

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

WORKER POWER CAN DEFY "THE MARKETS"



Cartoon by George Newman: @geowman

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Worker power can defy “the markets”



The Tories will say that their cuts coming on 17 November, and their hard line against public sector wage rises, are unavoidable adjustments to “market realities”.

Almost the whole political spectrum, apart from working-class socialists, agrees. After the Truss-Kwarteng experiment in maverick “Reaganite” bourgeois economics, which lasted only two weeks after the “mini-budget” of 23 September before starting to collapse, all the economists say that tax rises and cuts are no less unavoidable than heating your house or wearing warm clothes if you want to stay healthy in cold weather.

The writers for the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* are scathing about Sunak and his obvious follies like Brexit or “Eat Out to Help Out” in 2020, but they don’t doubt his basic case for new austerity.

Labour’s leaders avoid directly contradicting them. They say that the crunch has come because of Tory mis-steps, and they vaguely promise “growth”, but that’s all.

Liz Truss’s and Kwasi Kwarteng’s floundering have indeed made “the markets” (i.e. the big financial operators who buy and sell British government IOUs, “bonds”) more exigent. Those

operators want more interest rate rises and social cuts than from other countries to reassure them.

The labour-movement left should re-raise the call for public ownership and democratic control of high finance, which gained some ground in the years after the 2008 crash and was endorsed by TUC congress in 2012 and 2019, but has fallen out of circulation.

It’s not that or nothing. The [£50 billion](#) or so the Tories say must be cut from governments’ deficits by tax rises and social cuts is huge in terms of impacts on the NHS, on schools, and local services (all already squeezed by price inflation for what they buy in, not covered in their budgets) and in terms of benefit-recipients’ lives (inflation rates, driven by food and energy, are higher for the worse-off). It is small in terms of the economy at large (about £2,200 billion a year, a large part of that going to profits, interest, rents, dividends, and ultra-salaries for the rich). Shell has just reported profits rising to £26 billion in the first nine months of 2022. It is paying no windfall tax, and its CEO Ben van Beurden says he is resigned to paying some. Owen Jones in the [Guardian](#) argues that wealth taxes can balance budgets better than cuts. Will Hutton, a “centrist” social-democratic type, [contends](#) that many “market participants” are green and socially-minded, and will buy IOUs from a “social democratic” government as long as it has “credible fiscal plans”. Even Toby Danker, chief of the bosses’ confederation CBI, has called on the Tories to avoid a “doom loop” of “spending cuts”.

All those are right up to a point. Wage battles can win by reducing profit shares from the levels they’ve reached after nearly four decades of an increasing trend. Public service wage rises can be financed by modest tax rises, or cutting areas like military spending. A “wage-price” spiral than keeps inflation high for a bit longer is better than just a “price spiral” which may subside faster but cuts real wages.

But as the capitalist crisis – hiatus, crunch-point, emergency – now underway unfolds, then the leeway is likely to diminish for gains which can be made by mildly bending, rather than breaking, the basic rules of capitalism.

We say now, in advance: better to break those rules than break the poor, break the NHS, break the environment. We want to break those rules in favour of democratic and social control over economic life, not only because a crisis narrows choices, but because that is the only way to build a society of sol-



idity and equality and sustainability.

The leeway is limited already. When Labour published its “Corbynite” 2017 manifesto, its starting point was a government budget deficit of about 2.3% of GDP. That deficit was moderate in capitalist terms, and much lower than in the crisis years of 2008-10 (nearer 9%) and the Osborne years from 2010 (from 9% to 5%). Inflation was low. The short-term world economic outlook was relatively stable. Many financial operators probably assumed that a Labour government would evade Brexit or minimise it (e.g. stay in the Single Market and the Customs Union).

All that’s different now.

Since 2017, the UK’s excess of imports over exports has risen sharply, especially in 2022. Much of that worsening is due to Brexit. The UK is dependent, to offload its government IOUs and to buy the imports it does, on non-UK financial operators buying those IOUs and other financial assets (the “kindness of strangers” as former Bank of England chief Mark Carney called it, though there’s no “kindness” involved). UK governments are becoming more vulnerable to moves by plutocrats to shift their wealth and income to places less likely to tax them.

A workers’ government could make social aims – restoring the NHS and other public services, improving wages and benefits, and reorganising economic life around energy efficiency and low emissions – prevail over the pressures of the financial markets, but only by taking the whole of high finance into public ownership and introducing workers’ and democratic control over its activities and its directions of credit and investment.

Pension funds and mortgage-lending would become not exercises in speculation, requiring governments to impose social cuts to keep the funds’ interest and dividend revenues healthy, but rather accountancy operations with pensions and housing costs explicitly paid from current output (as in fact, under the financial veil, they always have to be).

The government would have no option but to reintroduce [exchange controls](#) (direct controls over moving large amounts of money across borders). That is not at all the same as attempting

a “siege economy” cut off from world trade (as some of the Labour left foolishly argued in the 1970s) or advocating those exchange controls as a virtue in themselves. China, heavily immersed in world trade, and no model for policy in other respects, still has strict exchange controls.

Those financial moves would be at odds with the economically and socially desirable reversal of Brexit (restoring free movement with the EU27, rejoining the Single Market and Customs Union, seeking negotiations to rejoin the EU, as polling says two thirds of Labour voters wish). The answer to the contradiction is that in the closely interconnected world of 2022, no working-class drive for radical policies in one country can succeed, or is likely to gather pace in the first place, unless connected with (and probably impelled by) similar working-class drives in other countries, which will change the parameters of what is possible in an integrated European economy along with much else.

But is all this fantasy given a labour movement where Starmer rules the Labour Party and can get warm applause at the TUC congress (18-20 October), with occasional grumbles but no concerted pressure from the unions? It is until we reinvigorate the left. We face a new capitalist crisis. To face up to it, the labour movement needs to raise our horizons. If we confine ourselves to meagre proposals, always limited to leaving the bulk of the wealth of the billionaires at their disposal, and economic life to be governed by capitalist-minded officials manoeuvring in the margins allowed by how the billionaires dispose, then we descend to wishful thinking.

After the 2008 crash, when millions were pushed into rethinking, the left ceded the initiative to the nationalist rights and far right – the likes of Modi, Erdogan, Trump, Bolsonaro, etc. – because the outspoken working-class socialists were too few, not bold enough, not energetic enough. In the delayed 2015 cycle of revival in the Labour Party again: the outspoken working-class socialists lacked the numbers and energy to drive and shape the new ferment.

Let’s organise the socialists to make this crisis different. □

Distributing Solidarity

We regret the CWU’s cancellation of some Royal Mail strikes (see p.13), but it has given us some more time to adjust distribution of *Solidarity*. With this issue, plans go ahead to shift more of the distribution to bulk bundles by courier (or by hand in London) to one person in each area who then distributes by hand to other sellers, and have less by individual mailings. Individual mailings by Royal Mail are continuing with this issue, but will be replaced by smaller courier bundles to sellers, and mailings of a few issues at a time rather than weekly to individual subscribers, in the coming weeks. Queries? Issues? Phone 020 7394 8923 or email awl@workersliberty.org □

Building up the pressure

By Ollie Moore

Throughout the current strike wave, *Solidarity* has used the slogan “unite, accelerate, and spread the strikes”. By “spread”, we mean extending the strike wave to as many new workplaces and sectors as possible, drawing in greater numbers of workers. By “accelerate” (we could also have said “intensify”), we mean striking more frequently and for longer, with action aimed to force material concessions from employers rather than to make a token protest. And by “unite”, we mean “coordinate”, and more: the conscious unity of different disputes, for the workers and unions involved in them to see them as a class-wide fightback for better conditions.

The next weeks and months could see significant spread. Higher education workers in the University and College Union have just voted for action. Midwives in Scotland became the first group of health workers to vote for action, returning an 88% vote for strikes, and a 94.6% vote for action-short-of-strikes, on a 61% turnout. Between now and January, teachers and other school workers, civil servants, health workers, rail cleaners, and probably fire fighters will return ballots. Hundreds of thousands more workers could take action. Ballots will also be returned in smaller disputes, such as Unite members at housing charity Shelter, and Unison and Prospect members at the Environment Agency. Additionally, rail and Tube workers in RMT and Aslef will return re-ballots, seeking renewed mandates that could extend action into spring 2023. Several unions have already accelerated action. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) stepped up its action in Royal Mail from sporadic 24-hour strikes by naming a 19-day

programme of action running through to early December, although some of those strikes have now been withdrawn following legal threats.

Unite members in various disputes have taken prolonged and sometimes indefinite action. Rail action escalates back to a staggered three-day strike by Network Rail workers in RMT on 5, 7 and 9 November.

Various union leaders started by insisting that disputes are “marathons, not sprints”, calling shorter strikes (24 or 48 hours), and only naming one round of action at a time – essentially, striking and then waiting-and-seeing. Much better to let the employer know that, if they don’t settle with the union, they will soon face intensified strikes.

Even if they are not up for indefinite action, unions can announce a calendar of strikes, week-by-week or month-by-month depending on levels of organisation and confidence, perhaps building up to indefinite action.

“Uniting the strikes” remains a key task. Where “coordination” – different unions striking on the same day – has taken place, it has been largely coincidental, mostly a product of the fact that, in a major strike wave, the calendar is crowded. Still lacking is a conscious effort by unions to democratically discuss and agree proposals for united action, with common messaging and materials, with joint strike rallies in as many towns and cities as possible. In some disputes, unity within a single industry or even within a single union remains elusive, with RMT now separating its strikes on Network Rail, Train Operating Companies, and London Underground/Overground. Wherever local cross-union discussion can be achieved – whether via Trades Councils, ad hoc strike committees, or even local Enough is Enough groups – it should

seek ways to support rank-and-file activists in arguing for unity and coordination within and between disputes. □



Strikes

Rolling, since 26 Sep: 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

Until 7 Nov: Liverpool dock workers (Unite) strike

Until 29 Dec: Hull Stagecoach bus drivers (Unite) on strike

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

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

12 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

14 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

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

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

28 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

Ballots

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

Until 4 Nov: Workers at housing charity Shelter (Unite) 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

11 Nov-12 Dec: Midwives in England and Wales (RCM) ballot for action over pay

Until 14 Nov: Fire fighters (FBU) ballot on whether to accept a 5% pay offer. The union is recommending rejection, which will almost certainly lead to an industrial action ballot

Until 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

Until 19 Nov: Prospect members at the Environment Agency ballot for action over pay

Until 22 Nov: Outsourced cleaners on multiple TOCs (RMT) ballot

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

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

Until 9 Jan: Teachers (NASUWT) ballot for action over pay

Until 13 Jan: Teachers and support staff (NEU) ballot for action over pay

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



Upcoming meetings

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

Thursday 3 November: Oxford Workers’ Liberty: The roots of the Russian anti-war movement, Seminar Room 6, St Anne’s, (meet at the lodge), Woodstock Road, Oxford, OZ2 6HS

Wednesday 9 November, 7pm: Women, Life, Liberty: Iran rises up for women’s rights, Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London, WC1N 1AB

Thursday 17 November, 3pm: The strike wave in France – Tubeworker monthly meeting

Sunday 20 November, 11am: Matt Huber’s “Climate Change as Class War”: Ecosocialist reading group

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



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: womensfightback@workersliberty.org. Tickets: bit.ly/wl-atr □



Second thoughts about China?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

For many years, the *Morning Star*, like its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain, has acted as a mouthpiece for the Chinese ruling class when it comes to anything concerning China.

Apologists for the Communist Party of China (CPC) like Carlos Martinez and Jenny Clegg are regularly given space in the paper to praise the wonders of Chinese “socialism” (i.e. state capitalism), accuse the west of mounting a “new cold war” and to deny or justify human rights abuses like the persecution of the Uyghurs.

Britain is Broken

Protest 5 November, noon from Embankment, London WC2N
6NS: peoplesassembly.org.uk □

However, some at the *Morning Star* surely realise that an authoritarian system with no genuine elections, no free trade unions, a leader set to rule for life (and now no women on the leading bodies of the state) might not be an attractive proposition for workers in the UK, used as they are to at least the limited freedoms of bourgeois democracy. This may account for the novel statement in an editorial (17 October) that: “Nobody is advocating a Chinese-style political system in Britain: it has evolved according to that country’s particular history and experience.”

It didn’t prevent the paper publishing yet another panegyric to the Chinese ruling class from Jenny Clegg just a few days later:

“But as the US advances to the brink of actual war, it comes face to face with a 96 million-strong column of CPC members determined to resist. Under the intense pressure, the CPC congress has struck a confident note.

“Xi’s ‘authoritarian turn’ is keeping China on a steady course, united in purpose while remaining flexibly committed, in Xi’s words, to the principle

of ‘letting 100 flowers bloom and 100 schools of thought contend’. At a time of growing political chaos as the world’s dominant ruling classes flail about amid multiple crises, the 20th CPC congress stands out as an example of orderliness and clarity of direction.

“China’s journey represents the continuity of socialist revolutions reaching back to 1917; its success is vital for the future of socialism in the world as a whole.”

But in another novel development (at least in recent years), the paper published a letter from reader Laura Potts mocking the idea that China is in any way socialist. It’s worth quoting in full:

“I noted with some amusement Jenny Clegg’s curious assertion (M Star October 25) that ‘China is advancing along its journey to develop into a modern socialist country by 2049’.

“Precisely under which definition of ‘socialist country’ is she labouring, I wonder?

“One that bans independent trade unions? One that locks up political dissidents without trial? One that imprisons record numbers of journalists?

One that crushes public protest? One that detains, wholesale, members of an ethnic minority? One that is supremely relaxed about leading party functionaries amassing extraordinary wealth? One that disappears a young tennis player after she accuses a senior party official of sexual assault?

“Apostles of Western imperialism are undoubtedly spreading a great deal of misinformation about China, but its threat to US hegemony does not grant it immunity from criticism.

“Those who seek to portray China as a workers’ paradise are doing the left no favours.”

I suppose the *Morning Star* deserves some credit for even publishing the letter. It will be interesting to see if there are any replies. □

Second hand books

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

Life as a casual worker



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

Currently I’m a casual worker seeking employment in a few different areas, mainly the traffic control industry.

The job conditions are mainly governed by what we call in Australia an award, fundamentally a legal document on the minimum standards of wages and conditions in a given industry. The award system in Australia dates back to 1907: over the last 30 years, awards have been overshadowed by Enterprise Agreements in numerous industries, yet millions of Australians rely on what we call “the award rate” to survive, keep a roof over their head, and feed and educate their families.

I have generally worked in higher-paid blue-collar unionised jobs (in between time off due to unemployment or blacklisting or injury and illness, adding up to over 11 years lost!) and that has made my transition into casual em-

ployment a little different from most.

In the companies I’ve worked for recently as a casual, with the partial exception of one, a worker is responsible for supplying his or her working clothes, safety boots, two-way radio, traffic stop-go signs etc.

At first this shocked me, but it is the industry standard. Before you even start work you are up for close to \$1,000 or £500, not including the cost of your licence.

As a casual employee you have no guaranteed income. Some employers offer a system where workers are guaranteed 16 hours per week, but the huge majority offer no guarantee. You can accept or decline work as it is offered, but if you repeatedly decline work the phone (or in most cases the app) will stop ringing or beeping: no work.

And it’s arbitrary. You may be offered a job say 18 hours in advance of it starting, and then it can be cancelled within one hour of commencement. The lunch you have made and the plans you have put together (minding your children, pooch, etc.) are all thrown in the bin.

Casual workers in Australia receive a 25% loading on our pay rate to compensate for not having holidays, sick leave etc. Many workers in award-wage employment opt to be casual: even though it will mean they will have no paid holidays or other benefits, the 25% extra helps keep the wolf from the door.

In the areas I’m working the rate for a permanent employee is \$25 an hour, around £12.50.

Unemployment is currently running at a 50 year low around 3.5%, but this is not bringing higher wages.

In Australia union density in the private sphere is no more than 9 to 10%. Unions can exert pressure for higher wages in a much smaller part of the economy than most on the left would care to admit. Runaway inflation in Australia and most of the developed economies (Japan is an exception) is eating away at purchasing power, but the lack of unionised workforces limits response. Union leaders have been very vocal about the problems of insecure work, yet casual employment has stood

at virtually the same levels for the last 25 years. The perception of insecurity is running the ACTU campaign rather than realities on the ground.

Most workers do not want to be casual. They want to be permanent and have access to holidays and sick pay. However, many opt to be casual because of the 25% loading.

Workers under award wages

in Australia are mainly not in unions not because they don’t want organisation, but because unions have become alien to them: too many unions are top heavy with bureaucrats and short on genuine organisers and delegates in the workplaces and in the community.

In the coming weeks I’ll discuss this and other issues in more depth. □



Our audio

Listen, download or subscribe to Workers’ Liberty audio recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **Playlists include:**

- Solidarity Newspaper
- Environmental pamphlet and meetings
- Solidarność: The workers’ movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-81
- Public meetings – recordings of introductory speeches on topics from Ukraine to “Geoengineering” to Covid and beyond. Campaigns, history, theory, current affairs, and more.
- Fighting racism: pamphlets and more
- Corbynism: What Went Wrong? – Pamphlet and more
- Many other pamphlets

See workersliberty.org/audio for episodes, and for information on subscribing and using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search “Workers’ Liberty” or “Solidarity & More”. □

Anti-choice MP becomes Women's Minister



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Maria Caulfield, a Tory MP who supported cutting the abortion time limit and voted against legalising abortion in Northern Ireland, has been named as the minister for women. Caulfield, the MP for Lewes, was previously a member of parliamentary "pro-life" group, stating that she wants to be a "voice for the unborn child".

In voting against buffer zones around

abortion clinics she explained those accused of harassing women wishing to access abortion services may in fact be trying to "comfort" people.

"For me, the definition of what's harassment is open to interpretation. That's my concern – [that] someone who's going up to, maybe, comfort someone who's upset or distressed could be accused of harassment and could face six months in jail."

In 2018, when Caulfield was the Tory vice-chair for women, she called for a debate on reducing the 24-week time limit on abortion, describing the 1967 Abortion Act as "one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world".

She urged her colleagues in the House of Commons to be "wary of greater liberalisation of the law" surrounding abortions, and said having to receive approval from two doctors before terminating a pregnancy protected vulnerable women.

In Britain, abortion is not legally available on request. You must persuade two doctors to agree to your decision on the basis of restrictive legal criteria. This requirement is not only paternalistic, but, more damagingly, it allows the approximately one in ten doctors who are opposed to all abortion the opportunity to delay, obstruct or even veto abortions.

Caulfield had been a vocal backbencher under Liz Truss, criticising the plans to abolish the top rate of tax and ending the triple lock, which guarantees that the state pension rises every year by the highest out of inflation, earnings or 2.5%.

Following the Roe v Wade Supreme Court ruling there was a short-lived resurgence of public abortion rights activity in the UK. The majority of people oppose reductions in abortion rights and the protests earlier this year brought in lively support. The appointment of Caulfield should be a spark for further resurgence of a positive pro-choice movement. □

Armoured cars on Russia's eBay



Letter

Your invariably excellent Antidoto column recently noted a comment by *Morning Star* contributor Nick Wright where he appeared to complain that civilian casualties inflicted on the Ukrainian people by Putin's invasion were "so low" and expressed his surprise that what he regarded as Russia's "superior" military force was performing so poorly.

One is outraged and saddened in equal measure that someone like Wright, who regards himself as belonging to the broad labour movement, should even think this way, but stances such as his highlight a curse in elements of "far left", namely pandering to tyrannical regimes simply because they are seen as enemies of American imperialism.

A recent example of this has been the claim by reprobate Chris Williamson that current protests against the misogynistic regime in Iran are nothing

more than a CIA orchestrated plot. In Wright's case he really should ponder as to why Putin's military are doing so badly, and then maybe the scales of admiration will fall from his eyes.

On paper Russia is the fourth or fifth biggest military spender in the world – roughly on par with Britain. In reality a lot of this "spending" doesn't actually go on the military. Instead it lines the pockets of kleptocrats.

Russia's chief military prosecutor, Sergei Fridinsky, claimed in 2011 that corruption regarding defence orders was of "cosmic" proportions. The present Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, owns an \$18 million mansion – nowhere near commensurate to his official salary – so that gives some idea of where alleged spending on military hardware has actually been going!

Those recently mobilised as cannon fodder certainly aren't benefiting. No first aid kit. Rusting and rotting body armour. Outsized uniforms. Rations seven years out of date. No training because the funds

for that have been diverted into the pockets of those higher up. No wages for the same reason! To get a chance of any decent gear they've had to fork out from their own pockets by going on Avito, the Russian equivalent of eBay.

Almost all of the equipment they buy on that has been stolen from state warehouses and sold at inflated prices to conscripts dragooned into an army whose state doesn't give a fig for their well-being. Should the troops feel the need to purchase an armoured car on Avito, then it's theirs for \$300,000! And where do such armoured cars originate from? Obviously they've been paid for in taxes by the Russian people.

So there you have one explanation, "comrade" Wright and all your fellow tankies, as to "why the Russians did not deploy their undoubted capacity" to fully subjugate Ukraine. That "capacity" was much depleted because, just like in Stalin's time with the five year plans you love so much, the figures are fiddled! Then as now the Russian people were

subject to monstrous repressive regimes. Let's hope that genuine socialists argue for their overthrow. □

Tom Harrison, Liverpool

No spoilers, please



Letter

I appreciate Kino Eye highlighting films that many *Solidarity* readers will not have seen. I would have been keen to watch the Hungarian film John recommends, *Kontroll* (*Solidarity* 650). I may still do. Knowing the details of the final scene, and who the metro killer was, may have dampened my desire somewhat. It is surely possible to précis and promote a film without giving away the major plot points. □

Jay Dawkey, London



**Activist
Agenda**

About Left International-Lists met on 28 October to discuss plans after Labour Party conference. Its [report](#) recognises that left activity in the Labour Party is at a "low ebb" for now, but says LLI will promote and renew links with campaigns like Labour Campaign for Free Movement and the Labour Campaign for Council Housing; agitate on democratic issues like the ban on Workers' Liberty (see protest statement at bit.ly/lift-wlban and motion at bit.ly/mo-pe); and keep up a flow of model motions.

Labour HQ officials have told the *Observer* (23 October) that Labour membership is picking up again. The story is probably made-up (for a start, Labour's record-keeping is not good to enough to tell), but as Tory support erodes, some such revival may yet come, as in 1994-7. This time new members can come in from a background of a strike wave, not of a wave of defeats as in 1985 and after. We'll see. But it's important that an internationalist left-wing flag is kept flying. □

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

Myanmar's sham election plan

By Hein Htet Kyaw

The Myanmar military's preparations for maintaining its hold on power have been quite simple since soon after its seizure of power in February 2021. On the front page of the government-run *Global New Light of Myanmar*, they printed their proposed Five-Point Road Map.

The first and last points say:

- The Union [i.e. nation-wide] Election Commission will be reconstituted and its mandated tasks, including the scrutiny of voter lists, shall be implemented in accordance with the law.

- Upon accomplishing the provisions of the state of emergency, free and fair multiparty democratic elections will be held in line with the 2008 Constitution, and further work will be undertaken to hand over State duties to the winning party in accordance with democratic standards.

As stated in their plan, they began by arresting the former UEC Chairman U Hla Thein, UEC spokesperson Myint Naing, and UEC member Than Htay, to completely reconstruct the UEC. A special court presided over by the military junta sentenced these UEC executives to three years in prison under the criminal laws. The UEC's most powerful positions were then taken over by pup-

pets who would carry out the junta's commands.

In January 2022, the UEC which the junta created said that 422 persons, including Aung San Suu Kyi, had been detained and accused of electoral fraud. Suu Kyi is accused of several crimes for which she might receive a sentence of more than 100 years.

The military junta is preparing to hold a multiparty democratic election some time in 2023 on their terms. The military junta desired for Myanmar to be viewed as a democratic nation with free and fair elections. However, Myanmar is a nation where the repressive, autocratic, fascist administration successfully staged a coup. Inhumane military actions and multiple massacres continue to take place in Myanmar. Just as elections held under Stalin and Hitler were never free and fair, neither will be those held under the military dictatorship.

The military junta has its proxy political parties in Myanmar. Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is the most well-known example. Recently, the State Administration Council (SAC) removed the USDP chair and replaced him with U Khin Yi, who is regarded as a close associate of SAC Chair Min Aung Hlaing. At a previous party congress,

Khin Yi publicly stated that they are fully confident that USDP will get the best result in the 2023 general elections.

Phoney

Most democratic parties that uphold their anti-authoritarianism, pro-federalism, and pro-democracy ideals are abstaining from the military junta's phoney election.

The NLD (Aung San Suu Kyi's party) may not be able to run in the sham election as of right now because the military junta has accused them of electoral fraud. The military junta, however, has a good chance of using "entryism" in the NLD to use it as one of its proxy political parties in the upcoming election.

Shan Nationalities League for Democracy is one of the most significant political parties. Sai Kyaw Nyunt, a political figure in the SNLD, said that they had informal contacts with groups campaigning for democracy but had no communication with the military council.

Democratic Party for a New Society, the first political party on Myanmar's mainland to openly support federalism, has explicitly announced that it will abstain from the military regime's fake elections. DPNS has associations with labour unions, student unions, and

Wipe out terrorism for ensuring the life safety of the people. PAGE 8 (OPTION)

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Five-Point Road Map of the State Administration Council

1. The Union Election Commission will be reconstituted and its mandated tasks, including the scrutiny of voter lists, shall be implemented in accordance with the law.
2. Effective measures will be taken with added momentum to prevent and manage the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Actions will be taken to ensure the speedy recovery of businesses from the impact of COVID-19.
4. Emphasis will be placed on achieving enduring peace for the entire nation in line with the agreements set out in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.
5. Upon accomplishing the provisions of the state of emergency, free and fair multiparty democratic elections will be held in line with the 2008 Constitution, and further work will be undertaken to hand over State duties to the winning party in accordance with democratic standards.

Volunteers invited to join Covid-19 disease prevention, control activities

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services
Statement on Ceasefire and Perpetual Peace
8th Waing of Wase 1383 ME
31 July 2021

1. The Union after forming the State Administration Council has adopted the Five-Point Road Map and Nine Objectives for multiple developments such as political, economic and social affairs of the State with might and main. Moreover, as the accomplishment of the perpetual peace for the State is a must, the Union suspends military operations in order to implement the peace process together with ethnic armed organisations.
2. Efforts are being made for enabling ethnic armed organisations to continue dialogues for successfully restoring the enduring peace and to smoothly undertake the peace process while timely preventing and controlling the infection of COVID-19 as the number of infected people rises due to the spreading of the virus in the country.
3. The Union is striving to ensure the safety of the lives of the people in Myanmar at present. The State Administration Council is striving for cooperation with international organisations and local social organisations in addition to the United Nations for prevention, control and treatment of the disease. To be able to successfully implement these work processes, the Union further suspended its military operations from 1 August to 31 September, except for overhauling and attacking to security and administrative measures across the nation.
3. It was hereby announced that during the period when the Union further suspended its military operations, all relevant organisations should strive for restoring perpetual peace through negotiations.

Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services

RECENT TODAY

NATIONAL	NATIONAL	NATIONAL	NATIONAL	LOCAL BUSINESS
Recruitment to be conducted in eight overseas in Nay	Nearly 40,000 more Covid-19 vaccines administered across country	Detained Myanmar citizens in Thailand repatriated	Import processes of anti-COVID-19 equipment run	Myanmar govt extends entry restrictions for all travellers until 31 Aug
PAGE 2	PAGE 2	PAGE 3	PAGE 4	PAGE 6

large anti-junta activities.

Many political parties with influence among the public are boycotting the military junta's sham election, despite the willingness of some opportunistic parties to participate. The international community is also urged to refrain from endorsing the military junta's fraudulent election. The revolutionary spirit of the Burmese working class shouldn't be limited by a sham election. □

Shoulder to shoulder for the strike

Our history

By Ann Keen

In May 1944, four Trotskyists, Ann Keen, Heaton Lee, Roy Tearse, and Jock Haston, were jailed for "inciting and furthering" an illegal strike, after a prolonged press campaign, led by the Daily Mail and the Communist Party's Daily Worker, against their efforts around an apprentices' strike on Tyneside. This is Ann Keen's speech for the court.

Consistently throughout the trial the prosecution has attempted to separate me from my comrades. He has pictured me as a dupe of Lee and the others. I do not ask for any special consideration. The part I played in assisting the apprentices was a conscious and voluntary one. The work that I did to assist the apprentices was merely a continuation and extension of my activities with

my party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, to further the struggle of the working class for their emancipation towards socialism. That a woman has been charged under this Act side by side with her men comrades is symptomatic of the movement that is developing in the ranks of the working class movement. It is a sign of the part that the working class women will pay in the revolutionary period that lies ahead.

Independent

The development of society in the past few years has torn women away to a large extent from their slavish existence of the past. No longer are the mass of working-class women entirely dependent on the male bread winner. During the course of the war hundreds of thousands have been drafted into the factories where they stand shoulder to shoulder with their brothers, fathers and husbands and become economically independent of their husbands and fathers. They now stand shoulder to shoul-

der in a relation far stronger – far more lasting than the blood relationships that bound them in the past. Today they are workers first and last. They are members of the same unions in which they share equal rights and in which the voice of women is becoming daily stronger. In the struggles that lie ahead women trade unionists will play their part. Not only the women in the factories but the mothers of working-class youth have a new outlook.

It has been said that the strike of the apprentices could not have lasted more than a day had the 20,000 lads involved not had the wholehearted and sympathetic support of their mothers, who fed, clothed and housed them and gave them moral support during the two weeks they were away from their employment. That they received the entire support from their parents became all the more apparent when the barrage of lies and calumny was put out by the capitalist press, radio, the Trade Union leaders, the Communist Party

and the Economic League, and that in spite of all this the lads remained solid in their fight against the Pit Ballot Scheme and against any breaking down or reasoning of their existing conditions of employment.

Bloodbath

These 20,000 mothers know that their sons are not misguided youths. These mothers know that these same lads are being called upon daily to get into uniform, handle a rifle and die in the imperialist bloodbath that is at present taking place. These lads are not looked upon as dupes then, and they are only called this when they conduct a struggle in their own interests. We revolutionary communist women and men alike claim that if these boys are to be forced to fight and die for their country, they should be allowed to take part in shaping of their future.

I do not regard my actions as a crime. Rather do I regard them in the light of an honourable duty – honourably

executed. By punishing me for the part that I have played in support for the striking apprentices, the government attempts to brand as criminals the thousands of women who have given moral and material assistance to their sons.

In the eyes of the capitalist class we are all criminals, but I am confident that working-class women do not regard me and my criminals but rather do they regard us as fighters in the interests of and with the working class. I consider it an honour to have been chosen from thousands of other women who supported the strike to represent them before this court. □

- Keen was immediately released after the trial because of the weeks she had spent in jail on remand. After further campaigning, all the verdicts were overturned on appeal in autumn 1944. In the late 1940s Keen became a supporter of the "Third Camp" Trotskyism of the US Workers Party and ISL, but then drifted out of activity.

Oust Braverman! Hold Labour to its free-movement policy!

By Simon Nelson

The appalling conditions in which refugees are being held at the former RAF base in Manston, Kent, are part and parcel of the ramped up "Hostile Environment" presided over by Home Secretary Suella Braverman.

Braverman has relished the opportunity with her second bite of the cherry, reappointed by Rishi Sunak after having to resign in disgrace on 19 October after six weeks in office, to be even more hardline than Priti Patel.

The scandal at Manston will not be the last. Opened to process migrants more quickly as the numbers arriving by boat increased in 2022, Manston should hold migrants for no longer than 24 hours before finding alternative accommodation. Manston aims to process 1,000 people a day. The Independent Inspector of Borders told the Home Affairs Select Committee that 3,000 people are being held there, including unaccompanied children.

Some had been in place for over 30 days, forced to sleep on mattresses in a marquee. Diphtheria and MRSA cases have been reported, as it appears the government has refused to act on advice and transfer people to more suitable (yet still inadequate) temporary places to stay like hotels.

Braverman has doubled down. Mimicking the far-right, and drawing praise from Nigel Farage as a result, she described the arrival of boats on the south coast as an "invasion". According to Braverman, immigration is out of control and that means clamping down on the boats arriving into Britain.

To claim asylum in Britain you must be physically present in the country. Most refugees will have no other choice but to risk crossing the Channel. They now face being held in disease-ridden conditions scarcely if at all better than the now-bulldozed "Jungle" in Calais.

The language of Braverman and by extension the government is reminis-

cent of the "breaking point" billboards during the Brexit referendum. A petrol bomb attack on a Dover migrant centre on 30 October has pushed where this rhetoric may lead into sharp focus.

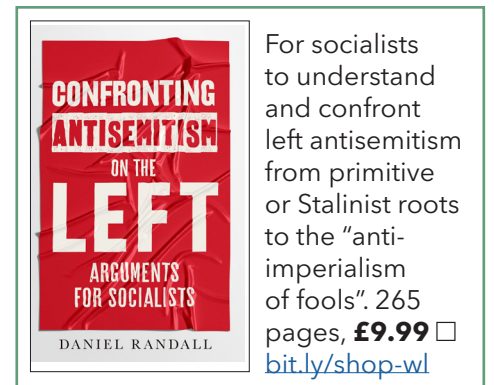
The situation at Manston will fuel the Tory plans to continue with the Rwandan deportations. The government has already paid £140m to the Rwandan government and is determined that flights will go ahead.

While Yvette Cooper has expressed some outrage at Braverman's comments, the Labour Party continues to have a wretched policy. Rachel Reeves has previously commented that the issue with the Tories is their failure to deport enough people fast enough.

Starmer announced that Labour would introduce a points-based immigration system. Labour pose this as different to the Tories only in that it breaks down the number of migrants going to different areas rather than having an overall net migration target.

Campaigners in the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and others have done a lot in the last few years to win (at least formally) much better policy in the Labour party, including the shutting down of detention centres. Activists need a renewed push against this government's hostile environment and to hold Labour to its conference policies. □

• Labour Campaign for Free Movement: bit.ly/lc-fm



COP27 won't stop the ecocidal spiral



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Get ready for more "Blah, Blah, Blah": from 6-18 November the world's capitalist class meets in Egypt for their 27th attempt to slow the acceleration of the climate crisis.

In the 27 years since they first started meeting, human activity has added over 811 Gt of CO₂ to the atmosphere or about as much as has been emitted by all of human activity in the previous 250 years. Given this record there is little hope that COP27 will organise effective change, but still Rishi Sunak's decision to stay away is denialist swagger from a man who just handed Big Oil a multi-billion pound tax break to expand North Sea oil production, and whose family wealth is tied to fossil-fuel firms.

This COP, hosted by a regime in Egypt that imprisons environmentalists and subjects them to a "assembly line of torture", comes as the UN announces "there is no credible pathway to 1.5 degrees Celsius in place".

Leaders of liberal democracies will ignore the electrocution, rape and butchery in Sisi's dungeons, just as they ignore the blindly obvious fact that

their system of endless profit-making is posing a direct threat to human civilisation.

There will be a lot of hand wringing about "inaction" on climate change. In fact there has been a lot of action on climate change. Globally, we are extracting 78% more coal, 29% more oil and 93% more gas than in 1995. Deforestation has now destroyed or degraded 64% of tropical rainforest: an area the size of Europe.

Capitalism has always operated with careless disregard. As Marx wrote: "Capital, which has such 'good reasons' for denying the sufferings of the legions of workers surrounding it, allows its actual movement to be determined as much and as little by the sight of the coming degradation and the final depopulation of the human race, as by the probable fall of the earth into the sun. In every stock-jobbing swindle everyone knows that some time or other the crash must come, but everyone hopes that it may fall on the head of his neighbour, after he has caught the shower of gold and placed it in secure hands. *Après moi le déluge!* [After me, the flood!]" is the watchword of every capitalist and every capitalist nation. Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so." (ch 10, *Capital*)

Marx was discussing the unregu-

lated capitalism of Victorian England that disfigured child workers with toxic chemicals, and where many worked 14-18 hour days six days a week. The same profit-motive that drove workers into an early grave also poisoned the air, soil and waterways. Workers lived among industrial effluents and human excrement in slums that were plagued with epidemics.

British workers currently live and work in better conditions thanks to the long struggle for workplace safety and environmental regulations. Time and again, workers have organised to reorient denialist bosses to material reality and insist that life and wellbeing are prioritised over profit.

Yet capitalism's continuing denialism can be measured in gigatonnes of waste: atmospheric CO₂, displaced nitrogen in the oceanic deadzones, persistent organic chemicals, textile mountains, e-waste dumps, the great Pacific garbage patch. This waste is accumulating at ever growing rate, overwhelming the biosphere's complex recycling and homeostatic systems.

From a thermodynamic perspective, human civilisation is an open dissipative system. Nothing useful is produced without the production of waste. Capitalism is exceptionally careless with its ever-growing mountains of waste. Profit accrues to the capitalist who dumps their waste as cheaply as possible.

In the physical world, capitalist growth is an ecologically blind acceleration of matter. The accelerating rearrangement of matter takes place on every scale from the molecular (chemical, agricultural), mechanical (manufacturing, extraction), and geographical (transport). Extractive and biocidal activity expands into the Earth's last remaining wildernesses in order to draw ever more quantities of rocks and minerals, plants and animals into the human social metabolism. The drive to propel this ever-growing mass at ever greater speeds generates capitalism's inexhaustible appetite for energy. In line with the [Jevons paradox](#), exponential growth in solar and wind energy has not displaced fossil fuels. The extra energy supply just feeds permanent acceleration; emissions continue to rise.

An alternative to the blind rule of profit will have to emerge as we deal with the escalating fires, floods, droughts, storms and plagues that capitalist activity is unleashing. That alternative can only be a revived international workers' movement advocating common ownership and democratic economic planning so that our considerable productive powers and scientific understanding can be used in the service of human wellbeing and ecological restoration, rather than deepening and accelerating ecological collapse. □

Brazil: the continuing

By Alfredo Saad Filho

Alfredo Saad Filho, a professor at Kings College London and author of books including (with Lecio Moraes) *Brazil: neo-liberalism versus democracy*, talked to *Solidarity* before Brazil's 30 October presidential run-off, which Lula won 50.9% to 49.1%

Bolsonaro has been trying to engineer the conditions for a coup [if he lost the run-off election] for a long time. He has no attachment to any form of democratic process, and I believe he realises that his political programme and his electoral base are narrow.

He has hired several thousand military officers into government positions. But that has not secured the attachment of the army to his project. He has brought with him the gun lobby, the agribusiness lobby, and significant chunks of the evangelical Pentecostal churches; and he has managed to attract the larger part of the military police and the federal police.

But that is not sufficient. He has lost the support of the mainstream media. He has lost the support of the Supreme Court. He has got a majority in Congress, but it is a conditional majority, attached to the neo-liberal part of his economic programme, not to his personal power.

Bolsonaro is not a good politician, in the sense that he is not able to build bridges and build coalitions. He did extremely badly during the pandemic, failing to expand his support so that he could lead a coup. His political options right now are limited.

On 7 September 2021, Bolsonaro overtly tried to organise a demonstration of military force in the capital city of Brasilia in order to build momentum towards a coup; and that failed. Since then, it's been fairly clear that a coup is not possible.

Bolsonaro has repeatedly thrown questions into the electoral process, like Donald Trump. Brazil has been running fully electronic ballots for 20 years now. Bolsonaro has questioned that process. But even the military do not support his claims that the electoral process is open to fraud. He's behind in the opinion polls: catching up but slowly. He came second in the first round of the elections. And he's not doing well in his campaign, though he's got an uncomfortably large number of votes.

It is difficult to see what he will do if he loses. He is absolutely terrified of going to jail. He is terrified that his three sons, who are all very closely involved with his government, will be found guilty of some crime. Bolsonaro has been trying



behind the scenes to negotiate a way out for himself and his family.

We'll see how it goes. The first step, of course, is to win the elections for Lula. But it's for the left and for the new administration to see what to do with Bolsonaro. The law should be applied, but we'll see how far that can go.

While Lula has done well in the election campaign, the base of the PT [Workers' Party] has not expanded. This campaign has been entirely focused on the personality of Lula and on how good the PT-led governments were in the past. There has been very little in the way of commitments by which to judge the incoming administration should Lula win.

Mass mobilisation has been entirely passive. You have large crowds to see Lula, but not to participate in any meaningful way.

The prospect for the future is bleak in terms of the capacity of mass movements and the left to influence a Lula administration. It will be an anti-fascist government, including extremely dubious characters such as people who supported the coup against President Dilma Rousseff. The level of cohesion will be very low. I'm pessimistic about the medium term.

Bolsonaro achieved not much of what was expected of him. He has re-

laxed gun laws very substantially, and contributed decisively to the devastation of the Amazon. He has pushed the economy towards greater reliance on neoliberal policies, with some privatisations, but fewer than they expected when they won the last elections.

Brazilian economic performance has been very poor. Brazil had a terrible performance in the pandemic. Bolsonaro was against vaccination.

Yet. Bolsonaro has got maybe 45% of the electorate, or more – for a president who was not able to stay within the political party that he hijacked in order to become a candidate; who then, almost immediately as he took office, left that political party to try to set up his own party and failed to achieve the number of signatures that would be necessary to create it; and was not in any political party until very close to the presidential election, when he hijacked another party.

You can only imagine what would have happened if there had been no pandemic, or if there had been a more competent political leader for the right. This shows, which indicates, by reflection, the weakness of the left and the weakness of the entire democratic spectrum in Brazil.

There are large political movements in Brazil; but they have not been able to capitalise on their strengths, and they have not been able to mobilise on an anti-fascist programme to the extent that would have made a difference.

One of the lessons that I think we can take from the presidential elections in Brazil so far is that it is very likely that we're going to have to contend with an organised far-right movement in Brazil with a very substantial mass base well into the future.

[We asked about the fact that the

"Thatcherite" 2012 book *Britannia Unchained*, by Liz Truss, Kwasi Kwarteng, and others, cited Lula's Brazil as an economic model.] Lula was attached to neo-liberalism with social programmes on the side, global commodity boom. And that was purely good fortune on the part of Lula. He came to power in 2003. The global commodity boom was starting at that point. He left office in 2010, and the global commodity boom ended in 2011-12.

So he was extraordinarily fortunate. He is also the most capable political leader of our generation, and maybe even more of a bridge-builder than Mandela was. Lula has been the only political leader who could come out of prison and build a vast political coalition.

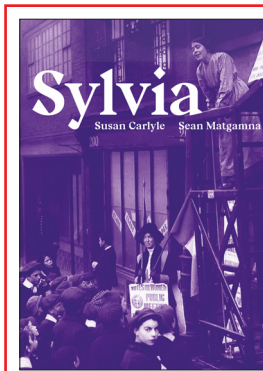
He finished his second administration in 2010 with his popularity through the roof, above 80% support. He used the global commodity boom for social policies based on transfers to the poorest, which were cheap to run. He also used the power of government to try to formalise the labour market too, and try to implement industrial policies, to support big capital to build large companies that would be competitive at global level. But he didn't reverse Brazil's deindustrialisation, in train since the 1980s.

What is he going to do now? Where is he going to draw resources to launch the programmes to combat hunger, for example, that he's talking about? Does he have the political space to introduce new taxes? I doubt it. The money is not going to come from abroad. The political margin is going to be very narrow. He's also contending with a country that is much more divided than it was in 2003 and a Congress that is much more right-wing. And there's a much more ingrained resistance against Lula and against the PT.

And Lula is much older. He was 77 years old on 27 October. It's difficult to see what is going to happen four years down the line when a successor has to be found.

What's gluing together the coalition of the right is the heritage of slavery. Brazilian society was built on social exclusion, discrimination against the poor, and racial discrimination, built on violence. That is what Bolsonaro stands for.

He does have a mass base amongst the poor, functionally articulated with very right-wing evangelical churches associated with what they call in Brazil the evangelism of prosperity. You give money to the church, and the church promises that you're going to get rich and you will be blessed: the church be-



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

strength of the right



comes a machine that serves the hierarchy of the church itself.

Those churches are one of the main channels that connects Bolsonaro to large masses of tens of millions of voters.

Bolsonaro has also thrived on the notion of security, in a similar way to Duterte in the Philippines – on the idea that more violence can keep things in

order and can keep the criminals in check.

He has used the prejudices against the PT and the notion that the party was a corrupt organisation and Lula himself was corrupt. The mainstream media is, to a large extent, to blame for that: they fed on that narrative for years.

Bolsonaro became president because the other potential candidates of

the right imploded in the run-up to the last presidential elections. Bolsonaro is a survivor in that sense.

But he's a man with very limited talents, and he could only keep himself ahead because of the resistances that had been created against the PT and the completely absurd discourse that Brazil would become another Venezuela or another Cuba.

I think the Left failed to recognise that extremely conservative, reactionary, socially exclusive, vein in the country.

Since the overthrow of the military dictatorship in the late 1980s, there had been an illusion among the left that Brazil had stabilised as a constitutional democracy and a country where the far right was an extremely small minority. It turns out that it was not.

This will be a challenge for the left for the next several years: how to dismantle the right-wing coalition, how to convince a new generation of people that the people have to engage within the democratic terrain with a view to drastic social and economic reforms to move towards a more integrated society, that we are far from being able to do this even under a new Lula administration.

The evangelical churches don't provide a substitute welfare system as the Islamists do in some countries. They provide a big lottery in the sky and a promise that you can get rich in this life. They promise to keep people away from drink, and in poor communities, especially for women who have to deal with a man who is an alcoholic or is a violent husband, that is instrumentally important.

By being able to draw on the very deeply ingrained Christianity among vast numbers of people in Brazil, the evangelical churches have built themselves on the void that the Catholic Church has left since the late 1970s. The Catholic Church has not been able to put together any form of viable alternative.

One hypothesis is that when the Catholic Church moved to the left and liberation theology back in the 1970s, they started focusing too much on improvements in this life for the faithful. They left the mysticism to one side. The hypothesis is that a large part of the faithful wanted the mysticism, the ceremony, the mystery, the promise of the afterlife.

The liberation theology wing of both the Catholic Church was very strong in Brazil, one of the strongest in the world. It was very important in the foundation of the PT. But for some reason it was not able to hold on to its mass base.

The evangelical churches offered

a bargain that people could understand: give money to the church, and you're going to get rich, and God will bless you. If you're not successful immediately because you haven't given enough money to the church, so come back and give more.

They're not homogeneous. They are most united against abortion, and on other things there are differences. But on the whole, they are on the political right. There is now a wing that supports Lula. But the majority still forms a base for Bolsonaro,

Two-thirds of Bolsonaro supporters attributed a very high level of importance to religion or to the religion of the candidate, and only in the region of 40% among Lula supporters.

Yes, Bolsonaro is in his third or fourth marriage. He says horrendous things about women. He is not a virtuous man at all. Still, he projects this image of being very faithful.

Lula has to make a show about being very faithful himself. He's a Christian, very closely connected to a big number of priests. He has to appear in photographs, praying with priests, and to stress his Christian credentials, on a level of debate that is totally alien from the point of view of the organised left.

That is partly because there has been no organised left pressure around a meaningful economic programme, social reforms, etc. All that we have is Lula and the imperative of electing him because of his personality and because of his commitment to democracy. □

Bolsonaro and corruption



Lula's campaign did have a lot about basic stuff like a higher minimum salary that rises above inflation every year, and a big focus on the "maintenance of democracy" (on which lots of traditionally right-wing figures like Fernando Henrique Cardoso, president 1995-2003, came out in favour of Lula).

I think Bolsonaro won't go down without a fight. He is going to try to discredit the electoral system, the sort of stuff that Trump tried. It's difficult to say how much traction he's going to get.

If we actually get to a Lula government next year (he's due to take office 1 January 2023), then Lula has said he will end the hundred-years secrecy decrees, and I'm sure he is going to do that. Bolsonaro has made decrees that a bunch of things done by his associates will not be looked at for 100 years, hiding a lot of the corruption in his government.

If Lula does open that up, the situation for Bolsonaro and for the far right will be in a way similar to that for the PT (Workers' Party) with the corruption scandals, especially now the mainstream media and even the soft right is on the side of Lula on this. And there is still a lot of rejection for the PT in Brazil because of those old scandals.

The difference is that the Bolsonaro camp don't have a figure like Lula, who is charismatic and popular, while Bolsonaro is not a good politician in that way. If Bolsonaro goes to prison or the big corruption scandals from his government come out, his politics are going to be very weakened.

I am a bit sceptical about the possibilities for a return of the far right, but I agree with Alfredo Saad Filho on the hollowing out of the left. Lula coming back is not going to make Brazil into a socialist paradise: no-one believes that.

But most likely after a Lula government is some sort of more liberal right-wing government. □

Luiza Xavier, London

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Connolly and Partition: summary



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

“Insofar as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit making and strife it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national makeup of the population, etc.” – Bolshevik party resolution, 1913

We need to see where we are now at on Ireland, partition, and Connolly.

Both Catholics and Protestants in Ireland expected their English friends to coerce the other Irish: the Catholics expected the Liberals to coerce the Unionists, the Protestants expected the Tory-Unionists to coerce nationalist Catholic Ireland.

To go back no further, the Home Rule Bills of 1886 and of 1893 had been destroyed by Orange opposition backed by the Tories, one of the two main British parties. The Third Home Rule Bill of 1912 required only a majority in the Commons and then a two-year wait, and it had a majority of Liberals and Home Rule Irish MPs on the House of Commons.

Given the determination of the Orange Unionists, a majority in north-east Ulster, to resist Home Rule, coercion was the only way forward, and there was no force could hope to coerce but the British Government, if that.

Resistance would be less or more. It had grown to an armed Ulster Volunteer Force in 1914 and would have

been easier to handle earlier, but serious coercion there would have had to be, given the commitment of Unionists to resistance.

Connolly virtually pleaded for coercion, in for example *The Liberals and Ulster* (Forward, 30 May 1914); in the same period he tried to dismiss “the wooden guns of Ulster” (Unionists had drilled with wooden guns early in 1912), and alleged to be fictitious threats of Unionist resistance that were not fictions.

Connolly wanted and asked for a united Home Rule Ireland – with coercion. No other united Home Rule Ireland was by that time a possibility.

And after coercion? In the 32-county Home Rule Ireland? Would the coercion be a short-time thing, a soon-forgotten, passing affair? Would a British presence and coercion in the north-east continue indefinitely? Or would the Catholic Irish coerce Protestant Ireland?

At the end the Home Rulers made offers to the Protestants, but too weak, too late.

Be it understood here that Protestant Ireland is being discussed; and not the eventual partition unit of six counties, which was something else again.

Connolly advocated British coercion, and, to cajole and make it plausible, presented an always, and increasingly, nonsensical picture of Unionist resistance being bluff and pretence. There is no reason to think it was ever only that.

Carson, the leader of the Unionists, opposed partition because he wanted no Home Rule for any part of Ireland; Connolly was prepared to have no Home Rule if partition came with it. Curiously, they converged.

Carson responded to an early partition proposal (in early 1912, to exclude four counties from Home Rule): “We do not accept this Amendment as a compromise of the question... We believe that Home Rule would be disastrous for the rest of Ireland...” A government minister had said “without Ulster Home Rule would be incomplete and ineffective... I agree with him. I believe it would be almost impossible, for many reasons... I draw the conclusion, therefore, that you ought not to have Home Rule at all” (Hansard, 13 June 1912).

Connolly wrote: “we would much rather see the Home Rule Bill defeated than see it carried with Ulster or any part of Ulster left out” (The Exclusion of Ulster, *Forward* 11 April 1914).

Entirely wrong was Connolly’s contrast of



Archbishop Walsh

Protestant Irish as “slaves in spirit” and Catholic Irish as revolutionaries. Patrick Pearse was strange and off beam but not entirely wrong when he welcomed guns in the hands of Carsonite Irishmen: “I am glad that the Orangemen have armed for it is a goodly thing to see arms in Irish hands”.

Partly with Connolly, his picture of contrast between revolutionary-minded Catholics and subservient Protestants was a matter of juggling with words. The mass of Catholics wanted a separate Ireland. They were anti-English in history, tradition and religion. The Protestants were an outshoot of Britain in Ireland, and were only anti-British in limited ways – on Home Rule for the biggest instance. But they did resist Britain. They would do so for the rest of the century and beyond. Their resistance went back to the 19th century and far beyond: to when the Orange Order had been banned and threatened to “kick” Queen Victoria’s crown into the Boyne, and back, to King James II in the 17th century...

Connolly repeatedly talked of the main Protestant areas, Antrim and Down, as part of the 17th century Plantation of Ulster. They weren’t. Their Protestant majorities were the result of spontaneous migration.

The Protestants had progressive impulses and sectors of their own, and mostly in a distinct part of Ireland. Fundamentally, the description of them as subservient says only that they were not Catholics or nationalists. Only coercion would have put them into a unitary Home Rule Ireland.

Connolly, who spent time as a union organiser in Belfast, experienced the bigotry of the Northern Protestant population, and especially from 1910 when it was plain that a new Home Rule Bill was coming, this time with no absolute Lords veto to stop it. He said many true and necessary things about north-east Ulster.

What he said about the innate democracy and revolutionism of Catholic Ireland was false, one-sided, heavily partisan, and untrue to reality.

Catholic Ireland had a tradition of rebelliousness, of fighting landlords, of Catholicism fused with national identity, of a sort of anti-Englishism, of a positive sense of separateness. The Catholic Church had a tremendous and growing power all over Ireland, North and South. The Catholic Church insisted on sectarian Catholic control of schools in a series of disputes from the mid-19th century onwards.

If James Connolly really believed what he wrote about the sham nature of Orange resistance before the war, then he was self-deceived, greatly delusional. Carson may have expected the Liberals, given all that was against them, to back down – to be unable to pass Home Rule without “wrecking” amendments which would force them to abandon it. That was a different thing. He wasn’t bluffing.

If it was ever in doubt it is clear now, with hindsight, that Catholicism was always part of Irish nationalism.

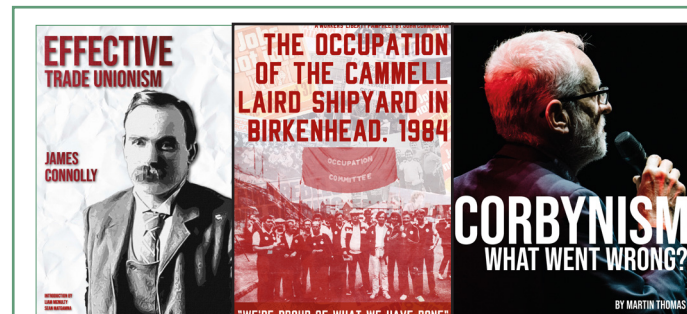
The power and spread of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (called by some “the Catholic Orange Order”) was only part of it.

The Home Rule Party who would not parley with the Unionists would eventually panic and, under duress, offer “too many” concessions to them (partition). The last thing they were was national.

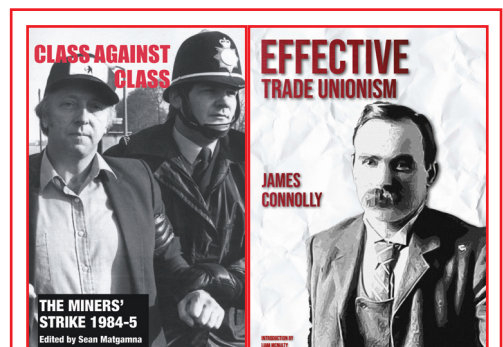
There was mass and pervasive Catholicism. It wasn’t just the Catholic control of marriage or of compulsory education North and South. It was the Catholicisation of public life.

The active Catholic sectarians came out against the workers in the 1913-14 Labour War. The Catholic Orange Order broke strikes, and beat strikers.

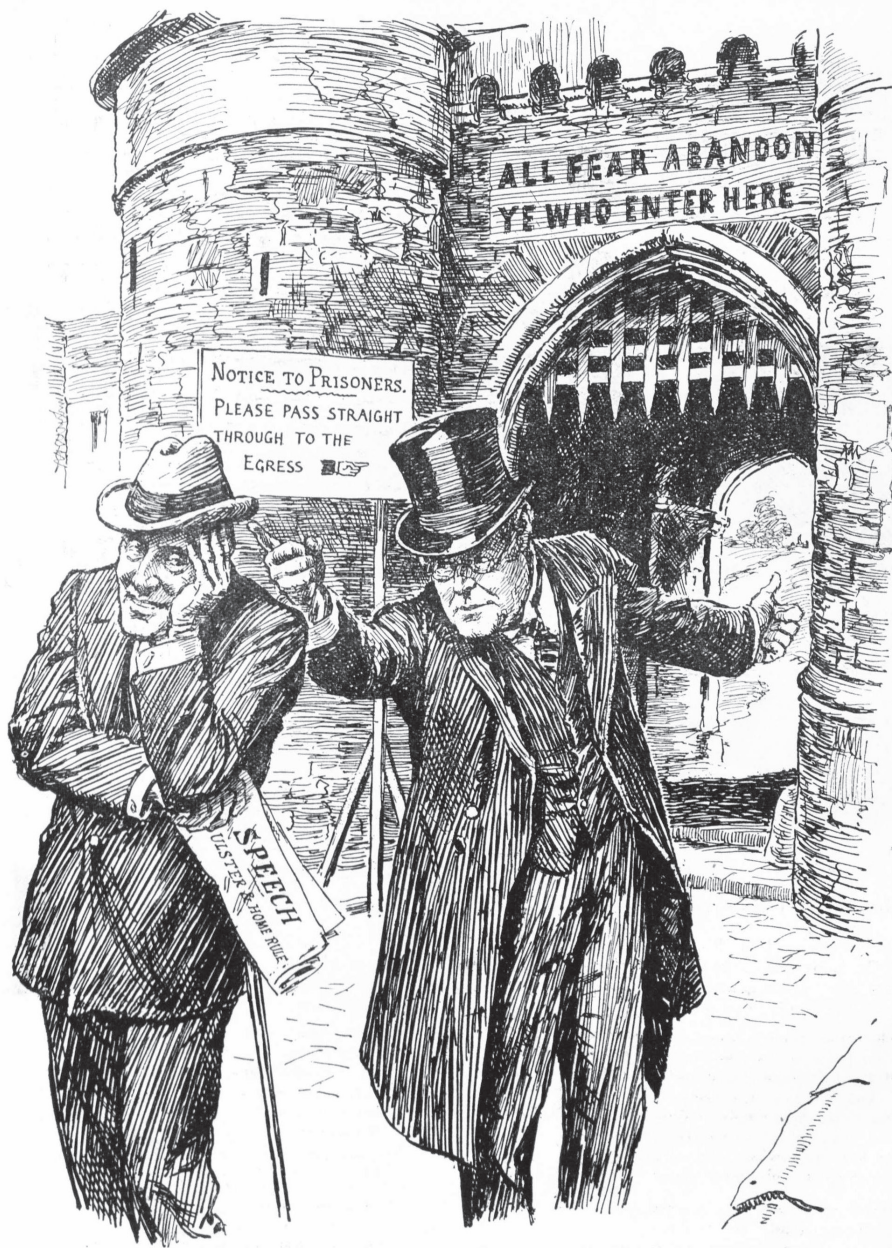
Gangs of priests took children from their parents during the Labour War to stop them being fed. Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, a sympathiser of the workers in 1913-4, who would be shot by the British forces in 1916, was beaten by a gang led by priests when he sought to escort strikers’ children to a train to



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THE EVER-OPEN DOOR.

MR. BIRRELL, "DON'T TEMPT ME TOO FAR, MY DEAR CARSON, OR ON MY HONOUR AND CONSCIENCE I SHALL HAVE TO PUT YOU THROUGH THIS."

A cartoon in the English magazine *Punch* (26 Nov 1913) shows Augustine Birrell, the Liberals' Chief Secretary for Ireland, "threatening" the defiant Unionist leader Edward Carson with... release from jail

travel to families who would feed them during the strike. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin, reputedly pro-labour, set the Hibs on the strikers. The same man accused Dora Montefiore and others come to Dublin to rescue the strike-bound children of being really recruiters of prostitutes. The rampant Catholic sectarianism in Dublin was worse than

the Protestant sectarianism in Belfast, or at least as bad.

James Connolly, acting as ITGWU leader in the Dublin strike for the jailed Jim Larkin, exchanged words with Archbishop Walsh, the prostitute-baiter and master of the Hibernian strike-breakers: "We leave the gentleman in question [a priest who had vilely denounced Montefiore and her comrades] to be dealt with by his Grace, who will assuredly see that in his diocese the garb of a priest is not made a shield for the acts and language of a scoundrel. The utterances of his Grace the Archbishop on the question at issue deserve and

no doubt will receive, the earnest consideration of every thoughtful man and woman in Ireland..."

That tone of voice, those excuses, used by Connolly to Walker would echo down decades of the 26-counties labour movement. [1]

When the nationalist movement stirred during World War One, it was first in response to the killing by the British of the prisoners from the Easter Rising in 1916. Then it was in opposition to British talk of conscription. The Church and its institutions mobilised against conscription. The church was not diminished by the nationalist upsurge, or by the war of independence. In 1925 it was able to abolish divorce. The poet W B Yeats, who had spoken and written for the workers in 1913-14, objected in the Senate over divorce.

If Protestant and Catholic Ireland had been united and interacted with each other for compromises and adjustments, it would have been different. They did not. Two states developed, both sectarian but in different ways

The North blew up in 1968-9 because of its artificial Catholic minority. The South has blown up, sort of, over the last 20 or 30 years, when evidence of mass rape and indifference, at best, to murder, in Catholic schools and orphanages has grown to be unignorable.

The Rising of 1916 put the events we review in another light. But is it possible to see Connolly's 1913-14 articles on partition – Labour and the Proposed Partition of Ireland, Industrial Unity and Political Division in Ireland, The Exclusion of Ulster, The Liberals and Ulster, and others – to see them as other than shameless chauvinism? Than unheed-

ing, unreflecting, unthinking, unseeing, unreflecting one-dimensional partiality?

There was an argument among once-Marxists-turned-Catholic-chauvinists in the 1970s that national self-determination is for oppressed peoples only. That is absurd. It would lead to a flip-flop back and forth between peoples locked in conflict depending on who had the upper hand at this time or that. The norm is national justice: that's why James Connolly was wrong in 1913-4.

Only if the Northern Ireland Protestants were evil incarnate and never to be reclaimed or reformed – only then would the attitude be right that the only answer for them is to be coerced by the British government into submission to the Catholic all-island majority.

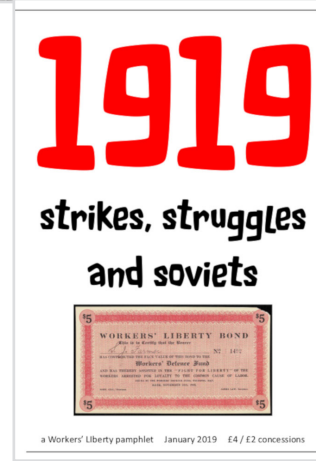
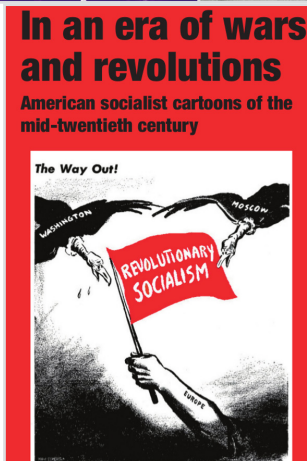
From such attitudes came partition; and terrible things came from Partition, North and South.

Finally, the revolutionary party. Marxists tend to hold that Ireland lacked a revolutionary party then. In fact Ireland had a growing revolutionary party. Connolly would be coopted to its leadership three months before Easter 1916. It will remain a power in nationalist Ireland until after it had helped Michael Collins take the 26 Counties in 1922. It was the Irish Republican Brotherhood (the Fenians). It is from them that we will now begin to hear. □

• Concluding part of an instalment on Connolly, partition, and the Protestants. Whole series at workersliberty.org/connolly

[1] Padraig Yeates's book on the Labour War is value. But his account of Dublin 1913-14 is false and biased on the Catholic Church.

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Energy bills: worker revolt and consumer revolt

By Martin Thomas

The [Don't Pay](#) campaign is calling for a household energy bill payments strike from 1 December, with the demand to reduce the energy price cap to the level before April 2021 (£1,042 for a "typical" household, as against £2,500 now).

The campaign started in June 2022. At first it planned to get a million people signed up to payment-strike from 1 October. It dropped that when it didn't get the numbers and after Liz Truss announced a £150-billion energy prices support scheme (via government subsidies to energy companies).

It has revived the payment-strike plan now that the Tories have said that the bill-reduction scheme will run only for six months, not two years.

As Don't Pay reports, already two million households are in arrears on energy bills (as many as in late 2020, when the arrears-surge was caused not by increased bills but by people losing income through the lockdowns).

The two million is far bigger than the 246,000 pledged with Don't Pay: realistically, most of the two million will not have heard of Don't Pay.

Increased non-payment can surely increase pressure on the energy companies and thus pressure on the government to make concessions.

Solidarity is still of the view we had back in June, that the best focus for activist energies is on building the worker revolt (with increases in Universal Credit and other benefits as a demand, as well as wage rises) rather than on consumer revolt.

Don't Pay cites the poll tax non-payment campaign as a model. But that had strong estate-by-estate organisation, spectacular demonstrations. There are some local Don't Pay groups now, but on the level of boroughs or towns rather than estates. Nothing comparable.

The 4.3 million plus worse-off households on pre-payment meters cannot do a payment-strike. Households on

direct debit who do payment-strike are unlikely to get disconnected, but can and will be switched to pre-payment.

Don't Pay's demand for an immediate 60% cut in energy bills (and, they say, a further reduction after that) is also a problem. With food and other prices rising fast, it is in effect a demand that fossil-fuel consumption be subsidised relative to other consumption, with a big ecological downside.

The New Economics Foundation has proposed a [scheme](#) for a basic free energy quota for every household, a flat-rate boost to Universal Credit, and a flat-rate per-household immediate-relief allowance – all paid for increasing windfall tax and capital-gains tax, a profit-cap on energy suppliers... and an increased tariff for above-quota energy mostly consumed by well-off households, thus incentivising energy economy. The NEF also advocates "a national mission to improve energy efficiency and clean energy generation", noting that basic household energy-efficiency measures "will typically cost under £1,000 per home and can be undertaken within a day".



We would advocate taking the whole energy industry into public ownership. That would allow energy bills to be set at average rather than marginal cost, "mopping up" the exceptional profits now being made for example by renewables generators. But at the consumer end, an NEF-type scheme is better than Don't Pay's call to subsidise fossil-fuel consumption, which would have bad ecological side-effects, and benefit above all better-off people with big houses. □

efficiency measures "will typically cost under £1,000 per home and can be undertaken within a day".



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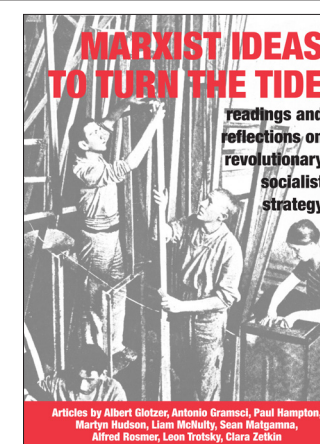
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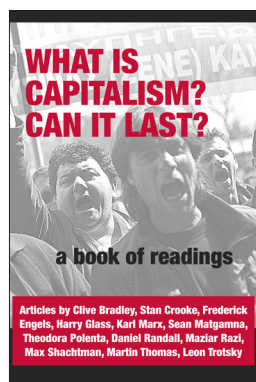
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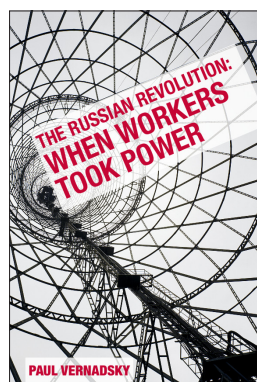
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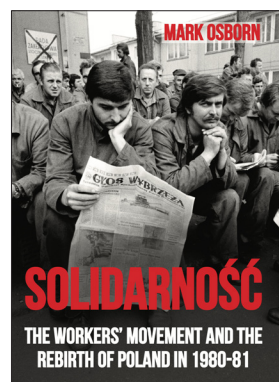
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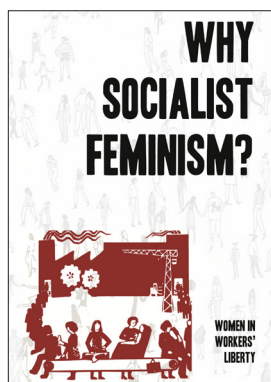
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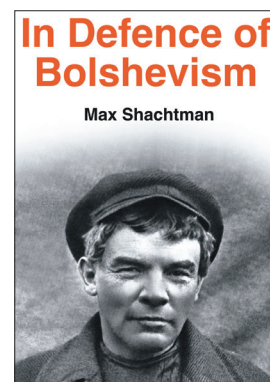
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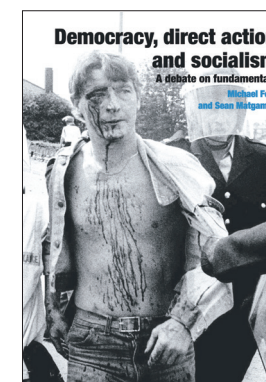
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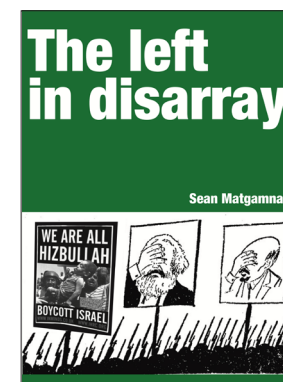
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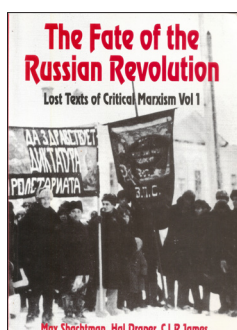
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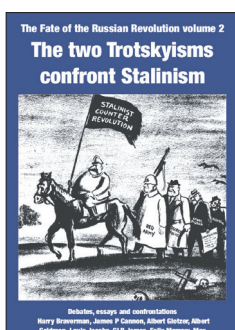
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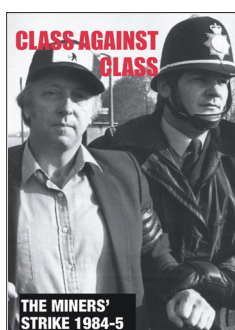
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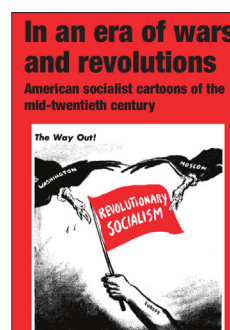
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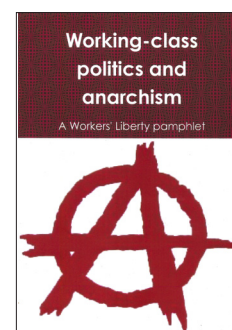
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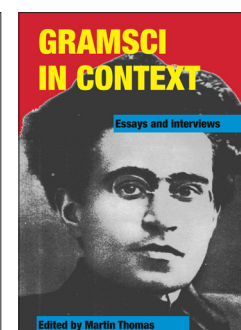
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Unison should back NEU efforts



By Bill Davies

The National Education Union (NEU) is balloting its support staff members in state schools (whose pay is either determined or indirectly influenced by local government pay negotiations) for strikes over pay and increased funding for schools.

Shamefully, Unison's bureaucracy has reacted by declaring that it is suspending cooperation with the NEU, accusing it of breaching an agreement which prevents the NEU negotiating for support staff in state-funded schools.

However, rank-and-file activists in Unison, GMB and Unite who want to

see an effective fightback over pay in 2023 will welcome the NEU's support staff ballot and potential strikes. Unison and GMB effectively threw in the towel right at the beginning in their consultative ballots this year. Both the NEU and Unite, by making a clear recommendation to reject a below-inflation pay offer, inspired their members (almost certainly no better organised than Unison and GMB members) to reject the pay offer. It shows what could be achieved if Unison and GMB show a similar level of determination.

Pressure on the Unison and GMB bureaucracy needs to come from rank-and-file activists in these unions. But pressure from the NEU taking action with an explicit demand for more resources for schools, to fund above-inflation pay rises, should also be a reminder to the leaderships of Unison and GMB.



Pic: [Unison]

The local government unions should respond to the NEU action, not by hostile manoeuvres against the NEU, but by welcoming the NEU as an ally in the fight against cuts and pay restraint, making their own demands for increased funding for schools and local councils sufficient to fund above-inflation pay increases, and then militantly pursuing those demands. □

Council pay: start now for 2023

By a Unison member

Local government members of the GMB union have voted by 67% to accept the local government pay offer in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (£1,925).

Unison (the largest local government union) voted 63% to accept in September, and Unite (smaller in local government) 75% to reject. Unite's calling

for a reject vote made the difference. In the Local Government Joint Council the three recognised unions have a custom of going by majority vote and it appears that Unite has conceded.

The three unions must start next year's pay negotiations immediately with a bold claim that fights to win a £15 per hour minimum wage and an above-inflation offer for the vast ma-

jority of the workforce. We want all the unions to agree such a claim as quickly as is possible, and agree to ballot for strikes from the beginning of January if employers do not concede.

We cannot afford a repeat of 2022, where the three unions were balloting in September and October, up to six months after the pay rise was due in April. □

CWU cancels strikes after legal threat

By Ollie Moore

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) announced via a public online briefing on 30 October that it was cancelling department-by-department strikes planned in early November, following threats of legal action from Royal Mail.

CWU officials said Royal Mail had raised objections about the information given to them by the union about which members had been balloted in just three out of 1,500 workplaces. However, the CWU's legal department's advice was that facing down Royal Mail's threats in court could lead to the entire ballot being injunctioned.

Planned all-out strikes on 12 and 14 November, additional dates which the

CWU's postal executive called in response to the threats, will go ahead. Departmental strikes are due to resume from 12 November.

During the online briefing, CWU general secretary Dave Ward suggested at one point the cancellation of strikes could be good thing, as it allowed both sides to "focus on negotiations". He suggested that "attempting to negotiate when you're also striking can be difficult." In the recent past, unions have often called off strikes in exchange for the mere promise of talks, rather than any concrete concessions. In fact, striking during negotiation periods is the best way to put the maximum degree of pressure on employers.

Officials also missed an opportunity to educate members about exactly

which of the anti-union laws Royal Mail had used to make its threats, and generate some justified anger about the restrictive legislative regime that allows employers to threaten injunctions on the basis of technicalities and minutiae.

Whilst the briefing was taking place, Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson was posting gloating screenshots on Royal Mail's internal social media platform Workplace. Ward hinted at a split within Royal Mail management, who see Thompson's high-handed and bellicose approach as prolonging the dispute.

In the face of Royal Mail's threats, postal workers will need renewed solidarity on the picket lines for their next strikes. CWU's strike fund: bit.ly/cwu-f □



Action on Covid-19

Some of the news about China's "Zero-Covid" policy is usefully collected on the webpage of [Xi Chen](https://www.workersliberty.org/2022/11/20/xi-chens-zero-covid-policy/), a professor of public health at Yale University.

Instead of pushing hard for full vaccination and then reopening, with a Covid surge but a limited one, as countries like New Zealand previously talking of "zero-Covid" have done, China is doing little to fill its vaccination gap (or to use more effective vaccines). It uses repeated ultra-lockdowns, forced quarantining, and mass PCR testing (which produces results only with delay).

The latest bout of ultra-lockdowns, including a new one in Wuhan, site of the first world's first Covid lockdown in 2020, show that this policy is unlikely ever to reach actual zero. In China there must be strong incentives for any individual with Covid who can get away with it not to report it, and any official who can pass off local Covid cases or deaths as some other disease, to do so. China almost certainly [underestimates](https://www.workersliberty.org/2022/11/20/xi-chens-zero-covid-policy/) its Covid deaths hugely (maybe by a factor of over 100), and keeps no count of the toll caused by ultra-lockdowns which stop people getting health care.

Even if the policy can keep official counts low for years, it blights life. The World Health Organisation reckons it is unsustainable: at some point China will have to concede that lockdowns cannot stop this virus.

More sustainable and humane measures cannot make the virus go away, either, but they can limit its impact:

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



Shifting ground in China
bit.ly/xi-j

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- 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! □

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Time to duck, or chance to win?



Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

We're in the mess, mugs of tea in hand and the remnants of beans on toast on the table. After months of silence while we prepare for a strike ballot, the employers have come back with an improved offer of 5%. Still a 5% pay cut, but enough of an improvement that the FBU is going to do another consultative ballot.

J says it's a disgrace that it's taken them so long to come back with this offer. "It's still a big pay cut, actually the biggest one yet, after 12 years of crap and below inflation pay cuts. We're already four grand behind where we should be. How can we accept that?"

T sticks the boot into our commissioner, Andy Roe. "You didn't hear a peep from him over the years of 1% and 2% pay increases, or arguing against government funding cuts, but now we're threatening strike action he pretends he's our best mate."

"He says to accept it and start negotiations for next year, but the government hasn't given more money", says J. "When it comes to it, it's down to them, not him. We need a pay formula." There are lots of murmurs of agreement.

Several of us are wary. P simply says "take the money and run". D is concerned by the chance of success, burned by the fact that none of the last three strikes ended in victory. "We'll go out the doors, lose a bunch of money and end up accepting the 5% anyway. Look at the economy. I just can't see them budging – they hate us".

I throw in my two cents. "We have to remember that the context is huge chunks of the public sector balloting for strike action after rejecting 5% offers. Over the past 12 years, this is the biggest class-wide dispute over pay. If we're going to fight, this is the moment."

F agrees. "When teachers and nurses are out on strike, do we really want to be the ones that ducked the fight? I don't want the Tories to be able to point to us and say '5% was good enough for firefighters, so why not for the rest of you'. If we got this offer just from threat-



ening strike action, we should at least chance our arm with a ballot."

Nobody thinks the offer is acceptable, but plenty are unconvinced about the prospects of a strike. It's a very small sample size, but it shows the work that needs doing if the membership is going to vote with the union's recommendation and reject the offer, and for us to then win a big strike vote.

Anecdotally from General Secretary Matt Wrack, most of the rest of the country seems right up for it.

If that's true, perhaps it will increase the confidence of those wavering at my station. □

- The Fire Brigades Union consultative ballot on the 5% offer runs 31 Oct to 14 Nov.

Scottish health workers gain better offer

By a Unison member

For health workers in Scotland, a bit as with Scottish local government workers in September, the mere threat of action has led to the Scottish government increasing its initial offer of 5% to £2,205 flat rate per worker, an average of perhaps 7% across the workforce.

That is slightly better than the Scottish local government offer accepted by the three main local government unions (Unison, GMB and Unite). Call-

ing off the live strike ballot which was due to close only days later was still an expensive mistake by the Scotland Unison health committee.

It weakens health workers' hand in future negotiations and divides the workforce. On the same day the Royal College of Midwives won and overwhelming vote for strike action on 61% turnout. RCM, Royal College of Nursing, and Unite are continuing to reject the offer. It is unclear what GMB are doing.

To call off a strike ballot midway and move to an online consultation on the new offer can only feel like a white flag to the employers and undermine the other unions. Unison Scotland's head of health has described it as a "record pay offer" and "the biggest pay offer since devolution" and emphasised that "public finances are stretched to the limit", so the official Unison "no recommendation" is in fact a push to demobilise this dispute.

This improvement even before Scottish health workers have set dates for action shows a real opportunity to win an inflation-beating deal for all members if Unison unites with the other health unions. □

A film from Iran



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Despite its appalling record on women's rights, Iran is home to some excellent films by female film directors. *Persepolis* (2007) is a mainly black-and-white animation directed by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Parra-noud, adapted from the graphic novel of the same name by Satrapi.

The main character Marjane, "Marji", grows up witnessing the downfall of the Shah and the takeover by Ayatollah Khomeini, who introduces an increasingly oppressive fundamentalist regime. Marji rebels. She buys

a "Punk is not dead!" T-shirt and listens to western rock music tapes, all purchased on the black market. Her clashes with the authorities became more frequent, and her parents send her to a school in Vienna.

Marji struggles to make friends, gets kicked out of the school and eventually returns to Iran. Here she continues to fight the regime and in one memorable scene, which evokes the recent memory of Masha Amini, she rips off her headscarf and allows her hair to blow freely.

Her situation becomes unsafe and she again leaves for Europe, this time for Paris. *Persepolis* had only limited distribution in Iran (a fate of many of the Iranian films we see in Europe) and was banned or censored in some places. □

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Go for action, not a pause



John Moloney

We're now into the last week of our national industrial action ballot campaign [closing 7 Nov]. We're confident of getting over the line in many areas, whilst falling short in some, and we need to look at the practicalities of re-ballots where that happens. My view is that we should re-ballot as soon as possible in any area where we get over, say, 40%.

There's also an ongoing discussion about what to do with the mandates we do win. Some argue for a pause, and using the mandate as a kind of ultimatum to the employer – "if you don't negotiate with us, we'll call strikes." Personally I think that would possibly dissipate momentum. I believe we need

to call a programme of action straight away. The strikes themselves are the ultimatum; by naming action, ideally an escalating programme of strikes, the Governments can see that if they don't meet our demands, they'll face definite strike dates, rather than the vague threat that we might call some. It's clear to me they won't concede our demands without the pressure of industrial action itself.

The prospects for coordination with other unions are also being discussed. I'm for the maximum degree of coordination possible, but we shouldn't determine the pace of our own action based on guesswork about the amount of coordination we're likely to get in the future. Holding back from calling strikes on the basis that we might get a coordinated strike further down the line would be mistaken.

Everyone understands that we can't

mess around with token strikes, striking for 24 hours here and there. We are actively looking to have selective action, with different areas striking on different days. Obviously all workers have power in their immediate workplace, and we want all members in this dispute to feel a sense of that, so I believe we must have all-out days as part of any strategy. However, it is a structural reality that some workers have a particularly immediate industrial leverage, so it makes sense for the action to hit the employer where it hurts. Workers in the Department for Transport, especially at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea, where workers fought a battle over Covid safety in the workplace, definitely have a lot of immediate leverage, as do workers in the Home Office and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

I've also recently been involved in developing the union's international work. I've had meetings with trade unions from Sweden and Italy, who are both facing attacks on workers' rights and social rights in general due to the rise of the far right. There've been physical attacks on trade union headquarters in Italy recently. I'm hoping to organise an online meeting for PCS activists to meet reps and activists from these countries to discuss their struggles. I also met with the No Sweat campaign, which is active in promoting solidarity with the workers' movement in Myanmar. As a result of that, the National Executive has agreed that the union will support Myanmar's trade unions. □

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

UCU: action, not delay!

By Cathy Nugent

On 24 October the University and College Union (UCU) announced the results of ballots in Higher Education (HE) of academic-related and professional services staff on taking industrial action over pay, conditions and pensions.

The ballots were successfully aggregated, achieving over 50% turnout (58% and 60%). On pay and conditions, 81% voted for strike action and 88% for action short of strike. On pensions, 85% voted for strike action and 90% for action short of strike. These are incredibly strong results. The whole of the union could now strike and join UCU members in Further Education, some Unison members in HE, and potentially, education unions in schools.

The UCU has been fighting on pensions since 2018 and pay and conditions since 2019. As for all workers, inflation is now adding to pressure on pay. The union calculates the value of pay in HE has fallen by 25% since 2009. Against the university employers' 3% pay offer, UCU is demanding a 12% increase plus 2% on all pay points. But on conditions (casualisation, inequalities and workload) some of the union's demands are woefully imprecise; for example, UCU is for "meaningful, agreed action to tackle the ethnic, gender, and disability pay gaps."

To build more effective action the union needs more democratic input from branches. The UCU's practice of consulting branches with asinine questionnaires (example question,

"do you agree with maximum unity?") should be replaced with regular and frequent branch delegate meetings, with motions, votes and accountability – meetings which constitute the decision-making for the duration of the dispute.

The union needs local knowledge from branches. For example, the UCU's general secretary Jo Grady has argued for a marking boycott to start in the spring term. In some institutions this will bypass important assessment periods. Her idea of the union taking token strike action this term (24-25 November), postponing escalation until February 2023, is completely inadequate, fails to build on the ballot result, to link up with other disputes and ensure we fight for the full claim everywhere (and

not be divided by local institutions making separate deals).

UCU should start the escalation now, with a mix of strikes and action short of strikes based on the best fit for local conditions. □

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Student protest hits military links

By Michael Elms

On Friday 28 October, students at the University of Sheffield finished their week-long sit-in to protest against the university's complicity with arms manufacturers.

Students from a variety of campus activist groups took over the Diamond, which is the largest lecture block in Sheffield and houses the Engineering Department (the department most involved in the arms trade). University

management responded by shutting down all teaching in the building for a week, eventually using the threat of intervention by bailiffs to drive protestors out on Friday.

Significantly, arms manufacturing firms were unexpectedly absent from a careers fair which took place at the same time as the sit-in.

In 2021 the University of Sheffield was the biggest recipient of arms industry funding out of all UK universities. Writing in the local magazine *NowThen*,

activists revealed that between 2013 and 2020 the university received £47 million from the arms industry – more than Oxford and Cambridge. Most of that came from Rolls Royce, whose engines are used in the aeroplanes with which Saudia Arabia is massacring civilians in Yemen. Other companies linked to the university include Caterpillar (whose products have been used in house demolitions carried out by the Israeli Defence Force), GKN Aerospace and Airbus. □

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Rail cleaners balloted



Off The Rails

Rail union RMT has launched a strike ballot involving 1,700 cleaners across multiple contracts, employed by contractors such as Mitie, Churchill, and others.

The union first announced the plan for the ballot several months ago, but some preparatory work was necessary before the ballot could be launched. The ballot builds on existing disputes with Churchill on several TOCs in the south east, and Atalian Servest on Avanti West Coast. Churchill and Atalian cleaners have struck multiple times, most recently on 23 September.

The decision to treat the dispute as a national campaign, rather than organising on a piecemeal, contract-by-contract basis, is the right one. It may well throw up some obstacles further down the road, if particular contracts or TOCs offer acceptable settlements whilst others don't. But those are issues that will have to be faced if reached; for now, cleaners will go into battle together, confronting the scourge of outsourcing and the inequality it leads to across the widest swathe of the industry possible.

Demands

The four demands of the campaign are a £15/hour minimum wage, full sick pay, improved pensions, and staff travel facilities. Outsourced cleaners on TfL/London Underground recently secured a guarantee from Mayor Khan that they would receive staff travel passes from April 2023, but a parallel ballot on the other three demands may allow TfL cleaners to join the fight alongside their national rail counterparts.

The ballot closes on 22 November, giving activists just under a month to secure the necessary result. That is a challenge, especially given delays to the post due to CWU strikes. The balloting period also needs to be used to discuss and agree proposals for programmes of action, so cleaners can announce strikes straight away when the required result is hopefully achieved.

One question requiring consideration is whether it is more effective to strike at the same time as Network Rail/TOC workers strike, or for cleaners to strike separately. Some feel that striking on the same days as national strikes risks a focus on cleaners' specific issues being lost, or overwhelmed by the larger dispute. That is a real and legitimate concern. However, striking

together affirms an "industrial unionist" perspective, mobilising all workers regardless of contractual status or job role, and allows the union to stress outsourcing as one of the issues we're fighting alongside the issues of pay, jobs, and conditions in the national dispute. There is also a risk that, if cleaners strike alone, the impact on the service could be minimised by contractors using agency staff.

If cleaners do decide to pursue separate strikes, thought must be given as to how directly-employed workers can best amplify the impact of their action. Workers may wish to consider if their workplaces are sufficiently safe if they haven't been adequately cleaned.

Whichever strategy is pursued, the dispute will be more effective if a prolonged programme of action, stretching over several months, with escalation built in (e.g., three days one month, four the next, five the next, etc.). This makes clear to employers that if they don't settle with the union, they will face intensified action. The approach the union has taken in the national dispute, of announcing only one round of action, usually of 24 or 48 hours, at a time, and then waiting weeks before announcing the next round, is much less likely to produce results.

With the workers involved in this dispute much lower paid than those in the national dispute, effective hardship payments will be needed to support workers to take the action necessary to win. □

RMT and "Poppy Day"

RMT announced on 25 October that it was rearranging planned strikes on Network Rail, Train Operating Companies, London Overground, and London Underground.

Strikes had been due to take place on 3, 5, and 7 November; they will now take place on 5, 7, 9 and 10 instead, with Network Rail striking on all 5, 7 and 9, TOCs striking on 5, and London Overground and London Underground striking on 10 November.

The reason for the rearrangement is a clash with the Royal British Legion's (RBL) London "poppy day". Two articles from Off The Rails look at the suspension and at the politics of "Poppy Day" and the official remembrance. □

- Was RMT right to rearrange strikes for "Poppy Day"? bit.ly/RMT-suspop
- Debate: RMT and the politics of "Poppy Day" bit.ly/RMT-pop

Royal Mail's new wave starts 12 Nov

By Dylan Seah

The CWU union in Royal Mail starts a new and more intense wave of strikes over pay and conditions from 12 November. It will build up pressure on Royal Mail bosses through to Black Friday (25 Nov) and Cyber Monday (28 Nov) and beyond. But there are still issues and problems to surmount on the road to victory.

The union now has a long-awaited strike fund and hardship fund. There is a process by which people can donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/cwu-f. But applying to make a withdrawal from the hardship fund seems like a difficult process.

You have to state your case to the branch secretary who will then apply on your behalf to whoever is administering the strike fund at the top. "What this means is some people will just not ask for help. Not everyone will feel comfortable approaching the branch secretary," says one CWU rep. A better way of administering the strike fund would be to allow branches to administer it themselves. In July, RMT released £500,000 from its central disputes funds and distributed it among branches (on the basis of the number of members in each branch who are involved in a live dispute). RMT licensed branches to establish their own processes for applications to and withdrawals from the fund.

In some areas at least, Royal Mail has said they will soon bring local agreements on reps' release times in line with a national agreement, effectively cutting release times. Reps will not be released to attend committee meetings and to cover other reps on sick leave. Some of these local agreements currently allow members to consult with their rep on how best to organise their duties so as to be able to complete them. The cancellation of such agreements will mean that reps and members can no longer have such discussions about the working day. It seems that this will lead to less flexibility in how duties get completed and workers' performance will likely be tracked and assessed by data that is logged in real time from the van or from the PDA ("postal digital assistant").

Some members had been unhappy with the union's plan to escalate strikes throughout November and into early December and were relieved when this escalation was cut back. But some think



the union ought to announce an indefinite strike, which would be a better strategy. Everyone is wondering what will come after this next spate of action if Royal Mail does not concede. Communication from the union could be a lot better. At the time of writing, the CWU has not told its members what it thinks of the new "7 per cent" pay offer and why it rejected it. It may say so tonight [1 Nov], on CWU Live. But members don't know how the pay offer would have applied to them, and some are inclined to think it should have been accepted.

Three weeks ago, the CWU summoned all reps to a national meeting in London. That sounded important but no new information was actually given at the meeting, except for the fact that the CWU had written to Unite (which unionises Royal Mail managers) to ask for support (not clear what exactly). There was no talk of going out on the same days as other striking unions.

The strikes will be made more powerful if there is cross-union coordination. At the leadership level the different unions have yet to do any of this coordination. Workers in the rank-and-file of each union are capable of ironing out the prospects and the details of coordinated strike action. The way to do this is to set up joint strike committees involving striking rail workers and postal workers as well as other workers who are likely to go on strike in the near future such as health workers. In these cross-union rank-and-file meetings, proposals for joint action can be developed and then fed back into each union's decision-making structures. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

UKRAINE RISKS LOSING AID

By Dan Katz

The Russian imperialist attack on Ukraine has caused enormous damage to a country that – even before the war began – was economically weak, with a GDP per head of only \$3,700.

The overwhelming dependence of Ukraine on US military donations and funding is now a vulnerability which Putin hopes to exploit.

This summer the US provided \$40bn in aid to Ukraine. That package was held up in Congress by Republican opposition. The Republican Party hopes to win control of both Houses of Congress following the US's mid-term elections to be held on 8 November.

Some Republicans object to economic support for Ukraine. Far-right Republican Senator Rand Paul argues, "Many senior citizens in the US have lost a third of their retirement savings and are having a tough time with their social security pension keeping pace with inflation... I find it irresponsible to fund Ukraine's pension system while our seniors suffer."

By using this nationalist argument Rand Paul makes exactly the same case as some on the British left. Unfortunately, the left wing of the US Democrats also seems to be moderating its backing for Ukraine. This week

an open letter from progressive Democrats called for dialogue with Putin's regime. After heavy criticism the letter was withdrawn.

Ukraine desperately needs aid.

The Ukrainian hryvnia has devalued by around one-third since the invasion. GDP has contracted by 40 per cent in the second quarter of 2022. Estimates from early September suggest \$350bn of Ukrainian assets have been destroyed. Ukraine's central bank expects inflation to rise to 30%.

Deficit

According to Chatham House, a London think tank, the budget deficit has mushroomed and may reach \$40bn, or 30-40% of GDP, in the next few months.

Chatham House says: "The burden seems to be disproportionately shouldered by the US, which has provided \$8.5bn in financing to Ukraine mostly in the form of grants. The European Union [has] provided just over \$5bn so far... mostly in the form of loans." The report concludes that, as the hryvnia weakens, there is a danger of bank runs in the short term and, post war, an unsustainable debt.

Some large European states are also failing to deliver military aid. The BBC reports that the French share of foreign

arms deliveries is less than 2%, a long way behind the US (49%), Poland (22%) and Germany (9%). Speaking in Rome recently French President Emmanuel Macron appeared to suggest Ukraine should attempt peace with Russia by ceding land.

Macron's comments strengthen Putin.

The Kyiv government is predicting a future budget deficit of \$55bn and asking the US for at least half. This month Ukraine's Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal, asked for \$17bn to help rebuild schools and hospitals.

Britain should back Ukraine with generous military and other aid. On the left we should demand the UK cancels Ukraine's debt.

The human crisis in Ukraine is acute and terrible. 7.7m Ukrainians are now refugees, mainly spread across Europe, and 6m are internally displaced.

The United Nations estimates 16,150 Ukrainian civilians, including 402 children, have been killed since the 24 February invasion, although the actual number is probably much higher. The Ukrainian state says 9,000 of its troops have died and the UK military thinks 25,000 Russian soldiers have also been killed. □

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban