

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

TORY FIASCO



Time to fight back

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Tory fiasco raises the stakes



The Tory party melée may now subside a bit, with Rishi Sunak nodded as the new prime minister on 24 October.

But it has triggered an economic crisis. It has taken the lid off a swirl of dispute in the Tory party. And it has raised the stakes for the labour movement.

The usual pattern of capitalist crises is that debt builds up in a boom, with easy credit and speculative ventures, then a jolt reveals that many debtors are unlikely to pay, and collapse snowballs.

Not through a boom, but through the Covid lockdowns, government debt has increased hugely since early 2020, corporate debt mildly (and household debt not much). Economists thought the debt might ease through revenues recovering after lockdowns. Brexit (slowing exports), and wider disruptions of world trade, have jolted that scenario. Profit rates, which had recovered after a dip in early 2020, may now be sagging.

The Truss fiasco has given the decisive jolt to turn trouble similar to many capitalist economics into a “crisis” in Britain, in the strict capitalist sense, a hiatus in profit-making.

Capitalist governments, back to the 17th or 18th century, have covered their budgets by offering IOUs (bonds) to financial operators, and promising to pay interest. The total of those IOUs outstanding is now huge (£2.4 trillion, about £36,000 for each person in the UK), and the interest due on them too (maybe as much as the total NHS budget next year).

Yes, Japan’s debt is 2.7 times its annual output, and the UK’s only about the same as national output. But the UK is very dependent on global financial operators buying its IOUs. They stop buying new IOUs, and start selling the old IOUs they hold, if they think that those IOUs will become worth less by comparison with dollar (etc.) assets, or deposits in UK banks.

Trussonomics’ tax cuts for the rich

covered by airy promises that they would increase growth were (says the *Economist* magazine) “long circulated on the Tory right”, but they defied orthodox budget-balancing Thatcherism. They spooked the big financial operators. To regain their “confidence”, the Tories and the Bank of England will now cut public spending more, and keep interest rates higher, than they would without the Truss jolt.

The cuts and high interest rates will produce recession. They are designed to do that – to tame inflation by making households and governments spend less. The history of the late 1970s and early 1980s tells that, once inflation is embedded, cuts and rate rises bring it down only erratically, slowly, and if made severe and long-lasting. It will be bad.

That “Trussonomics” could “take” the Tory party and then be disavowed completely within a few weeks even by Truss herself shows us that the Tory party has become a soup of disparate and clashing right-wing ideologies.

Neoliberalism

In the “Great Moderation” from the early 1990s to 2008, neoliberalism settled into a loose consensus. It sought not so much a minimal “night-watchman state” (the socialist Ferdinand Lassalle’s term for 19th century free-marketism) as a premises-manager state, geared to attracting globally-mobile capital to its territory, but understanding that capital needed social infrastructure, environmental regulations, etc., and wanting women and LGBT people to join the workforce on somewhat equal terms.

The 2008 crisis frayed that consensus. Brexit jolted it even further. In 2016 the Tories added “industrial strategy” to the name of the business ministry, though in pre-2008 neoliberalism “industrial strategy” was abhorred as a futile attempt to second-guess markets.

The Tories stumbled into Brexit. Most who backed for opportunist reasons, like Johnson, had no idea how to make it “work”, and likewise those who didn’t want it and then decided they had to make the best of it, like Truss. Those who did have ideas – the so-called “Singapore-on-Thames” crowd – were cranks.

Tory MPs, floundering as neoliberalism frays globally and as they try to shape Brexit, are divided on many cross-cutting axes. Free-marketers and radical deregulators vs “industrial strategists” and populists. Thatcherite free-marketers vs Reaganite free-marketers. Trumpists and “anti-woke” warriors vs those who hold to the Tories’ earlier wish not to be “the nasty party”. Those who really want to reduce immigration to “tens of thousands” a year vs those who value an influx of competent, diligent, young workers. DUP sym-

pathisers vs those wanting compromise with the EU. Climate-change deniers vs green Tories.

Sunak can probably unite them to some degree round what they all agree on – a hard line against the strikes, and new anti-union laws. It’s still a mess.

Boris Johnson won the Tory leadership in June 2019, though most Tory MPs distrusted him, because they thought him enough of a chancer to pull off a Brexit formula – some Brexit formula, any Brexit formula. And he did.

After that, the constant semi-emergency of the Covid lockdowns enabled Johnson (with some skill and effort, no doubt) to hold the MPs together, in the same way that wartime governments usually rally acquiescence. You don’t yet see how we’ll make Brexit work? Wait: we first have to deal with this emergency.

The labour movement now faces a Tory government in which many sorts of impulses to “do something” drastic and right-wing with Brexit have been released, and greater pressure from “the markets” (the big financial operators) on a future Labour government and Labour’s prospectus even now.

In 2017 and 2019 Labour could offer reforms from heavier taxes on the rich in a context that was relatively stable (as long as a possible Labour government didn’t lurch into Brexit). John McDonnell promised balanced budgets.

Labour officials briefed the *Observer* (23 October) that Labour membership is rising again. That may be flim-flam. As the Tories flounder, membership may indeed revive, as in 1994-7, when it looked like long Tory years would end. But Keir Starmer doesn’t want to be even as daring as in 2017 or 2019; and the pressure of “the markets” will be more intense. Labour’s planned campaign day on 29 October is focused on mortgage payment rises, not on the NHS or backing the pay battles, or even on rising private-sector rents.

Starmer and Reeves will be pushed towards what Ed Balls, as shadow chancellor, said in 2012, after two years of mild “Keynesian” criticism of Osborne’s cuts: “We are going to have to keep all these cuts”.

But now we have rising strikes. Balls’s turn in 2012 came after the defeat of the public-sector pensions strikes, of the local anti-cuts battles of 2010-1, and of the student movement against fees then.

We can and we must build a political counterpart to the strikes: a left wing in the labour movement which argues for a full socialist alternative of common ownership and workers’ control as Corbynism never did, and which explains how to beat the rule of “the markets” and the meagre alternatives of bigger or smaller cuts.



Pic: Gemma Short

Public ownership of the whole of high finance, and democratic social re-direction of investment, must again become a campaigning slogan as it did in patches after 2008. □



All the Rage: A day of socialist feminist discussion and organising

Saturday 26 November, 11am-6pm, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1 5QJ. Talks and workshops include • Women and the cost of living crisis • Revolution in Iran • Fighting inequalities in India • Women versus the state • Trans-inclusive feminism • Childcare – what do we demand? • Reproductive rights, a worldwide fight • Ukraine: feminism on the frontline. Free crèche and kids’ activities. Overnight accommodation if required. Tickets: £10, £5 student or low-waged. More info: womens-fightback@workersliberty.org. Tickets: bit.ly/wl-atr □



Corrections

The USA does 17% of global manufacturing value-added, not 23% as a typo in *Solidarity* 649 had it. A technical glitch lost the “6” in the headline “67% of Labour voters want to rejoin the EU”. That figure was from Redfield & Wilton Strategies, not YouGov. □

Local strikes spread as national disputes expand and accelerate

By Ollie Moore

One of the markers of the significance of the current strike wave is that it includes, alongside national strikes in nationwide industries such as the rail and post, a proliferation of local disputes. That indicates not only the general conditions of mounting inequality and worsening wages and conditions, but an increasing confidence of workers to fight back.

In Aintree, near Liverpool, nearly 700 workers in the GMB union at the Jacob's Bakery factory have held a rolling strike since 26 September, striking for 12 hours at a time, for a total of 14 strikes so far. They are fighting for an improved pay settlement, after their employer offered four percent. The workers are considering escalating their action to an indefinite strike.

Bus drivers in Cornwall, employed by First Bus, have also struck over pay, most recently on 21 Oct. The workers, who are members of the RMT union, have rejected a 5% pay offer. 60 workers at a Quorn foods factory in Bill-

ingham, members of Unite, began an indefinite strike from Thursday 20 Oct, fighting to improve a 4% offer. The union has demanded at least 9%, in line with the April rate of RPI.

Refuse collectors in the London borough of Richmond, members of the GMB and employed by the outsourced contractor Serco, called off a planned three-week strike after just one day, after workers accepted a 15% pay rise. Like the indefinite strike of barristers, and the planned indefinite strike of Arriva bus drivers in north and east London, the Richmond workers' win is further evidence that announcing more sustained or indefinite action is likelier to get results than sporadic, scattered strikes.

Arriva

A planned indefinite strike by Arriva bus drivers in Jesmond, Newcastle, due to begin on 21 Oct, was called off after an agreement was reached with the company. Although the planned action did not achieve its main aim of preventing depot closure, it secured increased re-

location payments for affected drivers.

Friday 21 Oct saw another unofficial walkout of oil refinery workers, with 1,500 workers walking off the job at Stanlow refinery in Ellesmere Port, demanding improved pay. At the time of writing, work at the site was still shut down.

"Unofficial" strikes, in the sense of not having been sanctioned by a formal ballot, are also spreading amongst food couriers working for apps such as JustEat, UberEats, and Deliveroo. Strikes have taken place in multiple towns and cities.

The national disputes on the post and rail, with further action due in Nov, are covered elsewhere in this paper, as are ballots in universities, in the civil service, etc.

In any major movement, there will be setbacks. The GMB's ballot in an Amazon facility in Coventry, the first formal ballot in any Amazon workplace in the UK, fell agonisingly short of meeting the Tories' arbitrary, undemocratic thresholds. The ballot returned a 99.3% ma-

jority for action, on a 49.14% turnout, a good result given Amazon's anti-union tactics. If just three more workers had voted, even if they had voted no, workers would be able to strike legally. GMB immediately launched a new ballot.

TSSA members at Govia Thameslink Railway also fell foul of the thresholds; despite a turnout of over 50%, with 67% voting in favour of strikes, they missed the "double threshold" applied to certain "essential services", whereby 40% of all those voting must back strikes. They did, however, meet the threshold in a parallel vote for action-short-of-strikes.

The key task for socialists remains to build up the confidence and organisation necessary for rank-and-file workers to put themselves in the driving seat of their own disputes. The examples of the barristers, Arriva bus drivers, and Richmond refuse workers show it can be done.

Accelerate, unite, and spread the strikes! Fight to win! Build strike committees! □

Strikes

Rolling, since 26 September: Workers at Jacob's Bakery factory in Aintree (GMB) strike

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

Since 20 Oct: Quorn factory workers in Billingham (Unite) on indefinite strike

Since 24 Oct: Liverpool dockers strike (to 7 Nov, for now)

27-29 Oct: Engineers and technicians in East Midlands Railway's Derby depot (Unite) strike

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

Until 28 Oct: Woolwich ferry workers (Unite) strike

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

1-3 Nov: Teachers at Calverton school in Netham (NEU) strike

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

3 Nov: Transport for London workers in various departments (Unite) strike

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)

5, 7, and 9 Nov: Network Rail workers (RMT strike)

5 and 7 Nov: Workers at mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

6 Nov: Train Managers on Avanti West Coast (RMT) strike

10 Nov: London Underground and London Overground workers (RMT) strike

28 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

Ballots

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

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

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

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

31 Oct-14 Nov: Firefighters (FBU) ballot on whether to accept 5%. The union is recommending rejection, which will almost certainly lead to an industrial action ballot.

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

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

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

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

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

Distributing Solidarity

From *Solidarity* 651 (2 Nov), at least for some weeks, more of *Solidarity's* distribution will be by bulk bundles by courier to one person in each city who then distributes to other sellers, rather than in individual mailings. This is because of the stepped-up Royal Mail strikes. We are

researching options for sellers ill-placed geographically for the big city bundles, and individual subscribers in big cities. The paper is available each week as pdf at workersliberty.org/solidarity. Queries? Issues? Phone 020 7394 8923 or email awl@workersliberty.org □



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.

Wednesday 26 October, 7pm: Bloomsbury Workers' Liberty: Workers' Climate Action, SOAS, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H 0XG

Thursday 27 October, 8pm: Gramsci's Prison Notebooks study group

Wednesday 2 November, 7pm: Bloomsbury Workers' Liberty: Workers Against Raids, SOAS, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H 0XG

Wednesday 9 November, 7pm: Workers' Liberty London Forum: Woman, Life, Liberty – Iran rises up for women's rights, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 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 □



Lessons in democracy... from Xi Jinping!



By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star*, concerned about the rise of authoritarianism in Britain, has identified a major source of it: "Starmer's Labour is playing a key role in that process and its successes accelerate the drive towards a more authoritarian and repressive British state (editorial, 12 October).

The editorial cites, as examples, the expulsion of members "for rule breaches invented retrospectively", the suspension of a conference delegate "for arguing against one of the motions on the agenda" and the deselection of Sam Tarry. The editorial goes on to warn: "Some MPs fear the Labour leader is prepared to suspend sitting MPs just before an election on jumped-up accusations, making them ineligible to stand for re-election even after representing their seats for years."

Morning Star columnist and leading CPBer Andrew Murray (in his Eyes Left column, 5 October) warns that: "Today's Labour is a deeply undemocratic and authoritarian party" and that "inoculating Labour against any democratic pressures will be essential if it is to func-



tion as a reliable 'B team' for capitalism. It must be sealed off from the mass movements of the working people by draconian discipline".

Starmer's leadership has made outrageous attacks on party democracy. Whether this amounts to a "key role" in the drive towards a "more authoritarian and repressive British state" is debatable, but it has made those attacks.

What alternative to the authoritarianism and "draconian discipline" of Starmer's Labour leadership should democratic socialists be looking to? Why, Xi Jinping's leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), of course!

One Keith Bennett (*Morning Star* 15-16 October) described how the 20th national congress of the CPC would be an exemplar of democracy

and "set out the roadmap" for the next twenty seven years:

"As befits such a serious political event, the congress will have been meticulously prepared. The political report to be delivered by general secretary Xi Jinping will sum up the work since the 19th congress held in October 2017 and set out the roadmap not just for the next five years, but also, more generically, to the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic in 2049, by which time the goal is for China to have become a highly developed, modern socialist country... Certainly the report will bear Xi's personal imprint and reflect his leading role, but it will also be very much a collective effort. Over the last year, it will have gone through numerous drafts, with a huge number of contributions and suggestions from specialised groups and party structures from the grassroots up."

Clownish

Bennett contrasts this "meticulously prepared" event with "the clownish and dysfunctional farces into which Britain's major political parties have descended" – you know, stuff like actually debating motions and having a real possibility of defeating the leadership.

Still, the 20th congress did produce one surprise moment: the unceremonious removal of former president Hu

Jintao: he was "not feeling well", according to state media. A bit more drastic than what happened to Sam Tarry.

Meanwhile, the *Morning Star's* long-running series of hints that Boris Johnson – for all his faults (acknowledged by the paper – represents something progressive, continues. Having given de facto support to his Brexit manoeuvres following the 2019 election, the paper now urges us to "reflect that what Tory MPs are voting for is someone who can win an election. For all his exaggerated human failings... Johnson is the one Conservative figure standing with a track record of electoral victory. He managed this by appealing to enough of the people to give effect to their referendum vote to get Brexit done and bolstered this with a mostly spurious 'levelling up' scheme. By this breakout strategy he found himself leading a Tory Party in which the sharp divisions in the British ruling class were only imperfectly represented. Where the settled ideas of our ruling class is perhaps more perfectly expressed is in Keir Starmer's shadow cabinet" (editorial 22-23 October).

Logically, that can only mean that in an electoral battle between a Johnson-led Tory Party and a Starmer-led Labour Party, the *Morning Star* would (at least privately) prefer a Tory victory. Or have I missed something? □

Montenegro Pride: no more buts, no more excuses

By Loretta Marie Perera

Just two weeks after Belgrade's much-talked-about EuroPride, Montenegro held their own week-long series of events; this Montenegro Pride [8 Oct] would be the country's tenth. But in contrast to Belgrade's protests and aggression in the weeks leading up to the event, this year Montenegro would see none of the same aggression.

"Having been involved since the beginning, I've seen a huge change," said Danijel Kalezic, member of the organisational committee of Montenegro Pride and an activist who has campaigned for LGBTQ rights and equality for over a decade.

"I was here from the very beginning, and at the very first pride here, it was a small war in the street: fighting with police, a lot of tear gas," he described. "But you see here today? Everything is quite normal – a nice, big event of happy people."

The generally safe atmosphere hasn't come by chance. The threat of the Serbian Orthodox Church spreading anti-LGBT propaganda and expanding their presence in public and political spaces is rife in Serbia, but Montenegro isn't spared, either, said Pride board member Nada Vojinovic. "The organizers play a big role in keeping

Montenegro Pride a peaceful protest," she said. The theme of this year's event: No more buts.

"It means we are not tolerating any partial rights or support," said Vojinovic. "When someone is supportive BUT you should not do it publicly, or we will give you some of your legal rights like getting married BUT it can't be perceived as marriage. We are not asking for any privileged rights but basic human rights."

Gathering at Independence Square in the afternoon, organisers estimate 400-500 people participated – the largest Montenegro Pride has seen. Among them were members of the local government and a team from the country's EU delegation.

"It's important for the EU to be represented because it's an issue that still has problems here," said Yngve Engstroem, who led Montenegro's EU delegation. "Members of the community are not treated as equal, and there is still stigma."

Despite their non-EU status, he stressed on the importance of their participation. "It's part of the EU values, it's part of a dialogue, we promote legislation that is here for everyone," Engstroem said.

For long-term organiser Kalezic, it's visibility that is most needed, and an

essential part of why Pride needs to be held. "Having pride in Montenegro is important because of a lot of different things, such as our lack of visibility: visibility of our identities, visibility of the problems we are facing," he said, "but also because Pride is making change in people's attitudes."

During the march which took participants through and around central Podgorica, observers looked on from their windows as a moderate police presence was felt on the streets. "We are noticing positive change, but there are still so many people who do not like us," Kalezic said. "But change is coming every year."

"With Pride, people see that we are not afraid, and we are not different in a negative way," he said. "They have a chance to interact with us and know us better."

The next step for Montenegro? Kalezic answered without hesitation: Legal gender recognition law.

As the country of just over 600,000 presses on in a fight for full equality and acceptance, it is important to acknowledge both the changes that have become reality, and the struggle that still looms.

In a message of support for the community in Montenegro, Engstroem called on the resilience members of



the LGBT community have continued to demonstrate. "I think it's important to not be afraid of who you are, to do what you think is best, and to stand free," he said.

And while a right-wing resurgence storms many countries around the world, "the Balkans are the worst when it comes to supporting women," Vojinovic said. "You can only imagine what women in our community deal with as they face multiple forms of discrimination, misogyny, violence and hate speech." But the team is pressing on. "For Pride 2023, we will go harder and stronger!"

"A lot of people forget that when we have rights, we can also lose those rights," Kalezic added in a message to allies abroad. "So, don't take your rights for granted because someone was fighting for rights that you currently have." □

Iranian protests spark wider fightbacks



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

While raising pictures of Mahsa Amini and calls against oppression, a number of women have held a rally (2 Oct) in front of Beirut's National Museum in solidarity with the protesting women of Iran. Lebanese women held banners that said: "Our anger is one, our struggle is one", "Women's hair is not sinful, your oppression is sinful", "The veil is a personal freedom, not a governmental matter", and "My body and my hair belong to no-one but me."

The demonstrators refused the attendance of Abbas Yazbek, a Shia cleric opposed to the Iranian regime, at the vigil because of their stance against religious authority, with activist Zahraa al-Dirani saying, "We don't care if the sheikh is against the Iranian regime, we object to him representing a religious authority that oppresses women."

Since 2019, there have been large protests in Lebanon against the Iranian regime. These protests are significant as they focus on solidarity with Iranians against state repression. Up until this point protests had domestic focus against corruption and Iranian influence in Lebanon.

Women in Gaza, governed by the Iran-backed Islamist group Hamas, have also been drawn into conflict over the hijab. Students are complaining that

school headteachers have been trying to impose the hijab on pupils at girls' schools, though there is no requirement from the Ministry of Education. In September 2013 the Hamas government passed legislation segregating education but it did not make the hijab compulsory in schools. But [this school year](#), in 70 girls' state schools spread across Gaza, preachers and sheiks, in agreement with the school managements, have been preaching the need to wear the hijab. Saber al-Awadi, one of those extolling the requirement to veil at schools, told *Al-Monitor*: "This state of 'open-mindedness' that has been prevailing among female secondary school students, which is the most dangerous for young women, prompted me and a colleague to organize groups of preachers and to launch social awareness and guidance campaigns in schools to urge female students to stick to religion and avoid indecent clothing. Schools are the only and appropriate place through which religious sermons can be spread to a large number of girls. A majority of school administrations help us in our religious project, by carrying out continuous inspection and follow-up campaigns with female students."

There has been considerable backlash from students, including some citing solidarity with women in Iran. The attempt to assert religious authority, in the wake of the Iran protests may well backfire. Back in 2016, after protests and complaints, the Ministry of Educa-

tion in the Gaza Strip issued a circular prohibiting state school administrations from allowing those who wished to carry out religious preaching or any other religious activity to enter the school premises after the protests and complaints. □

Iran: what revolution?

On 22 Oct the Saturday afternoon Iran solidarity protests at Trafalgar Square, London, were more dominated by royalist flags than previous Saturdays. Iranian leftists demonstrate separately, by the National Gallery, and by no means all in the royalist-flag crowd are royalists; but this week the discourse of "43 years" of oppression (as if all was ok under the Shah) dominated.

One of the slogans on the royalist-dominated sound system was "One solution, revolution". That shows us how empty that slogan (used at one time by the SWP, and more recently Socialist Appeal) is. The socialist task is to argue what revolution is for, what it is a "solution" to, and which class it must be made by.

There are moves for a committee bringing together Iran-exile left groups and parts of the British left to get a stronger show of socialist and democratic solidarity. □



**Activist
Agenda**

A motion and statement protesting against the Labour Party ban on Workers' Liberty are in circulation: bit.ly/liftwlbans

Following up from its activity at Labour Party conference (25-28 Sep), the Labour Campaign for Free Movement plans a conference, probably late November, to organise to make Labour support migrants' rights.

It is also circulating an updated model motion, and running open working groups on mobilising against detention centres and on organising within the unions.

It will seek to get involved in the Solidarity Knows No Borders network.

Free Our Unions is running an online fundraiser: bit.ly/fightantistrike-laws. □

• Links for campaigns and motions at workersliberty.org/agenda

TUC lobby and rally 2 Nov

The TUC has a lobby of MPs at Parliament from 2pm to 6pm on Wed 2 Nov, followed by a rally at Central Hall Westminster, 6pm to 8pm. The lobby calls for a £15 minimum wage, increases in pay and Universal Credit, defending the right to strike, etc. The rally has been rebranded as demanding an early general election. On 5 Nov the People's Assembly has a demonstration on similar demands, noon from Embankment, London WC2N 6NS. □

• tuc.org.uk/2November
• thepeoplesassembly.org.uk

Tories say they'll review school trans guidelines

By David Pendleton

A case brought by parents of a child on the Isle of Wight is now said to have "prompted the government to revise its gender-related guidance for children".

The case goes back to 2017. Nigel and Sally Rowe, who are described as "Christian parents" (presumably self-defining), took legal action against the government for failing to intervene against school policy, and the government eventually conceded the case.

Withdrew

Mr Rowe is reported as saying: "To cut a long story short, in the school, when our boys were six years of

age, in the classroom one of their friends decided to transition from being a boy to a girl. It was just announced to the kids. And therefore, when we heard, we objected to that." The Rowes withdrew their children for home-schooling.

This particular slice of transphobia is cloaked by a claim that the Rowes and their six year old son were accused of being transphobic. In fact the very reasonable letter from the school, which is available [online](#), says no such thing. It simply outlines the school's legal and, in their eyes, Christian, responsibility to protect the child who wanted to transition.

Children should be able to define their gender (or lack of gender) and how they want to be considered. They should be treated with respect by their peers and the school. Schools should protect children and allow them the space to develop as they want to.

Safe

Schools must be a safe space for all, away from the pressures of bigoted communities and parents. It is unclear whether the government is revising its guidance, and if so how. This is just another case of nasty transphobia. The left and the labour movement should call it out as such. □



Thousands marched in London on 22 October to demand Britain rejoin the EU. The demonstration was less ethnically diverse than London's population, and had no real organised labour-movement presence, but reflected a 67% majority among Labour voters who are for rejoining.

The suburbs from the 1980s to now



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

It's 21:00 hours in suburban Brisbane on 6 October, and I'm working on a traffic-control job in Brisbane's north west, in the suburb of Mitchelton where I have some of the strongest memories of my childhood.

Mitchelton in the 1960s was a working-class suburb with numerous state-owned Housing Commission homes,

all three-bedroom, built of wood, on 540 sq metre allotments. They certainly were not palaces, but they left enough room in the backyard to play a game of "backyard cricket" where one of the rules were if you hit a six over the neighbour's fence you lost your wicket.

Today, and from the 1980s, McMansions are built – big houses, usually four bedrooms, made of brick, that take up a suburban block to the extent that a backyard cricket game is not even imagined. Oddly, many of these houses have a half-sized American basketball court in their front yard – another example of the permeation of American

culture, particularly from the 1980s.

The huge push now for home deliveries of every imaginable item is nothing new. The United States had the Sears catalogue. In Brisbane we had our milk and bread delivered. "The Fruito", the fruit and vegetable vendor, would drive up and down your street, and many people would buy their weekly supplies from him.

I think the grocery monopolies like Coles and Woolworths in Australia and Tesco and others in Britain squeezed the margins of those small businesses and made it impossible for them to



exist. These monopolies in fact made the industry less efficient from the supply side.

Fresh food had to be bought in-store (so you buy more than you need) and not delivered to your door.

We are bombarded with how capitalism keeps improving and gets more efficient. It may get more expert at squeezing profit from those already hurting, but in many areas monopolies have led to much worse service than before. □

Midterm malaise in the USA

By Tom Harrison

Socialists, and rational people everywhere, can only rejoice that vile conspiracy-monger Alex Jones has been ordered to pay close to a billion dollars damages to parents whose children were murdered in the gun massacre at Sandy Hook school, Connecticut in 2012.

Jones's far right website InfoWars claimed the school shooting was "fake" – a plot organised by the Federal government to tighten gun control laws – and parents of slain children were "crisis actors". Fellow scumbags waged a campaign of harassment against those grieving for their lost ones. This included death and rape threats, urination on one child's grave and even sicker threats to dig it up.

It's unlikely Jones will recover financially from this, no matter how much he implores his listeners to buy the quack "supplements" he peddles. He's benefited from dark money in the past from numerous far-right funders, but their dubious generosity won't extend to a billion dollars. Lawyers for the Sandy Hook families have promised to see he's bankrupt for the rest of his life. It couldn't have happened to a nastier guy!

Staged

Yet millions of Americans still believe in such conspiracy twaddle. An estimated 20% regard mass shootings as "staged" by the government. Parts of the internet have become a cesspit for misanthropic garbage, the latest example being rapper Kanye West threatening on Twitter "death con 3 [sic] on Jewish people".

Nevertheless, these judgements

against Jones mark the beginnings of some kind of accountability for those peddling conspiracies and defamation. Fox News and two smaller right wing news networks also face billion dollar law suits from companies which make voting machines for baseless claims their machines had been "rigged" to favour Joe Biden. If successful, they could do considerable financial damage to the Murdoch media empire, which also faces fresh allegations of phone-hacking in Britain.

Trump himself has issued cease-and-desist letters against media outlets that call him a liar, together with a \$475 million defamation lawsuit against CNN. Such attempts to intimidate the media don't have much traction nowadays, as he faces increasing legal exposure on a number of fronts, although no indictments yet.

Theft, wire fraud, rape, seditious conspiracy, witness intimidation, obstruction of justice – all could make up an impressive rap sheet to which others could certainly be added, would the Department of Justice show it means business. Trump has to date actually been charged with bank, tax and insurance fraud in New York. And although this is a civil case, it could put him out of business in a way similar to his soul-mate Jones.

Trump has probably thrown a fair few KFC buckets at the TV screen recently. Causing particular upset has been the continued House investigation into the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January last year. It produced convincing evidence he knew he'd lost that election and was following a game plan decided on months beforehand to cry "fraud." Trump and cronies such as Ban-

non and Roger Stone were in collusion neo-fascist groups in the planning and execution of the Capitol attack. The J6 Committee has subpoenaed Trump to testify before it. His response has been a 14 page incoherent rant which primarily fixated on the size of the crowd turning up for him on that day. It's extremely unlikely he'll attend, employing instead a myriad of legal appeals and gambits to dodge accountability and hoping the legal road won't run out before mortality catches up with him.

Should the Republicans win control of the House next month, it's pretty certain the Congressional investigation will be closed down. They'll then engineer various partisan "investigations", the most likely of which will be of Joe Biden's son, Hunter. The FBI might also be a target in an effort to take the heat off Trump as a consequence of the stolen documents probe.

FBI

The FBI is seen by Trump's enablers as "a tool of the radical left", though in all probability the overwhelming majority of its agents voted for him.

According to a recently released memo sent to FBI Deputy Director, Paul Abbate, "a sizeable proportion of the [FBI] employee population ... felt sympathetic to the group that stormed the Capitol." It isn't surprising given the FBI's reactionary role in American history.

As campaigning for midterm elections draws to a close the future of democratic decision making is a major concern. Indeed elections themselves are on the ballot. According to the Brookings Institution there are at least 345 candidates who support "the big

lie" – Trump's assertion the election was "stolen" from him – and more than half are likely to be winners. Some at State level will have a say in how elections are run; others, if in Congress, on the certification of Presidential election results. A mob might not be necessary to get the desired election result for Trump in 2024 if these election-deniers resort to other forms of chicanery.

The main issue with voters, at 30% according to pollsters, is inflation, with prices at the petrol pumps seemingly more important than threats to democracy and reproductive rights.

The attack on abortion rights following the overturn of Roe v Wade by the Supreme Court has had a definite energising effect on voters, but, as Bernie Sanders has argued, defence of abortion rights must be linked to other issues that affect the American working class, and with a strong pro-worker agenda.

Sanders particularly berates the dysfunctional US healthcare system "which, despite being the most expensive in the world, allows 85 million Americans to be uninsured or underinsured." Sanders argues that corporate greed should be a major target, and the super-profits being made by the oil and pharmaceutical, food, agri-business companies.

Historically the left has had an uphill struggle in the USA to establish anything approaching a mass party that represents the interests of the working class. The current crisis in the American polity presents an opportunity to establish one and break the two party straitjacket constricting political life by advancing demands that truly benefit the working class. □

Zelenskyy: A government of millionaires against billionaires

By Denys Pilash

Zelenskyy's programme was so vague, and his rhetoric could be interpreted in so many ways – everyone was putting in him their own ideas and dreams. His party was also a mishmash of them with no coherent political philosophy uniting it.

The Zelenskyy government isn't so different from standard Central and Eastern European options. However, its platform and the way it was elected were much more inclusive and much less national conservative than the majority of politicians in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries.

It was that actually it had no comprehensive programme, and it was just really, in a way, adapting to mainstream ways of doing politics here.

In speaking about its class nature, it's quite important to note that every Ukrainian government in the history of independent Ukraine was pro-business, especially after President Kuchma consolidated oligarchic capitalism. Ukraine has its very powerful oligarchs of its own, it's not as dominated by multinationals as several of its Western neighbours, though our oligarchs are also part of transnational capitalism, often residing and hiding their capital in places like London.

Each government represented this oligarchic consensus, conducting economic so-called "reforms" firstly with privatisation in the interests of the national capital. There is a constant mantra about investors that we should "attract more foreign investors" and so on. But

the majority of investors up to this moment still comprise the same Ukrainian oligarchs coming via different offshore tax havens like Cyprus, the British Virgin Islands or the Netherlands.

Zelenskyy's campaign attacked different aspects of the Poroshenko government. But the team that was in charge of the neoliberal reforms under Poroshenko was mostly inherited by Zelenskyy. His minister of finance, Marchenko, was very afraid of the idea that we should write off or freeze the Ukrainian debt because it would frighten investors...

This is the same guy who was the deputy minister in the government under Poroshenko and who was behind the cuts in education drastically stripping students of their stipends. This manifestation of austerity sparked protests, and activists of our organisation then attacked this neoliberal politician with a pie.

Zelenskyy's circle was connected with different capitalist interests, for example his campaign was at first supported by the notorious oligarch Kolomoisky. His first Prime Minister was the person favoured by the multinational capital. His second and the current Prime Minister used to work under the oligarchic structures of the richest person in Ukraine, Akhmetov.

So we see that there is a continuity. It's a neoliberal effort and it's driven both by the external factors, the demands of international financial institutions, for example, loans for their packages; and by the internal factors, because we have all these so-called economic

experts who are essentially market fundamentalists and who are in many ways more eager to introduce more austerity, more anti-labour reforms, more deregulation than even the IMF itself.

There have been some shifts however. This government has been described as an uprising of millionaires against billionaires.

Though Zelenskyy was initially supported by Kolomoisky, there are rumours Zelenskyy has stripped him of Ukrainian citizenship as the oligarch's corruption is investigated in the US. It seems that the government is representing the interests of smaller big capitalists. This is also indicated on the horizon of their economic thinking and planning.

They lack ideas for big industry and big chains of production. They think of more medium sized business needs, for instance legalising gambling. And, of course, they neglect the interests and demands of the working class and labour in general. Among the ruling party MPs, there's a handful of extreme neoliberals like Tretyakova who aim at dismantling the entire welfare, labour



and social protections system.

This represents their own class background that many of them come from – middle bourgeoisie or groups of big-

ger capital not so prominent and not so politically involved as the big oligarchs.

A year ago, Zelenskyy initiated the adoption of several laws that were aimed at de-oligarchisation.

His legislators tried to put in an impossible framework. A certain number of people will be designated as oligarchs, and if you are an official oligarch then there're certain controls over you restricting your direct involvement in political parties and the media market. They didn't target the primary cause of the problems: that the oligarchs obtained their wealth in this illegal way during the post-Soviet privatisation processes. To address the core issue, we need to confiscate property from these oligarchs. And so the policy is still promoting, in general, the interests of this oligarchy and capitalism. Without expropriation, and with the continuation of privatisation, there cannot be real "de-oligarchisation".

So, in a way, yes, this is a continuation of a very pro-capitalist, pro-market policy, shaped by the class perspective that is driven by the people who agree to get rid of the complete control of big oligarchs, but only to replace them with a bigger number of smaller ones. In this, their interests may coincide with some of multinational capitalists who want to get more access to the Ukrainian economy, Ukrainian markets and Ukrainian resources. We can say this is this conjuncture of smaller big capital inside Ukraine and some international institutions, primarily financial. □

• Denys Pilash is a member of the Ukrainian socialist organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement)

BJP out of the Labour Party!

By Sacha Ismail

There has been significant disquiet about left-wing candidates excluded from Labour Party parliamentary selections on absurd pretexts.

Starmer's leadership has grotesquely abused the notion of "due diligence" – disqualifying candidates because of bad past behaviour – to rule out even left-wingers who under the rules should automatically make the list because they have multiple union nominations. So far, the unions are making little fuss.

But in Camberwell and Peckham (South London), the Labour machine has not only ruled out the left candidate in favour of conservative Starmer-types, but included an *out-and-out right-wing nationalist activist* on the selection list.

That's Neeraj Patil, who in 2014 travelled to his native Karnataka and at a press conference joined Narendra Modi's far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Patil has since openly campaigned for the BJP in India and acted as a spokesman for its agenda in UK Labour. □

• More: bit.ly/neerajpatilfacts



Action on Covid-19

According to Eric Topol in the *British Medical Journal*: "If we had a variant-proof vaccine, if we had nasal vaccines [which can cut transmission more than jabs], and if we had back-up drugs to the only pills that are available today, we'll be in much better stead and we'll finally get containment." Scientists think all those possible, and maybe also a vaccine effective [against all coronaviruses](#).

Without the spur of immediate emergency, resources are not being put into vaccines and vaccinations.

Down

Worldwide Covid vaccination is running at less than 0.1 doses per 100 people per day, down from over 0.4 for a while, even though only 63% of people world wide have had two jabs.

Hospitalisations with Covid are falling again in England, after a rise between 10 Sep and 4 Oct.

But the risk of a fierce new variant remains. We need to:

- requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how, to speed vaccine production and delivery world-wide.
- restore NHS funding and repeal privatisation
- requisition private hospitals to augment NHS resources
- bring 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)
- good sick pay for all
- a sustained public-health testing-and-surveillance system □



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The left and lesson



Interview

Michael Chessum met Martin Thomas from Solidarity on 15 October to talk about his new book on Corbynism, *This Is Only The Beginning*.

Near the end of the book (p.210) it says: "Socialist was the movement's prevailing adjective, but its immediate policy programme was... social democracy, and there was little or no collective discussion inside Corbynism about what a truly socialist or anti-capitalist programme might look like in the future". Wasn't that fundamental? And wasn't the same lack also true of the "movements" of 2010-5 which the book describes as feeding into Corbynism?

Corbynism was an amalgam, with amorphous political aims. The mass movements which had built it – the student movement from 2010, the local anti-cuts campaigns, the pensions strikes of 2011, the Occupy movement – came together with the old Labour left and a whole series of other traditions and waves of social movements.

There were a lot of different political aims inside Corbynism. A large part of the movement didn't know what it wanted. The movements from 2010-15 were searching for political expression. There was almost no collective discussion of what we wanted, rather, a mood of being desperate for the return of some alternative to neo-liberalism, to the political mainstream. That produced sometimes weird results in the years before 2015: the sudden popularity of Russell Brand, a surge for the Greens...

The organised left had gone through a period of defeat. The Trotskyist left and the orthodox Communist left did know what they wanted. But the Trotskyist left was not in a position to drive the debate.

The old Labour Left – people like the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

THE MAKING OF A NEW LEFT, FROM ANTI-AUSTERITY TO THE FALL OF CORBYN

MICHAEL CHESSUM

and the old Labour Representation Committee – also had defined political aims, but again little capacity to shape debate.

Corbynism was built from the social movements, from outside. It had little space to debate and discuss ideas: certainly after 2017, internally it was extremely loyalist and intolerant of dissent. It became impossible to debate political aims, or to build tendencies or factions. A group of people in Corbyn's office and the bureaucracy of the major unions set the programme, and the rest of us had no means to really shape that policy.

There were spaces for debate, like *The World Transformed*, but they were obviously toothless in terms of any decision-making. The people who created *The World Transformed*, many of whom came out of my [2010-11] generation in the student movement, took a de-

cision to build a space for debate, but the cost of that was that they weren't in the field of political battle in the Labour Party or Momentum.

But at *The World Transformed 2016* the panels had almost no speakers from the Momentum left. Stewards tried to ban left-wing literature stalls even from the public street outside while the *Morning Star* was distributed free inside. I know the organisers of TWT were anti-Stalinists, yet even at TWT 2022 there were very few actual debates.

TWT was set up in 2016 off the edges of Corbyn's second leadership campaign, with only a tiny bit of funding. Especially in its first year, Momentum and the Leader's Office were still interfering in event. But the overall effect of that event – and every other event that followed – was overwhelmingly positive. If I was going to talk about the problem of bad political culture and creeping Stalinism on the British left, I wouldn't start with TWT.

When people mostly from NCAFC [National Campaign against Fees and Cuts, the main student left activist movement from 2010] set up TWT, they marginalised themselves from the political battle. But what they produced was valuable. TWT is now an independent events company, with a more pluralistic culture than much of the left.

You have to remember that a lot of the worst party managers in the Leaders' Office and the Unite bureaucracy were hostile to the very existence of TWT. [Jon] Lansman was hesitant to fund it, but backed it in the end, even if his allies in Momentum remained suspicious. Of course what TWT couldn't substitute for was the lack of any dem-

ocratic life inside Momentum and the wider project.

There was a low level of political culture in Corbynism. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, you had a big organised left; Corbynism came from a moment when the organised left was weak. My generation [after 2010] was starting again after 30 years of continuous defeat. Much of the generation's politics got flipped on its head, very early on, into bog-standard Labourism.

The post-2010 movements didn't come from nothing: remember, e.g., the "new anti-capitalist" wave, the Social Forums. And the post-2010 movements had all been defeated and dispersed before 2015. The "Corbyn" influx into the Labour Party was mostly of older people, "returners". Young Labour and Labour Students were smaller at the end of the Corbyn era than at the start.

Corbynism, Syriza, Podemos, the Sanders movement, were a long wave of results from the financial crisis of 2008. The shattering at a deep sociological level of the neoliberal consensus produced mass movements which shaped people and politics. In that sense Corbynism was made by the mass movements after 2010.

Yes, the movements failed. They peaked early in 2010-11. By 2015 the "movements" were no longer a movement. All the institutions, organisations, and campaigns had largely collapsed. But the people who had been politicised were still there, forming an amorphous soup which after the defeats could be swept up into Corbynism.

I'm not arguing that Corbynism was overwhelmingly young. With Young Labour, you had a classic exercise of position-filling. Young Labour was won by a left slate which was interested in winning internal elections and getting people to vote Labour in general elections, but did little.

But in broader political terms, Corbynism and the Labour left became the voice of young people. You could see that in the electoral demographics.

Young people in that period experienced capitalism in a particular way. Generational politics became a way of expressing class politics.

The youth revolt against neoliberalism has not all been left-wing. It could go to the right. Golden Dawn in Greece, Le Pen in France, have disproportionate support among young people. Why was Britain different? You have to look at the mass movements after 2010 to explain that.

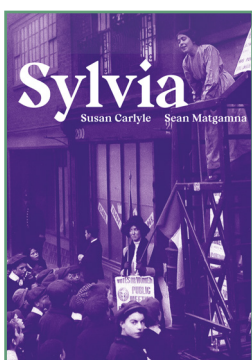


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ns from Corbynism

Didn't the lack of discussion on aims lead to de facto domination of Corbynite politics by variant combinations of Stalinism and of NGO politics? That was helped by many of the young activists going into NGO or other "doing comms" jobs, rather than becoming workplace and community activists like previous generations of young radicals.

Yes, the NGO-isation of the left is a major problem; and it's even more a problem now in a period of collapse.

The organised left was in a long wave of defeats after the mid-1980s. Rank-and-file-ism as an option collapsed. I think Workers' Liberty may be the only left group now which has an industrial policy [in the sense of encouraging young activists to go into workplaces important for industrial struggle].

In the 1980s there were big struggles in workplaces, and if you wanted to be political, workplace activism will have seemed a natural place to go. It shouldn't surprise us that in a period since the defeat of the labour movement, people looked elsewhere.

All great waves of activity eventually ebb. What remains? What sustains the activist spirit for the future? Institutions.

If you look to workplace struggles, you can go into a job, be active in the union, and even in a period of decline be nourished by that activity. If not, you look to create other institutions.

The "alternative globalisation" (alter-globalisation) movement boosted NGO politics on the left, and Blairism created wide job opportunities in

NGOs. The labour movement was at a low point, the organised left weaker, the labour-movement connections were more tenuous.

And so the Corbyn movement and Labourism interacted with NGO-ism. Momentum became a left-wing version of 38 Degrees – electronic list-building, digital campaigns, and little outside that.

You can see the legacy in Enough is Enough – huge email lists, big rallies, not much else. The NGO methodology is a big problem. Compared to that, even the SWP's Stop the War coalition looks like a breath of fresh air and democracy.

Hopefully a lot of young people will observe the new strike wave and become trade unionists. However, a lot of left-wing young people have middle-class aspirations. With the decline in real wages in many areas, they may see their only chance of a decent standard of living in jobs where you get promoted. For jobs in NGOs and in trade unions, real wages have not gone down as they have elsewhere – so the bonus in becoming a bureaucrat is much greater.

Not so much in the book, but elsewhere, you have argued for a focus on winning Proportional Representation to spawn a new "broad left" party. But "broad left" parties in continental Europe, mostly based on the heritages of old Communist Parties, haven't solved the political shortcomings that stymied Corbynism.

I don't necessarily see the European left parties as a model. Proportional representation might create two or even three left parties: around the Greens, around the Trotskyist and social movement left, and around the Communist Party.

But the idea of the left taking over Labour and enacting a programme through it is fantasy.

And the idea of Marxists building a class-struggle left in the Labour Party, which might eventually provoke a split by the right out of which a democratic class-struggle left party would come?

Any new left party would have a bureaucracy, but the Labour Party has a series of specific problems which make it worse.

At present the left is absent from the national debate, in the UK as in the USA. In those countries the Labour Party and the Democratic Party have a monopoly in political representation, and the left is forced to share space with neoliber-

als. That pressure had an effect on Corbynism's internal culture.

The hundreds of thousands of people who rallied to Corbynism didn't want an absence of internal democracy or lack of space for debate. Why could a small group of people convince them to go along with it? They argued that Corbynism was under siege and needed to get into the bunker – and that story was convincing because at least half of it was true.

Now old Bennites are thinking about how to have another Corbyn moment but do it better next time. That is no recipe for transformative change.

The Labour Party bureaucracy and the union bureaucracies make each other worse. I'm in favour of the union-Labour link, but it very often pulls unions to the right in terms of militancy and policy, and acts as a brake on Labour members' control of the party.

It would be much preferable to have multiple parties, and unions affiliating to various parties on the basis of politics. That would open up a real political debate within the labour movement. At the moment, we have this farce where we pretend we're all part of the "Labour family". Having a united voice for workers would be great, but Labour's way of operating mitigates against obtaining the very intellectual and political clarity that would be necessary for that to happen. Instead, we get an endless bureaucratic fudge and a sentimental attachment to a party which has pretty much always been dominated by its right wing.

A new left party would not be free of those problems, but it would be better, and it's an imperfect world. It could be a party which boosts the social movements rather than being a brake on them.

But I do not advocate leaving the Labour Party or splitting the Labour Party now.



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You propose a focus on PR as a left tactic, but in practice now it pushes towards an alliance with the Lib Dems and a future coalition government, i.e. a move to the right.

A coalition government is not my politics. But what we have at present is a permanent centrist fiction in politics – that elections can only be won by competing for voters who are in one sense or another in the middle. The fiction only holds because, under First Past The Post, the left cannot put its own programme to the public.

The only reason why the breadth of opinion within the Labour Party exists is that it is forced to by the electoral system. A new left party is not going to happen immediately. But when it does, it could well bury the centre-left, because when it comes to actual policies, ours are just so much more popular.

The status quo creates machine politics, and not just in the sense of the party's internal processes. Labour is a machine for taking people from social movements and industrial movements and neutralising them politically. □

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The Liberals and Ulster



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

James Connolly at first dismissed the Ulster Unionist resistance to Home Rule as a matter of "wooden guns". He ended in 1914 by saying that the defeat or withdrawal of the Home Rule Bill would be better than it being passed with any form of partition. In this article he suggested a third alternative: pressure on the Liberal government to coerce the north-east, to "use its armed forces to make an ascendancy clique beaten at the polls recognise the machinery of the law".

This is the fateful week when, according to all the authorities, the drums of war are ready to beat in Ulster. Everybody is on the tip-toe of expectation, and many worthy souls are not able to sleep at nights listening anxiously for the first rattle of musketry.

It is all very weird and puzzling. Had some writer gifted with the powers of prophecy attempted four years ago, or fourteen years ago, to sketch in a novel the outlines of the political developments of the past two years in Ulster, he would have been branded as a foul libeller of the British governing classes or else as an idiot who failed to understand the passion for order and

constitutional methods of procedure that inspires those set in authority in these islands. Not in all Europe would he have found one who would have accepted his prophecy as an indication of the probable trend of events.

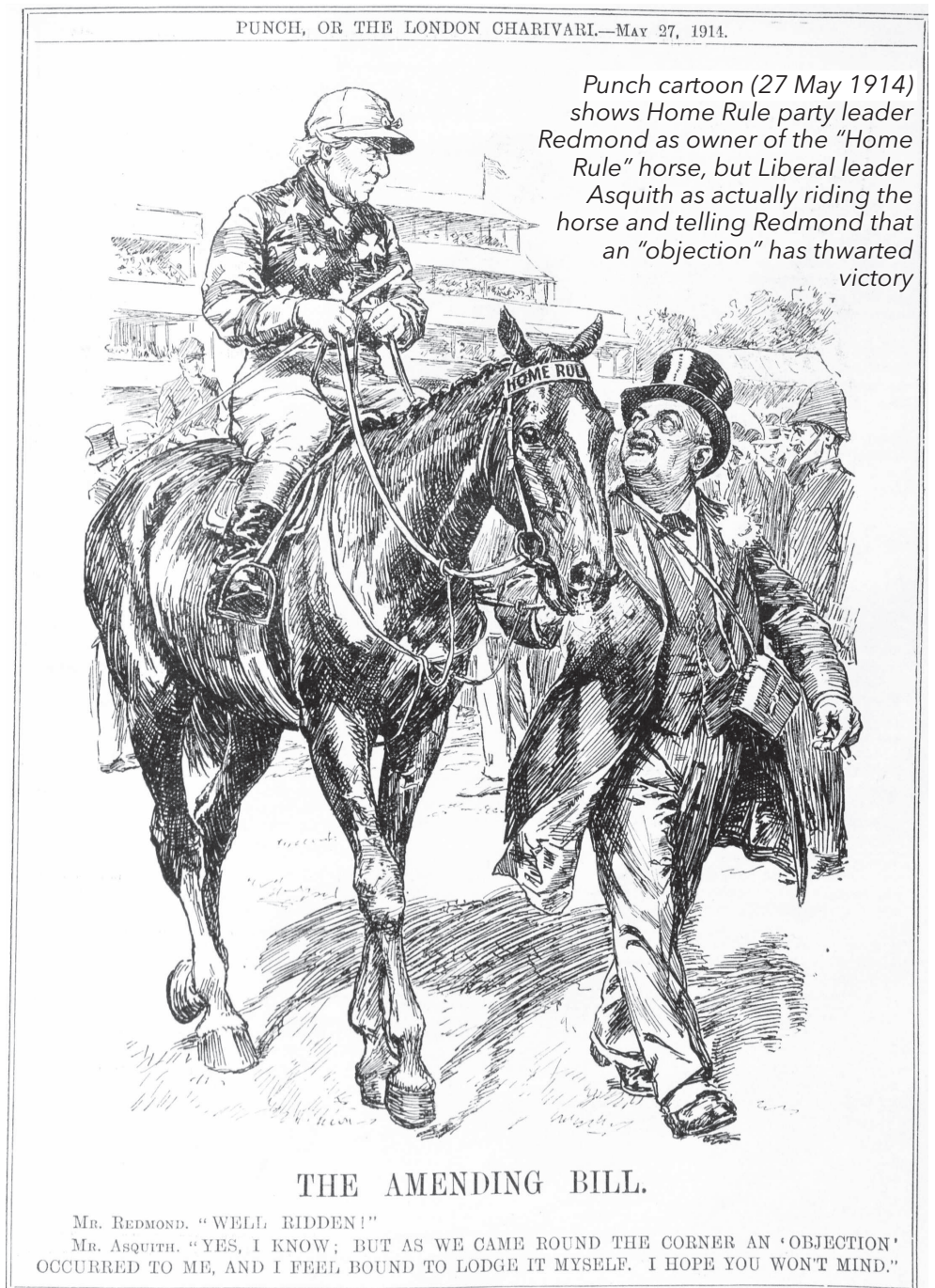
Permit me briefly to recapitulate the chief marvels that have astounded the world in this political struggle.

A Cabinet Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, announces that he has accepted an invitation from Ulster Liberals to address a Home Rule meeting in the Ulster Hall in Belfast. A meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, with a noble lord in the chair, publicly announces that it will take steps to prevent Mr. Churchill's meeting. Up to that point nobody in Ulster who knows the Ulstermen had taken in the least degree seriously the threats of fighting on their part. All recognised that the rank and file were probably ready enough to fight, but all also recognised that the economic position of the leaders of the Orange forces, their standing as holders of capitalist stock, land, coal mines, shipping, etc., made the suggestion that they should rebel against the Government that guaranteed their investments — a very ridiculous suggestion indeed.

It was generally felt that a firm application of the power of the police force would suffice to quell in a few days all the Orange resistance, and nobody dreamt that the Government would hesitate in firmly applying that force upon the first opportunity. Any open defiance of the law, any open declaration of an intention to break the laws, supplied just that opportunity for the Government to act with all the traditions of law and order at its back.

This projected meeting of Mr. Winston Churchill and the Unionist threat to prevent it came almost as a providential gift to a Government desirous, before it should act, to have its opponents entirely in the wrong. All the traditions of British constitutional procedure were outraged; even the most hardened Tories in Great Britain looked askance at this Orange proposal to deny to a Cabinet Minister that right of public meeting theoretically allowed to even the most irresponsible agitator. The occasion called, and called loudly, for a firm application of force to establish, once and for all, the right of public meeting in Ulster; to convince the Orange hosts that henceforth unpopular opinion must be met by arguments and not by bolts, rivets, nuts or weapons of war.

But, lo and behold! The Government ran away. Mr. Winston Churchill abandoned his right to hold his meeting in the place advertised, and slunk away to the outskirts of the city to hold a



meeting surrounded by more soldiers and police than would have sufficed to capture the city if held by the whole Orange forces in battle array. We in Ulster gasped with astonishment at this pitiful surrender of public liberties, and we realised that a direct encouragement had been given to all the forces of reaction to pursue the path of violence.

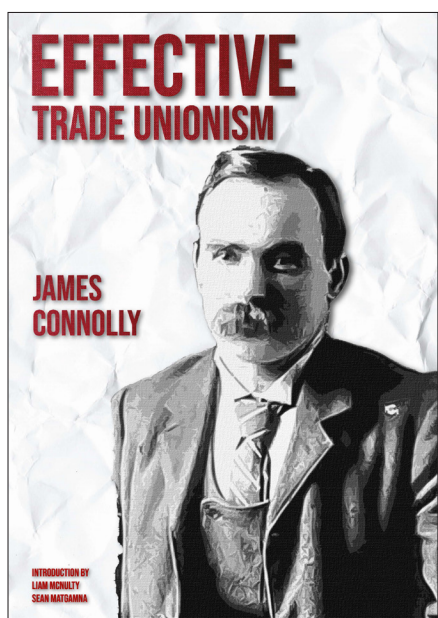
Mr. Winston Churchill's meeting was for the Ulster Orange leaders a glorious opportunity; it gave them the excuse for a daring experiment in lawlessness. That experiment was a success; it stood and stands to the succeeding events in the same relation as a trial trip of a newly-launched vessel stands to all its following voyages. Such a trial trip demonstrates the amount of pressure that can be safely put upon the boilers; Mr. Churchill's meeting demonstrated how, in what manner, and to what extent, pressure can be successfully applied to the Liberal Government by a reactionary class.

Suppose that the declaration of an

intention to take steps to prevent the meeting had been made by a committee representing the Labour movement, do you think that Mr. Churchill would have abandoned his meeting, even although that Committee represented an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the city? You know that he would have held that meeting at all costs, under such circumstances.

Next in importance to the abandonment of the right of public meeting came the tacit permission given to the Ulster Volunteers to arm themselves with the avowed object of resisting the law.

For two years this arming went on, accompanied by drilling and organising upon a military basis, and no effort was made to stop the drilling or to prevent the free importation of arms until the example of the Ulster Volunteers began to be followed through the rest of Ireland. The writer of these notes established a Citizen Army at Dublin in connection with the Irish Transport &



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

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General Workers' Union, and this was followed by the establishment of Irish Volunteer Corps all through Nationalist Ireland.

Hardly had the first of these corps been organised, and the desirability of having them armed been mooted, than the Liberal Government rushed out a proclamation forbidding the importation of arms into Ireland. What had been freely allowed whilst Orangemen alone were arming was immediately made illegal when Labour men and Nationalists thought of obtaining the same weapons. Then having allowed the Unionists to drill and arm, the Government made the fact of their military preparations an excuse for proposing the dismemberment of Ireland as a sop to those whom it had allowed to arm against it. Ulster, where democracy had suffered most because of religious ascendancy, was to be handed over to those whose religious ascendancy principles and practices had made democracy suffer.

Then we had the revolt, or mutiny, at the Curragh. Some regiments were ordered North, and the Liberal Minister humbly inquired of the officers if these gentlemen would kindly consent to go. The Orange leaders, their ladies and the royal family itself, had, it is believed, been usually engaged for two years in seducing these officers from all sense of duty – in teaching them to believe that they should refuse to act against the poor dupes who were being humbugged by the brothers, uncles, fathers, cousins and other relatives of those officers. And hence, as the ties of class are stronger than the ties of governments, the officers very

quickly told your backboneless Liberal War Minister that they would not proceed against their fellow landlords and capitalists in the North, nor against the poor wretches who had surrendered their political initiative to them.

And the Liberal War Minister, instead of promptly cashiering those officers, or ordering them to be tried by court-martial, humbly crawled to them, asked their pardon, so to speak, for daring to suggest such a thing, and gave them a guarantee that their services would not be called for against the Orange leaders. The guarantee was afterwards repudiated, but the rebellious officers are still in high favour with royalty, and still in command of their regiments. And the Liberal Government itself allowed the men who had corrupted the army to put it upon the defensive, and stand it in the dock, pitifully denying that it did the very thing that it is not fit to hold office if it fears to do, viz., to use its armed forces to make an ascendancy clique beaten at the polls recognise the machinery of the law from which it derived its powers in the past.

A final consummation to all this pitiful compromise and treachery to a people's hopes is the gun-running of the past few weeks. A ship sails into Larne Harbour one fine Friday evening, and immediately the Ulster Volunteers take possession of that town and seaport, the Royal Irish Constabulary are imprisoned in their barracks, the roads are held up by armed guards, the railway stations of Park Road, Belfast, of Larne, Bangor and Donaghadee are seized by the Ulster Volunteers and thousands of stands of rifles are landed together with a million rounds of ammunition. Along

with the landing at Larne vessels are used to tranship arms and ammunition from the original gun-running steamer and land the cargo so transhipped at Bangor and Donaghadee. Some hundreds of motor cars were used to convey the arms and ammunition to safe places, that night, and the same motor cars worked all day on Saturday conveying them from temporary resting places to more secure and handy depots throughout Ulster.

In a few days afterwards the affair came up for discussion in the House of Commons. The Liberals stormed and raved, and the Tories laughed. Why should they not? All the laugh was on their side. Then up rose again the hero of the Ulster Hall – Winston Churchill. He screeched and shouted and perorated and declaimed about law and order until one might have thought that, at last, a wrathful government was about to put forth its mighty powers to crush its unscrupulous enemy. And then, having attained to almost Olympic heights, Mr. Churchill ended by cooing more gently than sucking dove and blandly assured the Orange law breakers that he had not yet reached the limits of concession – he was willing to betray the Irish some more. If they would only let him know how much degradation of the mere Irish would satisfy them, he would try and work it for them. And Parliament adjourned, wondering what it all meant.

Now let me put the situation regarding the gun-running to any unprejudiced reader. Can anyone believe that the gun-ship, the Fanny, which had been reported at Hamburg a month before its appearance at Larne and the

nature of its cargo known, could keep hovering around these coasts for a month without the Government having it under close supervision?

Can anyone believe that if this gun-running feat had been attempted at Tralee, Waterford, Skibbereen or Bantry and Nationalists had attempted to imprison armed Royal Irish Constabularymen in their barracks that no shots would have been fired and no lives lost?

Can anyone believe that if railway stations were seized, roads held up, coastguards imprisoned and telegraph systems interfered with by Nationalists or Labour men, that at least 1,000 arrests would not have been made the next morning? Evidence is difficult to get, they say. Evidence be hanged! If Nationalists or Labour men were the culprits, the Liberal Government would have made the arrests first and looked for evidence afterwards. And been in no hurry about it either.

My firm conviction is that the Liberal Government wish to betray the Home Rulers, that they connive at these illegalities that they might have an excuse for their betrayal, and that the Home Rule party through its timidity and partly through its hatred of Labour in Ireland is incapable of putting the least pressure upon its Liberal allies and must now dance to the piping of its treacherous allies.

Who can forecast what will come out of such a welter of absurdities, betrayals and crimes? □

• *Forward*, 30 May 1914. This is part 10 of the section on partition and the Protestants of this [series](#) on Connolly.

Organising to fight for the NHS

By Luke Hardy

The NHS was already run down pre-Covid. Between 1949 and 2009 the average annual real-terms increase in funding was 4%. From 2009 to 2019 the real-terms increase was 1.5%.

The OECD average is 4.5 hospital beds per 1000 of the population. Britain has 2.45 beds per 1000. The staff shortage is 130,000, increasing year on year. Waiting lists almost doubled in the period 2010 to 2019.

Sally Ruane from the Health and Policy Research Unit at Leicester De Montfort University gave these figures to the Northern Health and Social Care Campaigns Conference hosted by Leeds Keep Our NHS Public (Leeds, 22 October), which drew around 50 activists, plus 15 on Zoom.

As well as the stress from

Covid, the [Health and Care Act](#) of April 2022 makes things worse. Cuts and increased privatisation are devolved to Integrated Care Boards. ICBs cannot set deficit budgets, and under the bill NHS trusts can make up to half their funding from private patients.

ICBs can also undermine national terms and conditions for NHS workers.

The conference also discussed maternity care, social care, and the impact of the government's [modification](#) of the £86,000 "cap".

In workshops, three key topics were:

- The relationship between focusing on local campaigning against ICBs and a national campaign against the government.
- The ways we can help support striking health workers and broaden this out to talk



about the broader state of the Health Service.

- The discussion about the fruitfulness or not of any orientation towards the Labour Party.

There was a lot more scepticism than in previous such conferences about what could be achieved by putting pressure on Labour. Yet unions that are affiliated to Labour could be using their power and in-

fluence to fight for Labour to commit to NHS restoration and to back their pay struggles.

If the Tories are ousted early, in the middle of a strike wave and mass protests, that strengthens our class and our ability to continue the fight against the right wing policies of the incoming Labour government. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/nhs-22oct

More Black History Month reading

The politics of "black power": interview with Darcus Howe
bit.ly/darcush

A US maritime union's hidden history of gay and interracial solidarity
bit.ly/maritimesolidarity

Shapurji Saklatvala: socialist and anti-imperialist rebel in Parliament
bit.ly/sak-pamphlet

The Black Jacobins: the Haitian revolution against slavery
bit.ly/haitian-rev

Revolution for black liberation: black soldiers in the US Civil War
bit.ly/blackcivilwar □

Sheffield students occupy against arms trade

Bucket, a University of Sheffield occupier, talked to Solidarity.

There is an occupation of the Diamond, the largest building in the University of Sheffield (UoS), to demand that the university ends its contracts with arms companies like Rolls Royce, Boeing and BAE Systems, and that these firms not be allowed to careers fairs. These arms manufacturers supply weapons that are used in wars that kill hundreds of thousands of people around the world, and so UoS should not take their money, or funnel graduates into their research programmes.

We have chosen to occupy the Diamond because it is mostly taken up by the Engineering Department, the largest department on campus. Many graduates from this department go into arms companies because of careers fairs involving arms companies and various agreements linking the department with these criminal firms. So

this is the part of the university which is most relevant to our demands. Also the Diamond is a culturally iconic university building, and because of the seriousness of this cause, we feel that highly visible direct action is necessary, after decades of campaigning by People & Planet and the Students' Union which have just been ignored by the University.

When we occupied the building in the morning, and we had our banners and were chanting, lots of people were filming, stopping to take leaflets and talk with us. People seemed very interested to hear about UoS's complicity in war crimes, and not to know very much about it. As with any form of protest, you get a few outspoken voices, easy to focus on, who might shout abuse. But society has its reactionaries in every corner: most people seemed genuinely interested and bad reactions only came from a few outliers. Even staff asking to get through accepted the fact of the occupation when we said no, and

turned away without complaint. A few staff members came up to us and told us that they privately support us. That shows that there is broad support for our demands, and the UoS management should come meet us and concede our demands, as we are only getting started.

Our message to other students is: we are not trying to deliberately target or disrupt you or your learning: we are trying to disrupt the university's relationships with these murderous companies. There is no reason that Engineering should be complicit in war crimes and arms manufacturing. We urge all engineers to come forward and demand that ties be cut and universities break away from the murder factory of international arms dealers and these weapons which kill innocent civilians.

There are a lot of jobs in the arms industry. But I don't think that cutting ties with the arms industry should necessitate job losses. Engineering is a vital part of any society. We would encour-



age workers to organise themselves and demand that their jobs be kept, but for creating other things. Workers can re-train: just as a Green New Deal should not mean fossil fuel workers losing their jobs, so we don't want to see the Engineering Department be shut down. But we want to see graduates and workers do things which contribute to society. □

• On 22 October activists in Sheffield Solidarity group organised a conference in Sheffield to regroup the student movement around the cost of living crisis. Report: bit.ly/st-22oct



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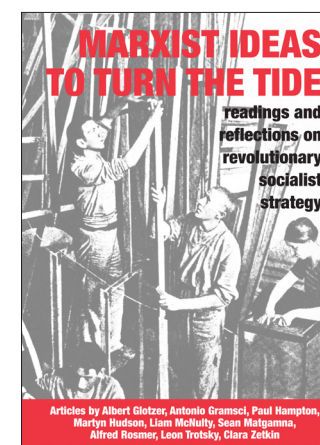
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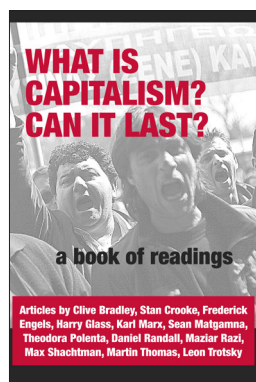
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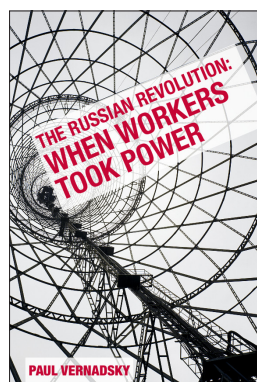
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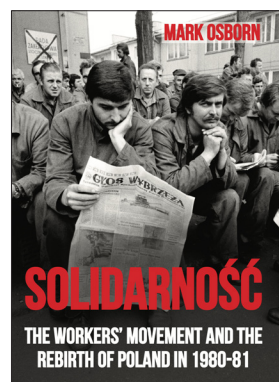
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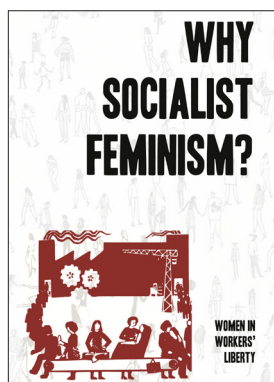
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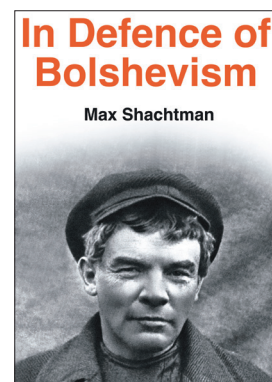
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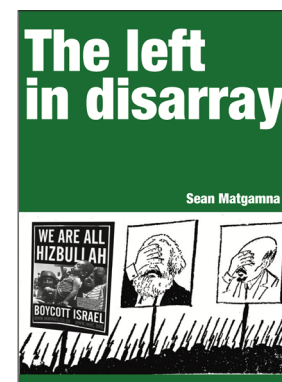
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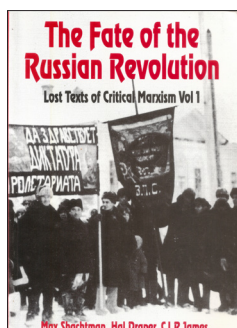
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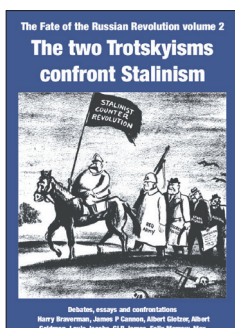
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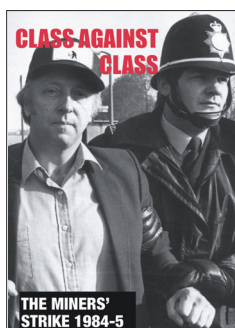
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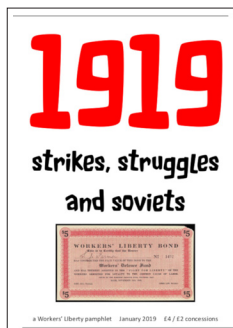
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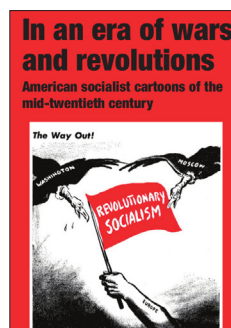
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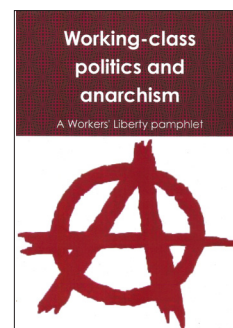
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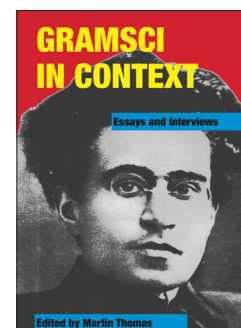
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NHS: make links across unions



By Alice Hazel

With a series of disaggregated ballots being conducted by a variety of health unions, we could end up with a complex picture of mandates for strike action across different Trusts and sectors. It could still be used to launch an effective campaign of strike action in defence of national pay, if co-ordinated. It is vital in this situation that the health unions communicate and plan together effectively.

With the leaderships nationally and at branch level of all the health unions having more experience of competing, pitting union against union, than of acting in solidarity, members will need to press for this to happen. Activists need to build this as an idea now.

Co-ordinated campaigns, cross-union strike committees, workplace meetings and bulletins, even simple chats in workplaces and messrooms, are all tools that can be used to build both the turnouts and the strategy and pos-

sibility for strikes. In Scotland the government has offered 5%, with a slightly higher percentage for the lowest paid, setting only £10.50 as a pay floor. In England and Wales governments have awarded the PRB recommendation of £1,400, vastly below inflation. Even that has been swallowed up by pension contribution increases, leaving many workers actually worse off in cash terms. No offer at all has been made in Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, the Unison ballot closes on 31 October, the RCN ballot on 2 November, and Unite's selective ballot on 4 November. The RCN England ballot, which is disaggregated by NHS Trust, also closes on 2 November.

Threshold

Anecdotally there is widespread support for action, and an attitude in many workplaces that a strike will happen. However, the turnout threshold is a challenge in health workplaces, with historically low levels of workplace organising. The RCN has very few workplace reps. The NHS workers' mobilisations that happened during the height of Covid, mostly in 2020, have not been repeated this year. Nurses United, the rank and file RCN group

which led at that time, has mostly burned out. Voting numbers are increasing, but there is still a way to go in the last week of the ballot, and postal strikes are likely to hinder this last week of returns.

The Unison ballot in England, Wales and Northern Ireland started on 27 October and runs until 25 November. It is also disaggregated. It appears that Unison has used the "pledge" results to pick those Trusts most likely to achieve the threshold, and resources will be targeted. Coming after the RCN ballot may help with turnout.

Both GMB and Unite are running selective formal ballots. GMB has started with a formal ballot across 11 Ambulance trusts, running from 24 October to 29 November, and has said that other Trusts will follow. Unite is running ballots across the Trusts that had the highest turnouts in their consultative ballot, with further "waves" to follow.

Those voting will be strongly in favour of action. Across the NHS virtually every



The Free Our Unions campaign has an online fundraising drive. Please contribute at bit.ly/fightantistrikeaws

worker talking about the campaign expresses the understanding that strikes are necessary. The challenge is achieving the turnout threshold, and the legal requirement that formal ballots have to be conducted by post will weigh heavy.

As many have commented, that requirement would not have been made in choosing the prime minister had the Tory leadership election gone to members. The Tories' ballot was due to be conducted online. □

BT workers moot four-day strike

By Rosalind Robson

Members of CWU at BT had their eighth day of strikes over an imposed pay settlement on Monday 24 October. Reportedly the union will next call four consecutive days of strike action, a break in a pattern of spaced-out strike days. That might begin to put sustained pressure on BT bosses,

who are so far refusing to negotiate.

BT imposed a flat rate settlement of £1,500 on last year's round of pay negotiations. The CWU says that equates to 3.8% and 8%, with the vast majority receiving only a little over 4%. CWU-represented workers at BT are not high earners – basic pay (outside London) ranges between just over £20,000

and just under £45,000. The CWU has been demanding a 10% rise.

The union has made a lot out of the fact that the refusal to negotiate is a big break in industrial relations at the company. But this negative turn is not very new; in the last two years the company has been restructuring its operations and had threatened compul-

sory redundancies. The union's recently stated tactic to meet with some of BT's biggest shareholders – a telecoms entrepreneur, another telecoms firm, an asset management company – to put pressure on the company's bosses is misplaced.

Short-term shareholder pressure to keep down costs is more likely driving the com-

pany's intransigence on negotiations.

BT claim they are minimising disruption but they will be under pressure from a backlog of new connections and repairs as Openreach service performance is overseen by Ofcom. That disruption will increase significantly if the four-day strike goes ahead. □

Keep together the action on rail



RMT members at 14 mainline Train Operating Companies (TOCs) will strike again on 5 and 7 Nov, and Network Rail workers on 5, 7, and 9 Nov. London Underground and London Overground workers will strike on 10 Nov.

It's very good that further strikes have been called, laying to rest fears that ac-

tion would be paused during the period of the RMT's re-ballot, which runs until 15 November. Striking during the balloting period not only maintains momentum in the dispute, it will help the ballot itself: the union is never more prominent than when we're taking action!

48 hours

It's also a welcome step that we're effectively striking for 48 hours. Two 24-hour strikes staggered over three days have more of an impact than 24-hour strikes with a week or more separating

them, as we've seen in previous rounds of action. This round of strikes sees the first time action has been separated between Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies, with Network Rail workers striking for extra days. Whilst there's a legitimate discussion to be had about the merits of selective action, with different groups of workers striking on different days as part of the same overall dispute, we still believe we're at our strongest when we all strike together. Whilst the Network Rail strike on 7 November means services will be disrupted anyway, despite TOC

members being in work, there's a risk that splitting the action up encourages people to think in terms of their own particular employer rather than as rail workers across the industry, whatever job we do and whoever employs us.

We'll be arguing – at work and in union branches – for further action to be called as soon as possible (realistically this means late November/early December, the other side of a hopefully positive ballot return), and for the union to call a programme of action starting with a further three-day strike involving all workers in the dispute. □

“” 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.

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- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Base roster not fit for service



Diary of a rail worker

By Steve Allan

Bond Street station is finally open, just a full five months after the other central Elizabeth line stations. Let's not forget the whole Crossrail project was nearly four years late and billions over budget!

Despite all this extra time to get things ready, bosses seem to have forgotten you need staff to run a station. There was an occasion last week where every central station was single-staffed rather than the usual two. A combina-

tion of high turnover, sickness and annual leave is hitting the company hard just as the service is ramping up.

From 6 November, the Elizabeth line will run seven days a week with through services from Reading and Heathrow to Abbey Wood, plus Shenfield to Paddington. Furthermore, trains will run later in the evening in line with London Underground services.

The base roster is not fit for the current level of service, let alone for the next stage. For example, the Sunday roster is lighter than other days since fewer staff were required. Now it is being incorporated by stealth despite Sundays not being included in our core working week. There are rumours that a new roster is being developed but

things are going down to the wire.

Once again, the company is relying on the goodwill of staff to keep stations open. Bosses recognise this and offer platitudes about looking at pay, conditions etc. But as always the proof will be in the pudding.

Another spanner in the works is the proposed Network Rail (NR) strikes at the start of November. The eastern and western sections of the line rely on NR signallers. On past strike days there has been a reduced service with trains finishing much earlier in the day. Embarrassment looms for the jewel in the crown of Transport for London! □

• Steve Allan is a worker on the Elizabeth Line in London

Liverpool battle will reverberate

By Neil Laker

Dockers at Seaforth (Liverpool) struck again from Monday 24 October. The current strike will last till 7 November – taking the days of work stoppage up to five weeks. An agreement was reportedly close to being reached in the week starting 17 Oct until the employer, Peel Ports, reneged by once again tabling redundancies.

The legacy of the 1995-98 dispute on the Liverpool docks is felt throughout the current battle: the communities that came together in struggle then are present on the pickets at the port and outside companies such as Atlantic Container Line – which is one of Peel's biggest clients, and the target of a demonstration last week.

The legacy of that last strike also takes the shape of a common understanding that the outcome of the current battle is crucial not only for North

Liverpool communities, but will reverberate around the wider Merseyside, British and international maritime labour movements. The dispute can play an important role in linking those who lived through the bitter campaigns of the 90s with younger generations of workers on the docks and beyond.

Trade union organisation on the Liverpool docks has been rebuilt steadily over the last decade, resulting in enough confidence and determination to fight for an above-inflation pay offer (in this economy!)

Decisions about the dispute are discussed and voted on in workplace meetings. The Chief Operating Officer of Peel Ports' description of this style of decision-making as "the pressures and undue influence of an outdated show-of-hands" says a lot of its continuing relevance in building and renewing a democratic industrial campaign.

There has been some talk among union officials of how the strikes at Peel Ports (and elsewhere) are a result of particularly malicious management. While true, it is also basic that the labour movement understands its role not only as either merely responding to bad managements nor even as "resolving" disputes through as militant action as needed. It must recognise that the antagonistic relationship between workers and their employers is in the DNA of all industry organised by capital. We must therefore also develop a political aspiration to match that, not limited by the horizon of "decent pay and conditions" etc. Needless to say, practical solidarity to help the dockers win this dispute is a vital first step in that direction.

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

A film for Tube workers



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Comrades working on the London Underground should enjoy this. *Kontroll* (2003, directed by Hungarian Antal Nimród) takes place entirely within the Budapest Metro, where a hilariously incompetent team of ticket inspectors (the "kontroll") attempt to carry out their duties, only to be harassed at every turn by ticker-dodgers, drunks, gangs of thugs and tourists. Meanwhile a hooded killer is pushing people under oncoming trains.

Trying to hold his team of deadbeats

together and keep his sanity in all this is Bulcsú (Sándor Csányi). Bulcsú's rival, the thuggish Gonzó (Balázs Mihályfi), challenges Bulcsú to a train race, a potentially life-threatening "contest" which involves running on the track to evade an oncoming train. Bulcsú wins the race and saves Gonzó's life in the process.

Bulcsú then befriends a young woman dressed in a rabbit outfit who is the daughter of a train driver he knows. Eventually, Bulcsú discovers the identity of the hooded killer. He is the disguised Lead Executive of the Metro; and after a scuffle he too is run over by a train.

Bulcsú returns to the "Bunny Woman", now transformed into a



"butterfly", and together they ascend the escalator out of the Metro which Bulcsú has not left for many months. □

PCS ballot ends 7 November



John Moloney

Monday 7 November is the last day for our national ballots. Effectively though, votes will not be counted if members don't send them off by the previous Friday at latest.

We know from information recorded by branches that in many areas we are getting close to the 50%, in some we are over, but in others, we still have a way to go. Over the coming days we have to redouble our efforts to get members to vote.

We are running a disaggregated ballot in over 200 areas. This means that by the end of the ballots, we may have a patchwork of positive ballots, but others where we did not get to the

threshold. In light of that, we may wish to re-ballot in certain areas.

Given the material context, that is the rate of inflation and other unions in dispute or moving into dispute, there is no reason why we should not get over the threshold.

We will not copy the previous pattern of industrial action which generally started with a one-day strike followed by weeks of relative inactivity. There is a consensus in the union for the use of selective action.

In my opinion, we should go for the maximum amount of all-out action that we think members will bear, along with an intelligent use of selective action.

Of course, if we take selective action then we need to ensure that the selected members lose little if any pay. Therefore, we must look at means of ensuring much more money being

raised for the strike fund. It is also clear that there is a growing consensus amongst the unions that those in dispute should co-ordinate their actions in order to maximise the effect of strikes. Hopefully over the next few weeks we can put flesh on those particular bones.

Along with strike action, I hope the unions will co-ordinate their political actions to put pressure on the Tories but also on the Labour Party and the SNP.

Alongside the ballots, we are also in dispute in local areas. Union members in Hinduja Global Solutions who work on the disclosure and barring service contract in Liverpool have just finished a week of strike action.

This dispute is over pay.

We should also know early this week the results of a ballot of our members

who work for Aramark on a contract in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). If they are successful, that should lead to strike action in the coming weeks.

At one time the union had a notion of "keeping its power dry" which was interpreted as meaning that local disputes had to be put on hold while we concentrated on national disputes.

I am glad to see that this attitude has been abandoned. The more local disputes the better. □

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

TUC: despite the strikes, a flat Congress

By Robert Knight

The Congress of the TUC finally took place on 18-20 October. The hastily reorganised Congress was both shorter and less well attended, with many unions focused on winning ballots for strike action. Although the mood very much reflected the upsurge in strike action and the imminence of further ballots, the gathering was flatter than ever, with most participants preferring the commodious hospitality of Brighton hotels to actually planning the serious, sustained fightback necessary.

Reproductive rights

Probably the best discussions on Congress floor took place around reproductive rights, sexual harassment and trans rights. There was strong acknowledgement of the centrality of these struggles and an honest recognition that some trade unionists have been (and still are) part of the problem. This probably reflects the influence of the equalities' conferences and committees, which include some of the better people involved in these gatherings. This year's new TUC president is Maria Exall, who has done much work in these campaigns over decades.

There were no international resolutions submitted by individual unions, but the TUC general council brought forward its own "world to win" statement. Although the statement rightly pledged solidarity with Ukraine, it was soiled by other skewed content and its omissions. The statement failed to mention China or Chinese workers or the destruction of Hong Kong trade unions. It condemned "apartheid" in the

occupied Palestinian territories, hiding behind the UN, instead of offering a working-class, consistently democratic political solution to the conflict.

The only significant disagreement was the debate on a GMB motion, effectively calling for more wars and more defence spending in order to shore up British manufacturing. Although the resolution tried to mask its reactionary message with reference to Ukraine, few were fooled by its nationalist, sectional and thoroughly opportunist character. With support from Unite, the resolution carried on a card vote by less than a hundred thousand votes – about 2.5 million votes to 2.4 million. This was a rare case where smaller unions held the balance – and some it seems sat on the fence.

Prominent

RMT disputes were prominent and had a resolution reiterating the demand to repeal the anti-union laws; a Fire Brigades Union speech in support included a useful plug for the Free Our Unions campaign. The TUC's strategy was summed up as "see you in court", although Mick Lynch bluntly told delegates not to trust the judges.

Keir Starmer's speech was noticeably well-received by the majority of delegates, taken in by some carefully crafted rhetoric. Starmer's performance was actually better than both Miliband and Corbyn as Labour leaders, helped by the tangible desperation in the hall for any government other than the Tories. However he made few promises and gave quite a few warnings, lowering expectations of a Labour government.

The fringe and activist layer around the Congress was dominated by Stalinism. The absence of healthier, militant and democratic campaigns was visible – although Free Our Unions hosted a useful discussion. The upper echelons of the trade union bureaucracy has awoken to the new militancy, but we have much work to do to create the rank-and-file-led leadership necessary for a successful strike wave against the employers and government.

Few can have come away believing it was worth the wait from the regular scheduled date in September. The previous two Congresses were mostly online and truncated due to the pandemic. This year's was disgracefully postponed in September due to the death of the queen. In the midst of our strike wave, all but a handful of trade union leaders felt it was worth scuppering the workers' democratic parliament to doff our caps to the monarchy. The employers of course carried on their side of the class struggle regardless. □

UCU wins strike mandates

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) in higher education have returned two aggregated ballot mandates for industrial action: on pay and conditions, 57.8% turnout with 81.1% for strikes; on USS Pensions 60.2% turnout with 84.9% for strikes. UCU's higher education committee meets on Thursday 3 November to decide next steps. □

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Putin declares martial law

By Dan Katz

On Wednesday 19 October Russian President Vladimir Putin declared martial law across the four Ukrainian regions – Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia – which he claims to have been annexed to Russia in September. Martial law in these occupied areas of Ukraine will allow Putin's forces to legally detain people for up to 30 days, set up checkpoints, seize property and forcibly mobilise people and resources for the Russian war effort. Occupation authorities have been obliged to submit plans to create local "territorial defence" forces.

At the same time a second decree put every Russian region into new categories of increased "readiness." Putin seems to have laid the basis for declaring a form of martial law across parts or even all of Russia, although the practical use of the new decrees still remains unclear.

In eight regions of Russian bordering Ukraine local authorities have been given powers to impose curfews, restrict travel and public assemblies, suspend activities of political parties, take over factories and transport, apply censorship and order the resettlement of people.

On 10 October, immediately following the appointment of a notorious thug, general Sergei Surovikin, as commander of Russia's war in Ukraine, Russia began a campaign to destroy Ukraine's civilian energy infrastructure. Using missiles and Iranian drones Russia is attempting to create widespread misery and demoralisation amongst Ukraine's civilian population. In fact, Russia's campaign is probably rallying people around the state, increasing determination and defiance.

Although many Russian missiles and Iranian-made drones were shot down, others got through Ukraine's limited air defences.

Ukraine's energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, said that more than 30% of Ukraine's electricity supply facilities have been damaged so far. On 22 October, the capital, Kyiv, and cities in western Ukraine experienced power cuts; 1.4mn households in seven regions were left without electricity.

Halushchenko added that prior to the Russian

invasion 10% of Ukraine's energy supply was made up of green energy, of which 90% of wind and 50% of solar facilities are now inoperable because of the war.

In August Russia bought 2,400 armed drones from Iran. Initially the Russians were unable to operate the drones effectively and Iran sent 20 members of its military to Crimea to train Russian personnel. The Ukrainian state claims Iranian trainers are also now in Belarus.

Why would Iran cooperate with Putin's Russia? They have a common hatred of the US, and in busting US-led sanctions. They have both cooperated together in Syria to stabilise Bashar Assad's murderous dictatorship. Neither of these dictatorships has any principled, moral objections to killing innocent Ukrainian civilians or committing the war crime of deliberately damaging civilian infrastructure. And as a Western nuclear deal with Iran seems very distant, there is no pressure on Iran to distance itself from Russia; it might as well take Putin's money.

Iran is also providing missiles to Russia, and has just announced it will sell Russia 40 turbines for use in the gas industry.

Ukraine continues to attack the Russian occupation forces in north east Ukraine and the southern region of Kherson.

The commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, Sergei Surovikin, admitted the situation in Kherson was "difficult" and Russia was "not ruling out difficult decisions."

Russia has probably mined the dam at the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant with the intention of blowing it up to cover their retreat from the right bank of the Dnipro.

The dam is 30m high and 3.2km long and holds back 18mn cubic meters of water. If the dam is destroyed a 5-metre-high tidal wave of water would rapidly flood settlements along the Dnipro River, including Kherson City.

The Russian military have destroyed a dam on the Dnipro before. On 18 August 1941 Stalin's NKVD blew up the Hydroelectric power plant at Zaporizhzhya, apparently to obstruct the Nazi advance. However, over 20,000 civilians died, as well as Russian troops, and flooding spread to

towns 80km downstream. The Russians would further damage Ukraine's power infrastructure by blowing the dam. However, they would at the same time disrupt the water supply to Russian-occupied Crimea.

The northern section of Kherson oblast, north of the Dnipro river, appears to being evacuated by Russia. Russian military equipment, troops and officials who have been collaborating with the Russian occupation, are all being moved out. On 23 October Moscow-installed authorities in Kherson claimed that around 25,000 citizens have also been evacuated.

Kherson city is now a ghost town where remaining Ukrainian civilians hide-away in fear of Russian occupation troops and Chechen forces. Although the power is still on, medicines and baby milk

are hard to get and the internet is blocked to stop Ukrainians from reporting on Russian troop movements.

The Russians are also looting the area, including removing the fire engines from Kherson fire stations.

The Russians are now forced to ferry materials and people on improvised barges across the river as Ukraine has used high-tech American weapons to make access by road and rail bridges almost impossible.

As Russia is moving experienced troops out of the area around Kherson city it is replacing them with 2,000 badly-prepared troops from the recent conscription drive. It seems that Putin considers the new draftees to be "expendable". □

Post workers ramp up strikes

By Ollie Moore

Royal Mail postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) are continuing a rolling programme of strikes for a decent pay rise and to resist job cuts and attacks on their terms and conditions.

Workers in all roles struck on 20 October. A postal worker and CWU rep told us: "The mood is brilliant, the support is constant, solid, and unwavering. Not just in my area, but across the whole country."

"Gate meetings", mass meetings of workers outside workplaces, were held on 19 October to update workers on the dispute: "They were mainly an update from the National Executive Committee on where the dispute is currently, and a rallying cry that solidarity will win this dispute".

The union reports that Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson is not turning up for meetings. "It is disgraceful and disrespectful that he's happy to announce cuts and attacks on conditions, but won't even turn up to negotiate. Meanwhile, he spends a lot of time posting on the company's internal social media platform, called 'Workplace', pumping out his propaganda thinking he'll persuade posties not to go on strike, which is laughable because we can all see straight through it. His posts, which are designed to sow fear into us, have the opposite effect and make us stronger and more determined. He is just being pig-headed and delusional."

A further all-out strike is planned for 25 October. After that, the strikes move into a rolling phase, with different departments striking on different days, before a further all-out strike on 28 November. Network services and distribution strike on 2 November; parcel and letter process-



ing and distribution, Royal Mail international, and collections on 3 November; and delivery on 4 November, with further strikes planned throughout November and into early December.

The effect of the rolling strikes, workers say, is to maximise disruption whilst minimising loss of pay: "On 3 November, when processing and distribution are out, we'll be on delivery at work – but there'll be nothing to deliver. The following day when all the mail has been processed and distributed, it won't be delivered because we'll be out on strike, you get two days of disruption for one day's loss of pay."

"Our action is ramping up towards Black Friday [25 Nov] and Cyber Monday [28 Nov], and we've got the option of issuing notice of further strike action in the 'peak period' in the run-up to Christmas. We're now hearing from reliable sources that because of the impact on their businesses, major companies like eBay and Amazon are pressuring Royal Mail to resolve the dispute, or they will pull out from using them as a courier."

The CWU has also established a national strike fund, which workers in hardship can apply to for financial support. Donations are also being collected on local picket lines: "We had someone give us £25 on our last picket line. People can apply to the national strike fund, but there's also a lot of support locally. People are really pulling together and helping each other out." □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

KICK THE TORIES OUT: GENERAL ELECTION NOW!

By Martin Thomas

"We now have the prospect of having a Conservative Party leader who doesn't have a mandate from the country and won't even have a mandate from the membership either... I think a general election is the only answer, otherwise we're just going to go from bad to worse."

That's not a Labour or Lib-Dem politician, but a Tory MP, admittedly a somewhat maverick one, Christopher Chope.

Socialists advocate a thorough representative democracy, based on the right to recall representatives at any time, abolition of privileges for representatives and officials, and ending the separation of legislative and executive. (That means: day-to-day government is by committees and delegates directly accountable to representative assemblies, rather than by an executive standing above it and only partially and tenuously accountable.)

The Chartist movement in Britain, nearly 200 years ago, called for a new parliament to be elected every year.

In the current system, MPs, once elected, have no real accountability for five years. The prime minister, once chosen, has much control over parlia-



ment via the "payroll vote" of people they appoint.

Theresa May announced the "end of austerity" in October 2018. In May 2020 Boris Johnson said austerity would be "certainly not part of our approach" to shrink the accumulated debt from Covid lockdowns. The Tories won the December 2019 election on a promise of "levelling up". As recently as 12 October, Liz Truss as prime minister said the Tories would "not [be] cutting public spending".

The Tories were lying. In fact cuts continued. But the pressure did loosen. Now they are openly announcing a new austerity. As former Bank of England chief Mervyn King says, it will be "even more difficult" than George Osborne's 2010-6 cuts.

No vote. No election. No democratic debate.

There are precedents for British governments with good parliamentary majorities being pushed into calling (and sometimes losing) early general elections to seek a "new mandate" (Jan and Dec 1910, Dec 1923,

Feb 1974...) An early general election now will not happen by exact analogy.

But an essential element in getting one is ferment and protest in the country, often interacting with ferment in the governing party. The best way to speed an early general election is to win against the Tories in the public and quasi-public (rail) industrial battles.

In the early 1970s the slogan "General Strike to Kick the Tories Out" was popular on the left, and we criticised it. If we could get a potentially-revolutionary mobilisation like a general strike, we should not fix it on an only-negative slogan like "Kick the Tories Out", handing the ruling class the option of getting a return to work by calling an election while granting no or meagre substantive concessions (as in France in May-June 1968).

"Kick the Tories Out" protest should not limit itself to that slogan – as if slightly eased austerity policies would be all right if put through by Starmer or Davey. It should push substantive demands: Restore the NHS. Stop cuts. Repeal anti-union laws. Keep wages and benefits up with inflation. Reverse Brexit. Public ownership of utilities and the banks... □

