seeking those discussions with the Tube unions about coordination.

Our result has now set a benchmark. Another reason companies always drag out pay claims is that no employer wants to "go first", and set a standard workers elsewhere will put pressure on their employers to match. Now that we've won 11 percent, no London bus driver should settle for anything less. □

Honesty on pay offers

By Mohan Sen

Following the threat of strikes, Unite the Union recently [announced](#) a 19% pay deal for American Airlines maintenance technicians and crew chiefs at Heathrow. Nineteen per cent is the headline on its website and summary for the media and social media.

The facts, according to the union itself, are that company offered a three-year deal of 5.3% in year one, followed by a one-off payment, followed

by a pay freeze. This was pushed up to 7% (backdated to January), 6% and 6%.

The workers have now voted to accept the deal. We're not well placed to comment about whether that was the right call or not. The new offer is a significant shift. However, *not* 19%.

Spinning multi-year percentage offers as if they're immediate one-year offers is something the bosses and their politicians and media regularly do. Why would un-

ions want to play that game?

But they do.

Such misrepresentation may give a warm feeling to those not paying much attention, but it can only encourage frustration and cynicism among anyone who knows any detail – including the workers getting the deal in question.

Honesty and sober presentation, measured against clear union demands in advance of and during a struggle, is always better. □

“What we stand for

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

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

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- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
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- 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

Something up, but they're not telling us



Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

Finishing in the depot compared to finishing in the platform can add an extra 20 minutes on your day. And when you want to get home, or at least away from work, that 20 minutes feels precious. If you are lucky as you take a train in, there will be one coming out and you can jump in with another driver. As I come in, I ask the shunter who is next out? Clearly they are just doing a shift change. "22 road has lights on so I reckon that's a good shout". I'm not entirely hopeful. They could be out in another 30 minutes for all I know. But it is the only train set up to leave, so I head over once I've stabled mine.

When I get in, another train pulls away. "Did he tell you I was first out?" N asks. "Yeah", I sigh. Oh well, still beats walking back down to the platform. "I'm only taking it that far anyway, then I'm being relieved". N gets called up, five minutes early. "Cancelled?" I hear him ask. "Did you just find out, or have you known a long time?"

I am not sure there is a reply. "Wankers". He says as he puts the handset back. "I bet they didn't just get told. Something's up on the line but no update as to what".

The train next to us is now set up, so we go over to board that. We are only on that one for 30 seconds before its driver gets called up and it gets cancelled.

Thinking I've now jinxed these drivers, we all trudge through the depot and back to the platform. The displays show a 15 minute wait on the eastbound platform. Typical. I'll proba-

bly be about 40 minutes later getting home now than if I'd got out as I hoped.

The train on the westbound closes its doors at that point and starts heading east. They can do that, head back over the crossover. It is in passenger service, lights are on.

"Bleedin' hell", N says. No announcement, no indication from the station that was the first eastbound. I suggest I stand away from any other driver as I seem to have cursed our prospects of getting anywhere we want to go.

Once the train we can all get finally turns up, it's packed as you'd expect. No one has got on a train for at least 20 minutes on this platform. I get to do this all again tomorrow.

Really it's a minor inconvenience, but those are often the things that can grind you down the most. I put my headphones on and shut my eyes for 20 minutes. It'll all look different in the morning. □

Liverpool dockers out again from 24 Oct

By Neil Laker

The Liverpool dockers' pay dispute, demanding both an immediate pay rise and a comprehensive pay review, has escalated into a fight over jobs.

Peel Ports, the container terminal operator, has refused to budge on pay, and has instead threatened redundancies (though the terminals are expanding).

The workers, members of the Unite

union, are currently back at work for a week, then striking again from 24 October to 7 November.

In an online meeting on 17 October, there was a wide ranging discussion of campaigning to support the dockers in the weeks ahead, with plans for a public meeting, a fundraising event, demos at companies that use the port, and potential solidarity actions at companies connected to them such as Cam-

mell Lairds (95% owned by Peel Ports Group).

When Felixstowe dockers first struck, Liverpool dockers voted to handle no diverted cargo, and told their management not to accept any. The management responded: "that's secondary action and illegal". The dockers' reps said, go on then, have us all arrested or sack us all.

No diverted cargo was handled. Southampton dockers have refused to handle ships redirected from Liverpool. □

• Strike fund: Unite NW 628, Port of Liverpool Branch. Sort code 608301, Account number 20292377

Banned books burned



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The mention of Banned Book Week (Katy Dollar, *Solidarity* 647) took me back to 1966, when Francois Truffaut made probably the ultimate film about banned literature, *Fahrenheit 451* (referring to the temperature at which paper burns).

Based on Ray Bradbury's novel of the same name, the film shows a future 1984-ish dystopia where all books are not only banned and burned by a special government department, "The Firemen". The Firemen burn books, while mind-bogglingly

stupid TV shows feed the population with a trashy alternative to thinking about the world around them.

Montag, one of the Firemen (played by Oskar Werner), becomes dissatisfied with his job and increasingly curious about the books he destroys. He hides Dickens' *David Copperfield* and begins to read it, much to the distress of his wife Linda (Julie Christie). Montag befriends a neighbour who is a "dissident" (curiously also played by Christie) and she tells him of the "Book People", a group who live in a remote area away from the gaze of the authorities.

Here, each individual memorises a particular book as a way of preventing culture and the intellect from dying out. Montag joins them and begins to memorise an Edgar Allan Poe novel. □

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Teachers look to strike in January

By Gerry Bates

The National Education Union (NEU) has announced “preliminary ballot” results of 86% for strikes on pay among teachers in England, on a 62% turnout, and 78% for strikes among support staff (68% turnout).

In Wales the figures were: support staff, 78% turnout; 83% for strikes; teachers, 70% turnout; 88% for strikes.

The formal ballot will run from 28 October to 13 January, and the first strike day is set to be in the week starting 30 January.

Support staff will strike alongside teachers. GMB and Unison support staff have the same legal protections joining a NEU strike balloted for in their grade as NEU members have.

NASUWT, another teachers’ union with around 300,000 members, will launch a formal ballot on 27 October, running until 9 January. □

London Underground workers will strike again

By Ollie Moore

London Underground workers in the RMT union will strike again on 3 November, as they continue their fight against job cuts and attacks on conditions, including pensions.

The decision to call another strike, the first since 19 August, follows Transport for London’s (TfL’s) publication of a further report on pension reform, identifying possible options for reforming the scheme. These including introducing a career-average element into the scheme, which is currently final-salary. For the majority of workers, a final salary calculation will be higher than career average, as most workers retire on the highest salary they earn. TfL’s proposed options for reform also include increasing the age at which employees can retire on their full pension, currently 60, to 65 – or even to the state retirement age, which is 68 for some workers.

Meanwhile, London Underground bosses continue the imposition of staffing cuts on stations, as part of a plan to cut 600 positions. Further cuts have now been identified in engineering and fleet maintenance depots, including decreasing the frequency of safety checks on trains, which would facilitate a reduced staffing level. Some sections of workers also face the imposition of



new working arrangements, aimed at maximising “flexibility”.

The next strike will be Tube workers’ sixth this year. Of the preceding five, all but the first, a staggered 48-hour strike on 1 and 3 March, have been 24 hours. Although all have been effective and impactful on the day, leading to a near-total shutdown of the Tube network, questions remain over whether sporadic 24-hour strikes are sufficient to win meaningful concessions from the employer.

Unspecified

Although most RMT officials accept the need to escalate the action, this is usually posed as something that should happen at some unspecified point in the future, when the dispute needs to be “brought to a head” (as if it hasn’t been “brought to a head” already by the decision of the employer to make

cuts!). In the meantime, occasional 24-hour strikes is seen as the pace of action best able to “keep the membership together.”

Although striking occasionally is preferable to not striking at all, this “strategy” – if it can be called that – risks teaching members to view strikes as token protests that stand little chance of making material gains, rather than as an effective leveraging of power that can actually win. In the long run the approach may prove less effective at “keeping the membership together” than its advocates hope.

RMT will also be re-balloting its London Underground membership from early November, as its current ballot mandate expires in December. Winning a renewed mandate is, of course, essential: the union will be better able to do that if members feel they are fighting to win. □

National Coal Mining Museum strikes

By Cy Grove

Workers at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield are due to strike on 26-30 October over pay. The museum has offered a pay rise of 4.2% plus 25p per hour. Workers have demanded a flat £2,000 increase for all workers.

The ballot showed 94% for strikes on a turnout of 87%.

Throughout the dispute management had refused to meet with members or their union, Unison, to negotiate on pay. After the strike ballot result they finally agreed to negotiations, but refused to increase the offer and refused even to discuss a flat rate claim. Under the museum’s proposals the average worker would receive an increase of 67p per hour (£1,289 a year) and senior managers would receive around £1.72 per hour (£3,309).

Unison Wakefield District Branch Secretary Sam Greenwood says: “Our members have been very clear that they want a flat rate pay offer of £2,000... They believe that during a



cost of living crisis any pay offer should be shared out evenly to ensure that the lowest-paid get a pay rise that is in line with inflation.

“I don’t believe that the museum management fully understand how

angry workers are and their determination to secure a fair pay rise for all. If the museum do not meet the demands of members more strike dates will be called”. □

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Putin's new recruits start dying in Ukraine

By Dan Katz

The first reports of deaths of Russian conscripts who had been drafted in the new mobilisation announced by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 21 September began appearing during the first week of October. At least 20 men from the September tranche of recruits have died in Ukraine so far.

220,000 people have been mobilised under Putin's September order, of which 35,000 are already in military units and 16,000 are involved in conflict following minimal training. Reports of low morale, and lack of equipment have been common with many new troops apparently having to buy their own body armour, clothing and cutlery.

Russian law prohibits the stationing of conscripts abroad. However, the annexation by Russia of four regions of Ukraine now allows Putin to legally deploy conscripts in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

Andrei Nikiforov from St Petersburg, a veteran from the war in Chechnya and more recently working as a lawyer, was called up on 25 September. Less than two weeks later he was dead, killed in Lysychansk.

A group of draftees from Moscow region were sent straight to the front, on 2-3 October, to bolster collapsing Russian lines around Svatove, in north east Ukraine. Almost immediately some were killed or injured in a Ukrainian artillery barrage as they made their way to the front lines. Their families said they had been promised two months of training, but had received almost none.

Following Putin's 21 September demand for new conscripts, large numbers of young Russian men left the country. 200,000 fled to Kazakhstan, 70,000 to Georgia and – despite new travel restrictions – 66,000 to EU states. Since only one quarter of Russians have passports, this is an overwhelmingly middle class, well-educated exodus.

On Saturday 8 October, the same day as the attack on the Kerch bridge which links Crimea to Russia, Vladimir Putin named Sergey Surovikin as the general in overall charge of the Russian war in Ukraine.

Surovikin is a loyalist with an unpleasant record. During the unsuccessful coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991 forces under Surovikin killed pro-democracy demonstrators, after which Surovikin spent months in prison. He has also served time in jail for selling weapons.

According to the British military his "career has



been dogged with allegations of corruption and brutality." After 2017 Surovikin led the Russian intervention into the Syrian civil war, which stabilised Bashar Assad's murderous regime. Human Rights Watch named him as probably bearing responsibility for "dozens of air and ground attacks on civilian objects and infrastructure in violation of the laws of war" during the 2019-2020 Idlib offensive. 1,600 civilians were killed and 1.4mn people displaced during this Russian campaign.

Surovikin's appointment was welcomed by the nationalist right in Russia and on 10 October Russia began a massive series of missile attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure. Surovikin's appointment was welcomed by the boss of the Wagner private militia, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who praised Surovikin's role in supporting the 1991 coup attempt: "Surovikin was that officer who without hesitation got in his tank and went forward to save his country."

Nevertheless, overall, and despite still holding 15% of Ukraine's territory, Russia remains on the backfoot.

In Ukraine's occupied southern Kherson region, Vladimir Saldo, the Russia-appointed leader in the area, called on civilians to evacuate as Ukrainian troops advanced towards Kherson City. He urged them to "save themselves" and leave for Russia.

Russia has been engaging in a form of ethnic cleansing in southern Ukraine, forcibly deporting Ukrainians to Russia and putting Ukrainian children up for adoption in Russia. In occupied Melitopol apartments are apparently being built to house Russian immigrants who are to be encouraged to move to the city to alter the ethnic balance.

Internationally Ukrainian victories seem to have hardened support for Ukraine. In late September

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Strikes: seize the time while Tories flounder

By Ollie Moore

Strong results in consultative ballots and surveys of teachers and school support staff by the National Education Union (NEU) show the potential for the current strike wave to spread.

In England, 86 percent of teachers voted for action on a 62 percent turnout, with 78 percent of support staff voting for action on a 68 percent turnout. The NEU Executive has already voted to move to formal ballots, which will run into early 2023.

NASUWT, another teachers' union with around 300,000 members, will launch a formal ballot on 27 October, running until 9 January.

Health

Late October and early November will see the first formal ballot returns from healthworkers, with the Royal College of Midwives' members in Scotland and nurses in the Royal College of Nursing returning ballots on 27 October and 2

November respectively. NHS workers in Unison ballot from 27 October-25 November, and ambulance workers in the GMB across 11 trusts ballot from 24 October-29 November.

PCS

Civil servants in the PCS, another sizeable workforce, conclude their ballot on 7 November. Higher Education workers in UCU will announce ballot results on 24 October, with a meeting for local branch delegates planned on 31 October prior to a Higher Education Committee meeting on 3 November, which could name strikes.

Postal workers' strikes over pay, jobs, and conditions are now entering what some activists have called a "crunch time" for the dispute.

And many other strike campaigns remain active, both big national ones (rail, BT, Further Education) and more local ones.

Accelerate, spread, and unite the strikes! □

• More: page 3 and pages 12-15.

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a poll in Germany showed that 74% of people favoured continued support for Ukraine "despite our rising energy prices." The proportion of Germans who now believe Ukraine will win the war rose to 49%, from 26% in August.

The international political shifts caused by the Ukraine war continue to play out.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE, from the start of the war have been unwilling to go with US pressure to fully back Ukraine. At the start of Russia's February invasion UAE abstained on a UN Security Council motion to condemn Russia's action.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia have expected more US support for their brutal war on Yemen. They have both created better relations with China and Russia. Both states agree with Russia on oil prices and on 5 October at the oil car-

tel, OPEC+, they agreed to cut oil production by two million barrels a day.

The cut will produce a rise in oil prices. The Saudis want to maintain high oil prices to fund domestic spending and need Russian help to manipulate production. Russia wants high prices to pressure the West over their backing for Ukraine. And Biden reacted angrily with a threat, "There's going to be some consequences for what [Saudi/UAE] have done, with Russia."

The UAE is the destination for a lot of Russian investment and has bought a Russian air defence system. UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan met Putin on 13 October. Zayed called for a Ukraine deal to "reduce military escalation, reduce humanitarian repercussions and reach a political settlement to achieve global peace and security."

Responding, three Demo-

cratic Party Representatives produced a statement: "Saudi Arabia and the UAE's drastic cut in oil production, despite President Biden's overtures to both countries in recent months, is a hostile act against the United States and a clear signal that they have chosen to side with Russia in its war against Ukraine. Both countries have long relied on an American military presence in the Gulf to protect their security and oil fields. We see no reason why American troops and contractors should continue to provide this service to countries that are actively working against us."

There are currently between 45,000 and 65,000 US troops in Saudi and the Gulf.

The UAE is no sort of "neutral" uninterested observer in the Ukraine war, and its diplomacy should not be trusted. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

KICK THE TORIES OUT!

By Martin Thomas

The new mini-budget of Jeremy Hunt, on 17 October, reverses "almost all" the tax cuts promised by Liz Truss, and reduces energy-bill subsidies to six months (from two years). Truss herself may not last much longer.

For the working class this means:

- Social cuts. Liz Truss's early promise of "no spending cuts" never really meant that: NHS, local government, and school budgets are being cut in real terms already because of rising prices for what they buy in. Now Hunt promises more cuts. Benefits have shrunk in real terms and will shrink again up to April, whatever the increase then.

- The government will surely do something to moderate energy bills from April, but not much. Inflation will rise. Wage battles, and campaigns for benefit rises, must factor that in.

- New anti-union laws: despite all their conflicts, the Tories are united on those.

- The government is weak. Whether Truss resigns or not, we face either a lame-duck prime minister or one visibly shunted in as second-choice. We can win.

A few Tory MPs are said to favour a quick election because then Labour will discredit itself in the turmoil of the next few years. If we step up the strikes and other struggles towards

making Britain "ungovernable" for the Tories, we can tip them into an election as in 1974.

But the Truss fiasco paradoxically increases the pressure on the Labour leaders to stick even closer to neoliberal rules to "re-assure the markets" (i.e. the big capitalist operators in the bond markets spooked by Truss's experiments).

Industrial battles must be combined with an effort to mo-

bilise the unions and the Labour rank-and-file to turn round Labour politically, towards taxing the rich, public ownership of the whole energy sector and the banks, and restoration of the NHS.

Without that we are preparing the way for worse in future, as the failures of the 1974-9 Labour government prepared the way for Thatcher. □



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

workersliberty.org/publications