

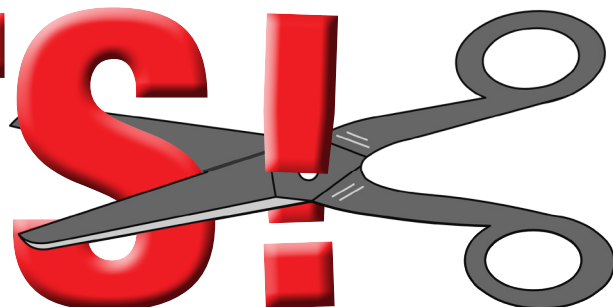
Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STOP SUNAK'S CUTS!



» **Tax the rich**

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» **Public ownership of banks**

» **Strikes can win**

Wide action on 24-25 Nov

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Stop Sunak's cuts! Tax the rich!



In British capitalist society, vast amounts of wealth and income are held by a rich or well-off minority, much more than is needed to repair the NHS and pay workers wage and benefit increases matching inflation.

In round figures, Britain's 32.6 million workforce produces £2.2 trillion (thousand billion) of output each year, or £67,000 per person.

That is inexact. A good chunk of the "output" is not actual goods and services ("use-values", as Karl Marx called them), but a counting-as-output of fees and the like generated as surplus-value from production is whirled through financial markets and part of it is dispersed on advertising, consultancy, legal, etc. costs.

And a good chunk of the 32.6 million are not actual workers but small-business owners and the like. (Britain has [1.4 million](#) small businesses with 8.3 million employees, and 4.2 million one-person businesses). The labour of business-owners and of high-level managers and their ancillaries is geared to increasing the share of the total surplus-value for this business compared with that, often not to serving output.

But say £70,000 per person. Take-home wages of output-serving workers are maybe £630 billion. Government spending on health, education, and benefits totals about £500 billion.

Only about 20% of that government social spending goes to households on less than 60% of average incomes. As socialists, we favour universal benefits and services, but they do not undo inequality. Most health and benefits spending goes to the elderly, a fair few of whom are well-off.

How much of the £500 billion goes to the capitalist class and what Marx called "the constantly growing number of the middle classes, those who stand between the worker on the one hand and the capitalist and landlord on the other" is difficult to calculate. "The middle classes maintain themselves to an ever increasing extent directly out of revenue, they are a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand".

But we can estimate working-class incomes from wages, benefits, and social provision at maybe £1,000 billion. Per household, that's an average of maybe £29,000 wages and £17,000 benefits and social provision. There are big inequalities within the working class, but there is a fundamental divide between the working class, reliant on routine



wages and benefits, and those who draw large incomes from dividends, share buybacks, interest, rent, and the ultra-salaries paid to high-up managers, bankers, etc.

The Resolution Foundation [found](#) in July that the top-paid 1% – around 300,000 people on more than £170,000 a year – were the only group whose pay rises were keeping ahead of inflation. It's hard to track how the £1,200 billion output that goes to the upper classes is divided, but, besides the £50 billion spent on the military and £17 billion on the police, a reasonable guess is about a third to capital investment (machinery, buildings, land), about a third to the very richest, and about a third to the well-off upper middle class.

The NHS pay bill is about £56 billion, and the total NHS budget about £136 billion. About £80 billion for a 12% rise for every worker on routine wages, about £60 billion to increase benefits and social budgets by 12%: it would be a relatively small bite from the £1,200 billion going to the rich and well-off.

But Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt plan to do the opposite. On 17 November they will probably increase taxes for the rich a bit, and extend the "windfall tax" on energy profits. They will also increase taxes for the majority – and cut social budgets when services are already overwhelmed.

Their argument is that global high inflation, and the signal given to "the markets" (i.e. global capitalist operators who buy British government IOUs) by the episode of Trussonomics make it necessary to rein in government debt (on which the government will pay about £100 billion interest in 2023, almost as much as on the NHS) and to signal policies that will reduce inflation (i.e. reassure those global capitalist operators that the IOUs will be valuable when the time comes to redeem them).

[Jo Michell](#) and others at the Progressive Economics Forum (PEF) have pointed out that the "fiscal black hole" is not hard fact, but a projection based on guesses (almost certainly wrong) about future growth and inflation rates.

"Changes to forecasts and accountancy rules produce hugely bigger effects than the £50bn or more changes in spending and taxes the government is reported to be considering for the Autumn Statement". For example, "reversing a decision to exclude the Bank of England's debt from the government's own debt figure, made in January 2022, completely wipes out the projected 'fiscal hole' and, on the official forecasts, leaves the government with an additional £14bn to spend against its own debt targets by 2027".

[James Meadway](#) points out that Hunt's and Sunak also aim to trap Labour. They will present a "plan" for taming debt highly dependent on austerity after the 2024 election, and say Labour must either endorse the plan or stand indicted as "irresponsible".

"There are already voices from the [Labour] party's right urging at least temporary support for austerity, seemingly in the belief that this will make the party look 'responsible' in the eyes of some ill-defined group of swing voters, or perhaps just to the Tory press."

It is an attempt to create another Ed Balls moment. In January 2012, after two years of saying vaguely that the Tories' cuts with George Osborne were "too far, too fast", the shadow chancellor of the time, Ed Balls, said that "we are going to have keep all these cuts". Thus the 2015 general election result: Labour's share of the vote lower than in 2019, despite Labour being ahead in the polls almost all the time since 2010.

The Balls moment could happen only after the 2011 union battle over public sector pensions, and the student revolt

against fee rises and the local revolts against council cuts of 2010-11, had been defeated. With the unions resurgent, we can stop a repetition, as long as the unions use their political clout in and on Labour.

Even the "Blairite" [IPPR](#) think-tank argues against cuts. Instead it recommends "increasing the windfall tax on energy companies, and taxing wealth (capital gains and dividends) at the same rate as... income through work" and looser debt targets: "The government could run a primary deficit of £49 billion (2 per cent of GDP) and still have a stable amount of debt".

This would give public services only funding in line with inflation, plus some government investment in energy-efficiency retrofit of homes, but it's not outright cuts.

Both PEF and IPPR are right as far as they go. And there are other options, like the 1% annual [wealth tax](#) on net assets over £10m which, as the Tax Justice Network explains, with other wealth-type taxes could raise £37 billion a year.

In current conditions of global economic turmoil and a special lag for Britain because of Brexit, those think-tank options – let alone more radical taxing the rich, to get real improvement in social provision and in working-class life – would lead to "flight of capital", in the first place global capitalist operators refusing to buy UK government bonds (IOUs).

To answer that would require taking high finance – banks, hedge funds, pension funds, insurance companies – into public ownership, with democratic control. And to make that work would require exchange controls (something quite different from cutting off from world trade, though exchange controls are not necessarily a positive move by themselves, in abstraction). □

24-25 Nov is next high point for strikes

By Ollie Moore

The 2022 strike wave, which represents the highest peak of industrial action in Britain since 1989, is continuing to grow, with new groups of workers returning industrial action ballot mandates and/or calling strikes.

Liverpool dockers have followed Scottish local government workers, some busworker groups, and other local strikes in showing that strikes can win. There will be a spate of strikes on 24-25 Nov, especially in Higher Education (UCU and Unison).

Civil servants in the PCS union won action mandates in numerous departments, and are likely to strike before the end of the year. Nurses in the RCN secured ballots in many NHS trusts and could also take action. On 14 November the Fire Brigades Union reported that firefighters and control staff have voted 79% to reject a 5% pay offer, with 78% turnout. The union will ballot on strikes from 5 Dec to 23 Jan.

Another mark of the continuing significance of the wave is the proliferation of disputes in private sector workplaces, many organised by Unite. Often, these disputes involve only small numbers of workers, such as the 150 workers on North Sea oil rigs operated by Petrofac, who will strike on 16-17 Nov.

But the spread of strikes well beyond the sectors considered bastions of trade unionism – i.e., the public sector, and privatised public services such as rail and post – reflects a number of important factors: a degree of “contagion”, with more and more workers feeling emboldened to take action; a conscious effort, limited but real, by

many unions to spread to disputes; and the overall context of wage depression and growing social inequality that is impelling the strikes.

Every dispute must be fought on its own terms, but all opportunities for co-ordination must be pursued. Conscious coordination between different unions to plan and launch united campaigns of strikes can help knit disparate disputes

together into a class-wide fightback for improved conditions.

In disputes where in our view there have been missteps or steps backwards, such as the disputes on the rail, Tube, and in Royal Mail, activists can point to the strike wave continuing to spread in order to re-galvanise workmates to reinstate and escalate action.

We can use the strikes to revitalise

local Trades Councils as hubs for labour movement organisation and strike solidarity, and set up ad hoc, cross-union strike committees linked to Trades Councils wherever possible.

That sort of work is imperative to ensure that, whenever the wave recedes and however much it wins, it leaves a higher tidemark of local working-class organisation behind it. □

Strikes

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

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

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

14-17 Nov: Workers at Fox's Factory in Batley (Unite) strike

14-21 Nov: Co-Op Funeralcare workers in Glasgow (Unite) strike

14-28 Nov: Stadler Rail engineers on Tyne & Wear Metro (Unite) strike

15-17 Nov: School workers at Downsell Primary School, Waltham Forest (NEU) strike

16-17 Nov: Petrofac North Sea oil workers (Unite) strike

17-18 Nov: Workers at University of Sheffield International College (UCU) strike

18 Nov: Walsall Housing Group workers (Unite) strike

18-20 Nov: Baggage handlers for Dnata and Menzies at Heathrow Airport (Unite) strike

22, 25, 26 Nov: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south and west London (Unite) strike

23 and 30 Nov: Outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (PCS) strike

24 Nov: Teachers in Scotland (EIS) strike

24-25 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

24-25 and 30 Nov: Lecturers etc. at 150 universities (UCU) strike; also Unison members at 19 universities some of those days.

25 November: London Underground station staff on four groups (RMT) strike

26 Nov: Train drivers at 13 Train Operating Companies (Aslef) strike

30 Nov-1 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

30 Nov-1 Dec: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

1-3 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London (Unite) strike

5-18 Dec: Workers at housing charity Shelter (Unite) strike

7 and 14 Dec: Outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (PCS) strike

9-10 and 16-17 Dec: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south and west London (Unite) strike

Until 29 Dec: Hull Stagecoach bus

drivers (Unite) strike

11-12 Jan: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

15-16 Feb: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

Ballots

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

5 Dec-23 Jan: FBU ballots for action

Until 8 Dec: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballot in their dispute over jobs, pensions, and conditions

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

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

Until 13 Jan: Teachers and school support staff (NEU) ballot □

Many face pre-pay switch

By Rhodri Evans

The regulator Ofgem, as reported by the [BBC](#), says some 60,000 households had been switched to pre-payment remotely over the past three months. More than 152,000 households with smart meters were remotely switched to prepayment plans for gas or electricity in 2021, up from 95,000 in 2020.

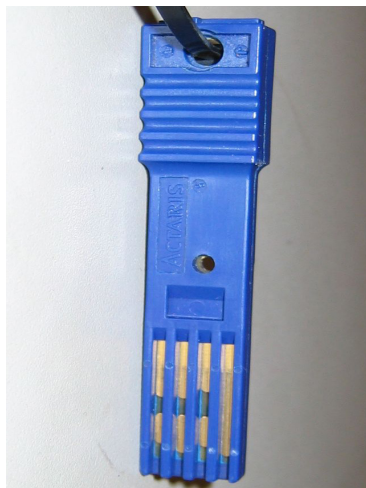
Citizens' Advice predicts that 450,000 people could be forced onto a prepayment plan this winter, 180,000 of them via smart-meter.

With smart meters, households can be switched to pre-payment from the energy retailer's offices, with no need to send an engineer out. On

paper retailers are obliged to consult households before switching, but if they don't, then the household still faces an accomplished fact.

About 4.3 billion households, mostly poorer, mostly younger, are on pre-pay. It is more expensive per unit; means higher bills in winter, when heating is on, while direct-debit spreads the cost over the year; and blocks the household from pausing payments either as a deliberate “strike” or just to gain time or push the retailer into renegotiating. (It is slow and difficult for retailers to cut supply to direct-debit customers in arrears, of whom there are over two million.)

A free basic allocation of



energy for every household would establish a right to warmth and light. And the pre-pay switch trends make the ongoing battles for wage and benefit rises more urgent. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 16 November, 4pm: Bloomsbury Workers' Liberty: Workers Against Raids, Room 360, SOAS main building, London, WC1H 0XG

Wednesday 16 November 6pm: Sheffield Workers' Liberty students, weekly discussion, upstairs, University Arms, Sheffield, S3 67HG

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

Saturday 20 November 11am: Matt Huber – Climate Change as Class War: Ecosocialist reading group

Wednesday 22 November: Workers' Liberty Leeds: Fighting Austerity, Cafe Nero, Laidlaw Library, Leeds University, LS2 9JT

Tuesday 6 December 6.30pm: Solidarity with workers in India (India Labour Solidarity meeting), Brunei Gallery, SOAS, WC1H 0XG

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



Nonsense about Ukraine peace talks



By Jim Denham

Morning Star writer Ian Sinclair reckons he's uncovered "the top under-reported story of 2022 ... the news the British government worked to prevent a negotiated settlement to the Ukraine war in March-April 2022" (MS 12-13 November).

In fact, this story has been circulating for months and the *Morning Star* previously referred to it (in a front page story on 11 October) as "widely reported", claiming: "The deal was ditched after then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, at the behest of the Biden administration, pressed President Zelenskyy to break off negotiations."

Sinclair cites various sources (including Russia specialist in the Bush and Obama administrations, Susan Hill, and ex-US intelligence officer Angela Stent, writing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine) as though they give credence to his claim that a deal was scuppered by Britain, acting for the US. In fact, these sources make no such claim, but merely state that in April (to quote Stent), "Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated settlement." Note the words "appeared", "tentatively" and "outlines".

It turns out that the only credible source for the version of events being promoted by Sinclair is the Ukrainian online newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda*, citing "sources close to Zelenskyy" stating that Johnson "appeared in the capital [Kiev] almost without warning" on 9 April, and said "even if Ukraine is ready to sign some agreements on guarantees with Putin, they [the UK and US] are not."

The researchers Voldymyr Artiukh and Taras Fedirko, noting that this article is routinely cited as "proof of nefarious western interference", spoke to its author, the political journalist Roman Romaniuk, and wrote up what he said. This can be read in full at [Novara Media](#) (17 October: "No, the West Didn't Halt Ukraine's Peace Talks With Russia"), but the crucial points are:

- Johnson didn't "order" termination of the peace deal: this was "advice at best, and ... his scepticism wasn't unique."
- There were already "strong concerns within Zelenskyy's closest entourage that the Kremlin wouldn't stick to an agreement for any longer than it suited its interests."
- Zelenskyy and his negotiators' main worry was that "Ukrainian society might not accept such a deal" (82% of Ukrainians surveyed in mid-May said that "under no circumstances should Ukraine give up any of its territory even if it leads to the continuation of the war and threatens its independence").

• "Russian terror in towns and villages in Northern Ukraine compounded the Ukrainian sides's scepticism about the viability of the deal."

In fact, Sinclair seems to partially recognise at least some of these facts, and (perhaps aware that the version of events he's promoting reflects Putin's propaganda), writes that "we should be highly sceptical of public statements from Putin and Lavrov, especially about their willingness to seriously pursue a negotiated settlement. And it should also be noted that the *Ukrainska Pravda* also reported that Russian atrocities in Bucha and other locations in Ukraine negatively affected the peace talks."

But this admission does not prevent Sinclair from ploughing on with his thesis, that the "British government ... torpedo[ed] the peace talks". It all comes down to the claim of ex Obama CIA boss Leon Panetta, that the conflict is "a proxy war with Russia" – a claim that might make some sense from his geo-political standpoint but is clearly at odds with the Ukrainian people's evident determination to defend their territory with militant intransigence, regardless of what Britain, the US or Europe want.

Sinclair's "proxy war" view of the conflict, regarding the Ukrainians as mere pawns in a geo-political game, also ignores the recent (5 November) *Washington Post* report that the Biden administration "is privately encouraging Ukraine's leaders to signal an



openness to negotiate with Russia" and that Zelenskyy has said Ukraine is only prepared to negotiate when all Russian troops have withdrawn from all parts of the country, including Crimea.

The idea of Ukrainian agency simply doesn't fit with the *Morning Star's* view of the conflict.

So people like Sinclair continue to claim that peace talks were sabotaged by the west and that there's a "mainstream media" conspiracy to suppress this "fact": the truth is that if any publication is misleading its readers about Ukraine, it's the *Morning Star*. □

Planning an NHS fightback

Jill Mountford reports on the SOS NHS conference

The NHS has the biggest waiting list in its history, with over seven million people waiting for elective surgery. It is only November and already the service is running very close to 100% bed occupancy and category one ambulance call-outs are now a fifth higher than before the pandemic.

Things are set to get worse as the winter sets in and the government still doesn't have the promised "workforce strategy" to reduce the 130,000 job vacancies in the NHS or to deal with the strain of the additional 165,000 job vacancies in social care.

Marketisation and use of private provision in the NHS are at record levels, and the more the service fails, the more the Tories and their managers point to private providers and the market as the answer.

Health workers at every level are exhausted, burnt out, and demoralised – from the pandemic where 1,500 health care workers died, and from 12 years of Tory attacks. Since Lansley's Health and Social Care Act 2011 more than 17,000 NHS beds have been lost, including 25% of mental health beds.

Rachel, a mother of a daughter with a serious mental health condition, told the "SOS NHS" conference in London on 12 November how the family had been tested to the limit when their child was placed hundreds of miles away, and how they had concluded that a mass movement and solidarity action are needed.

The NHS is in crisis like we've never seen before and there is nothing on the Tories' agenda that will ease or improve it. An equal right to life regardless of your wealth is an aspiration not shared by the Tories and not

enjoyed by the working class.

At the SOS NHS conference, the overall tone was set by promises of a fightback from NHS campaigns, key unions, and health worker activists. A mood of solidarity is rising against the relentless list of attacks on the NHS and its workforce, as RCN strike ballot results come through and other unions ballot for strikes.

Picket

Ben Selby, Fire Brigades Union Assistant General Secretary elect, promised FBU members on nurses' picket lines and urged health workers to join firefighters on their picket lines. Holly Johnston, an oncologist nurse, union rep, and health activist, explained why solidarity is central to us winning. A pay victory would push back the years of attacks on the NHS since the Health and Social Care Act of 2011 and give confidence to health cam-

paigns to push for demands to rebuild the service.

SOS NHS (sosnhs.org) is a coalition of more than 50 health campaigns and other organisations established a year ago and united around three demands:

- Emergency funding now;
- A publicly owned NHS; guarantee free health care for future generations;
- Pay staff properly.

The conference was sponsored by Unison, Unite, the Royal College of Midwives, and the BMA among others.

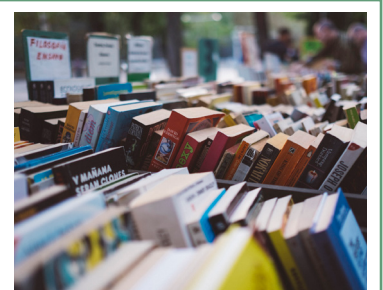
This conference could be the start of that, but to build a

healthy democratic movement we need a follow-up event where activists from the unions and health campaigns can discuss strategy and plan action. With more than 25 top table speakers on the day, and an insistence on "only questions" when time permitted from the floor, the event was more of a six-hour lecture series than a space for activists and campaigners to talk tactics.

Hats off for pulling together so many different organisations for this event; and forward to a genuine activist event where we can discuss and plan the fightback! □

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. □



Maternal mortality rises in UK and USA



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

The number of people dying in pregnancy or shortly after giving birth in the UK has risen sharply, with maternal health inequality widening further. Women living in the most deprived areas were more than twice as likely to die as those in the most affluent parts of the UK, the report found, a disparity that has significantly increased.

The latest [report](#) from an Oxford University research unit has found that 229 women died during pregnancy, or in the first six weeks after, from pregnancy-specific causes, in 2018-20. This was a 24% increase on 2017-19.

Maternal deaths have been increas-

ing in the United States since 2000. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found a staggering 84% of pregnancy-related deaths in the US were preventable, with homicide the most common cause of maternal mortality.

Professor Marian Knight, of the University of Oxford, who led the UK and Ireland study, described the picture as "bleak". "Maternal mortality has got significantly worse," she said. "The really very clear pattern, which has been getting worse over the last few years, is that many of the women who die have multiple disadvantages."

In previous annual reviews, cardiac events have been the leading cause of maternal deaths in the UK, but the latest data found mental illness was now on an equal footing. The leading direct cause of death was suicide, which had

tripled since 2017-19 among pregnant women or within six weeks of their pregnancy ending. The report found that many of the women did not have a formal mental health diagnosis, but they were facing multiple adversities, including a history of childhood trauma or domestic abuse.

The government has declared it wants to reduce pregnancy-related deaths, but continues to make cuts to health services. The gulf between what the NHS is being asked to deliver and the funding it has available is growing.

The Royal College of Midwives said the increase in maternal deaths was "a tragic indication of a lack of government investment in maternity services". Gill Walton, the chief executive of the RCM, said: "Governments must focus efforts on the crucial areas where women are being let down and not get-

ting the care they deserve and should expect. We have overstretched midwives and maternity services that have been trying to do too much, with too little, for far too long. This should be a time of great joy for women and families, but tragically for some, it is a time of heartbreak." □



**Activist
Agenda**

The Free Our Unions campaign is running a crowdfunder (bit.ly/fightantistrikelaws) to raise cash for campaigning against the new anti-strike laws planned by the Tory government. □

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

Free movement, not more border cops

By Ben Tausz

The new UK-France deal (announced 14 Nov) to intensify policing against migrants crossing the Channel can only endanger even more lives.

The deal includes UK officers joining increased beach patrols on the French coast and extra cash for French port security.

Yet the UK already receives fewer refugees than France relative to population. Both lag far behind much poorer

countries such as Lebanon and Chad.

This is yet another in a decade of successive UK-France deals. The ever-escalating (and ever-costlier) crackdown simply pushes desperate people toward riskier routes (like the 39 people who froze to death hiding in a refrigerated lorry in 2019) and drives up profits for exploitative smugglers.

Shamefully, a Border Force rep in the civil service union PCS was quoted in the [Guardian](#) criticising the deal as too

weak and appeared to call for detaining migrants caught attempting crossings. The union's democratic policy is to promote free movement, not crackdowns and criminalisation.

Rather than this sectionalism, civil service unions need anti-racist solidarity and a call for transition to socially useful jobs: protecting people at sea and supporting new arrivals.

Rather than detention camps like Manston, migrants need decent hous-

ing in the community and day-one rights to work and social security. Rather than ever-more-intense border policing, we need free movement and safe routes. □

Less work? Less capitalism



Letter

Stuart Jordan in "Winning the cooperation we need" ([Solidarity 652](#)) makes a persuasive case that workers' action to win democratic rational economic planning – not moral appeals to capitalist leaders – is needed to halt climate catastrophe. But one of his claims is incomplete at best.

"We need to slow down, do less work and have more leisure time, resisting the bosses' incessant drive to intensify the rate of work."

There are many important reasons to fight for a shorter working week and against intensification. Longer weeks and overworking degrade our quality of life, harming workers for the bosses' profit by extending our enslavement and narrowing our hours of freedom. Freeing time and energy can help more workers to participate in the fight against our bosses – and, after we have wrested control from the ruling class, to participate in the running of society. It could encourage and enable a more equitable distribution of domestic labour, which remains disproportionately done by women.

But environmentally, it is more complex. A day-trip doesn't necessarily

take less travel, food, energy, or resources, than a day at work. Working at home on your laptop doesn't use more electricity than watching Netflix instead.

Capitalists pursue ever-greater profit, regardless of environmental impact. They extract this profit from our labour: work under capitalism generally enables environmental destruction. But constructing green energy infrastructure, electrifying transport, ecologically transforming our economy, rewilding, redistributing wealth globally, and sequestering carbon will all take work – a lot of it. Capitalism, not work, is the problem. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

Open borders



Letter

"No borders" made a ringing slogan at the 6 November Manston protest. But the same form of words has been proposed, for example, for a proposed left bloc on the UN anti-racism day march in 2020, and it makes less sense than "Open borders".

We are for border quarantine controls (for some island countries these are important routinely, not only in pandemics). We envisage a United Socialist States of the World, not just an ultra-centralised government with no local autonomy. Even in the stateless society of the future, rules, official languages, etc. would surely vary in different areas. □

Martin Thomas, London

To make good damage, seize capitalist wealth!



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

"We became a victim of something with which we had nothing to do, and of course it was a man-made disaster. Imagine, on one hand we have to cater for food security for the common man by spending billions of dollars and on the other we have to spend billions of dollars to protect flood-affected people from further miseries and difficulties.

"How on earth can one expect from us that we will undertake this gigantic task on our own?" With these words Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, appealed to the assembled world leaders at COP27 in a key intervention in the loss and damages debate.

The Pakistan flood affected 33 million people, and cost an estimated \$40 billion in damages. 70% of crops were lost in one of the world's great agricultural centres. Eight million people remain displaced, living in makeshift shelters on flooded land suffering a malaria epidemic. Sharif speaks for Pakistan's 27,000 US-dollar millionaires, but is justified to ask for assistance.

Yet his appeal fell on deaf ears. The global capitalist class proclaims international solidarity but cannot even deliver effective disaster relief.

In 2009 rich nations pledged £100 billion a year in "climate finance" to poorer nations to help with mitigation and adaptation – by 2020. That promise has been broken and what climate

finance has been made available is mostly in the form of loans.

And COP27 mostly argued about who will foot the bill for loss and damages.

For socialists the answer is not for simply for taxpayers in richer nations to hand money to the ruling elites in poorer nations. The global capitalist class, not nations, makes and has made the investment decisions locking us into the fossil fuel economy.

According to the IMF, fossil capital receives over \$5.9 trillion a year in subsidies. Big landlords pocket \$500-600 billion farm subsidies a year.

The real solution to resourcing our response to the climate crisis is to seize the private property of the rich.

The world's top five fossil fuel corporations have announced \$170 billion in profit this year. This is a much greater sum than the \$116 billion a year poorer nations currently lose to climate related disasters. Instead of using those gains to preserve human life in the face of flood and famine, fossil capital is investing in accelerating climate breakdown.

Pakistan is home to around 500 "ultra-rich net worth individuals" with a collective wealth in excess of \$50 billion. They are among the richest 0.01% in the world, a class of people who emit 2,530 times more carbon each year than the average Pakistani.

Taxing these individuals and limiting their ability to accumulate wealth and power, would provide much needed resources for the post-flood restoration and reduce unnecessary carbon emissions.

The same logic goes for the super-rich throughout the world.

The resources we need to solve a lot of the climate related disasters are one of the great climate-related disasters of 2022 is the drought in the Horn of Africa. UNICEF has an appeal for £418 million food relief to stop 22 million people from starving. £418 million is a lot of money for Ethiopian workers. But it is small change for Mohammed al Amoudi, Ethiopia's richest man, who made his \$8.6 billion fortune exploiting oil and gas.

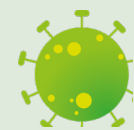
World leaders at COP27, both those demanding reparations and those refusing them, are united above all else in their commitment to defend capitalist property. But as the climate crisis intensifies, more of the world's productive resources will need to be directed towards mitigation, adaptation and the alleviation of human suffering. Pakistan's workers and peasants produce around \$350 billion in goods and services each year, nearly ten times the estimated cost of the relief effort. Yet instead of releasing a small percentage of this workforce to aid the flood victims, private capitalists prioritise their own profit-making.

Nicolas Stern's latest research suggests that by 2030 the world will experience £2 trillion climate related loss and damages a year. These figures will only continue to rise.

On the current trajectory, it is likely that Pakistan's Sindh province will soon be one of the first places on Earth which ceases to be able to support human life. This area, with a population of 47 million, has already briefly faced wet-bulb temperatures in excess of human survivability.

Maybe as many as three billion peo-

ple may live in unliveable areas by 2070. More still will be displaced as rising sea levels destroy our coastal cities. Resources need to go into planned, dignified migration to new cities at cooler latitudes. Only a renewed mass workers' movement has the power and interest to seize those resources. □



Action on Covid-19

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt [accepts](#) "the picture that the NHS is on the brink of collapse", but will still go for austerity.

Covid rates are currently going down in Britain and almost everywhere. But even a relatively small uptick could swamp an overwhelmed health system. We need:

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

Free Alaa Abd el-Fattah!

By Mohan Sen

Jailed Egyptian democracy activist (and UK citizen) [Alaa Abd el-Fattah](#) has started drinking water again. He is still on hunger strike and still denied contact with British officials.

Abd el-Fattah should be seen as emblematic of the vast numbers of political prisoners held by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's military regime – and its long-running suppression

of Egypt's working-class and democratic movements.

In the last week, with the COP27 summit meeting in Egypt, Abd el-Fattah's case has gained profile. Joe Biden's call for his release puts the Egyptian government under serious pressure. Despite the threat to a UK citizen's life, the Tories have been more reticent. When a reporter at COP27 asked about Abd el-Fattah, Rishi Sunak literally ran away.

UK Labour has not been vocal, though Starmer did push Sunak in the House of Commons. 60 MPs and members of the House of Lords have signed a statement. John Moloney, Assistant General Secretary of civil service union PCS, has released a [statement](#).

With COP27, Sisi's human rights record has come under increased scrutiny. There was a very visible contingent of Egyptians on the COP27 cli-

mate protest in London on 12 November. But the world's most powerful governments do not want to criticise too much. Just before the summit, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken laughably praised Egypt's "tangible progress on human rights".

There are over 60,000 political prisoners in the regime's jails. In the last weeks Egyptian security forces have brutally crushed attempts to organise

pro-democracy protests, arresting hundreds.

Egypt has a powerful recent history of working-class struggle. In 2011 a great upsurge of workers' action was central to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship. For the story of that surge and how it was eventually defeated: [bit.ly/egyptrevol](#) □.

- Tweet with the hashtag #FreeAlaa

Iran: will the workers move as a class?

By Dan Katz

On 12 November, a Tehran court sentenced a protester to death for “enmity against God”, following a 6 November vote in the clerical-controlled Parliament to deploy the death penalty against rebels.

Since Mahsa Amini’s murder on 16 September mass protests have continued across the country, often led by young women. The main slogans of the movement are, “Women, life, freedom,” “Death to [the Supreme Leader since 1989] Khamenei”, “Death to the dictator.” Demonstrators interviewed by independent journalists also objected to widespread corruption and money being spent on expensive interventions into Syria and Lebanon. The protests amount to the largest anti-government movement since 2009, and are probably more widespread than 2009.

Mahsa or Zhina Amini, a 22 year-old Kurdish woman from Saqqez, died after being arrested by the Islamic republic’s “morality police” in Tehran, Iran’s capital, on 16 September. Amini was accused of not wearing her hijab correctly and wearing tight-fitting clothes. Women who were arrested with Amini say she was brutally beaten and died from police violence.

The 2009 mobilisations, which became known as the Green Movement, were markedly different from 2022. The events of 2009, following the rigged election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the incumbent candidate for President, who was representing the conservative wing of the Mullah’s regime. 2009 was a faction fight between contending wings of the religious state which spilled out onto the streets. The (regime-vetted) “liberal” candidates who faced off against Ahmadinejad denounced the vote as fixed and called their supporters out onto the streets in opposition to the ultra-hard-line clerics.

Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the most prominent “reformist” election candidate, who became the opposition leader in 2009, is still under house arrest.

In December 2017-2018 large protests sparked by food price rises also took place in scores of cities across Iran. The movement on the streets was flanked by strikes. Protests typically be-

came political quickly, with demands such as “Death to the Dictator”. The regime blocked the internet, often tortured those in detention and blamed foreign governments for the agitation.

In November 2019 mass protests again erupted following a massive hike in the cost of fuel. The state used enormous violence including live bullets against the protests. Many hundreds were arrested as the uprising spread to a hundred towns and cities. Chanting included calls for the monarchy to be restored, and “The supreme leader lives like a God. We, the people, live like beggars”, and “We have no money or fuel, to hell with Palestine.”

The current mobilisations go beyond the factions of the regime.

Under Iranian law women who do not wear a hijab can be jailed for two months and fined. An independent survey conducted in 2020 showed that 58% of Iranians did not believe in the hijab at all, 72% were against compulsory hijab rules and only 15% agreed with the legal obligation to wear it.

White scarf

Opposition to the compulsory hijab has been a continuous theme of the Iranian left-wing, anti-clerical opposition. On International Women’s Day in Tehran in 1979, protests took place against the threat – as it was then – to insist on the hijab. 100,000 women and men marched against the law in 1979.

A series of protests known as the White Scarf Movement, utilising social media, became well-known in 2017. Women began wearing white headscarves on Wednesdays, or taking their scarves off and posting film of themselves on line.

The compulsory hijab is only a visible sign of the oppression of women in Iran. There are no legal protections against domestic violence, sexual harassment, unequal pay, or discrimination in work. Women are banned from riding bikes, or singing or dancing in public.

Husbands can prevent wives from taking a job and can divorce easily, whereas women find divorce more difficult. Male polygamy is legal. 30% of Iranian murders are so-called “honour killings” of women and girls.

The current protests continue. Last week thousands marched again in Zahedan, capital of Sistan and Baluchestan province, close to the Pakistan and Afghan borders, on Friday 11 November. The current protests have been particularly sharply repressed in minority areas: the Kurdish north west, Baluchi south east and in Khuzestan, in the oil and gas producing south east, which has a large Arab population.

Protests in the Caspian Sea coastal town of Babolsar, led to petrol bomb attacks on a Basij (pro-regime, volunteer militia) base.

Various Iranian celebrities, artists and sports stars have expressed support for the protest movement. On Friday 11 November the national basketball team refused to sing the national anthem during a match with China in Tehran. Earlier this week the national water polo team failed to sing the national anthem at a competition in Thailand.

Last month Iranian climber Elnaz Rekabi competed in an international competition without a headscarf. Last week Parmida Ghasemi, an Iranian archer seemed to let her hijab fall, later explaining that her hair had become uncovered “due to wind.”

According to the *Guardian* (12 November) the regime plans “public trials for over 1,000 in Tehran and a similar number outside the capital... the charges include those carrying the death penalty”. Saman Yasin, a popular Kurdish rapper, has been charged with “waging war against God” for posting his support for women’s rights online, and faces execution.

Reuters estimates 369 people have been killed and at least 1,160 people injured. The HRANA news agency reported over 50 of those murdered by the state are children. 15,100 have been detained. And 39 members of the security forces have also been killed.

The question now is: will the working class move as a class to join the protest movement? In October solidarity strikes took place in the Khuzestan oil-fields. Strikes were met with sackings and violence. The Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers Syndicate trade union called on other workers to join a nationwide strike. The union announced: “Freedom from oppression and ex-

ploitation, from discrimination and inequality, is only made possible through unity and solidarity.”

What is required now from the relatively small groups of Iranian leftists in exile is clarity about articulating socialist alternatives to the Iranian Islamic state.

From discussions so far, the following demands emerge:

A secular republic (meaning separation of religion and the state, with respect for the religious freedom of those who want to worship);

The release of all political prisoners; abolition of the Revolutionary Guards and Basij militia;

Free assembly, free association and freedom for trade unions;

Full legal and real equality for women and LGBT+ people;

The right of Kurdish self-determination.

This begs the question of who will implement these demands. Some on the Iranian left are demanding “All power to the councils”. However (workers’) councils do not yet exist. And we should not give the impression that legal equality for women must wait until the socialist revolution.

Iran needs free and fair elections to elect a constituent assembly (an elected assembly which writes a new constitution, as well as passing new laws as routine parliaments do).

And the Iranian working class needs answers to the economic situation it faces. Inflation is running at 42%, unemployment at 9%. One in three Iranians live below the official poverty line of \$200 per month.

Workers need a guarantee of employment and a minimum wage.

A democratic state should take ownership of the banking sector and oil and gas industry, abolishing ownership by religious institutions and militias connected to the existing Islamic state. The left must fight for workers’ control in industry, a demand already raised at Haft Tappeh.

Democracy would enable Iran’s wealth to be used to provide free healthcare and education for all. A future democracy would negotiate an end to Western sanctions and abolish Iran’s nuclear weapons programme. □

General strike in Belgium

By Nina Carlyle

Belgian workers staged a general strike on 9 November to demand scope for wage rises, cuts in energy bill, and an increase in welfare benefits.

One-day general strikes are relatively common in Belgium. This one was more effective than most. In Brussels, no

trains were running as far as I could see. Very few buses, only a few trams. The post, bin collections, and schools all stopped.

At the main university campus, there were well-attended student picket-lines, and blockades on some buildings, though some classes went ahead.

Students are hard-hit as well as workers, because the rents for student housing are going up, and household energy costs previously included in the rent are now sometimes being charged separately.

In Belgium wages are automatically indexed against inflation. But the index does not include petrol, gas, or

rent costs. And some workers get indexation increases only yearly, giving no protection in a year like 2022 when prices rise fast.

Inflation in Belgium was around [13.1%](#) as of October 2022. Belgium also has a law (from 1996) limiting wage rises above the indexation level, supposedly to stop wage rates

increasing above those in neighbouring countries.

The unions are demanding that the limit on wage rises be scrapped or modified. So far workers’ action on this has mainly taken the form of setpiece national protests (there was a big demonstration in June) more than workplace-by-workplace strikes. □

The economic

By Martin Thomas

Neither Marxist nor orthodox (bourgeois) economic theory has a good fix on price inflation, its causes and cures. This sketchy article will not remedy that lack, but it may help interpret debates and arguments on the issue.

In the Transitional Programme of 1938 Trotsky wrote: "Neither monetary inflation nor stabilisation can serve as slogans for the proletariat... Against a bounding rise in prices... one can fight only under the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages in relation to the increase in price of consumer goods".

He did not propose an alternative socialistic way of dulling inflation (which was quite low, by post-1945 standards, in the leading capitalist countries in the late 1930s). All known anti-inflation policies under capitalism would hurt workers probably as much as inflation. Instead, Trotsky proposed workers find demands to defend their class interests against all contingencies.

He would have remembered Bolshevik Russia in 1917-22, when the workers' government, grappling with invading armies, civil war, and ruin from World War One, suffered rapid inflation. It could quell the inflation only in 1922, and then by a conventional capitalist-type method: a new currency linked to gold. The workers' government could and did organise better protection against inflation than a "sliding scale" – free distribution of basics – but only on a pauper scale.

Marx was not much concerned with inflation. In his day prices might jump up and down from one year to the next, but there was no embedded regime of inflation.

In Marx's day, there was already an "orthodox" theory of inflation, the "quantity theory". It said that the price level was determined by the quantity of the money-stock as compared to the level of output. Inflation was "too much money chasing too few goods".

Probably it was influenced by Europe's historical "Price Revolution", the general rise in prices in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Marx's view that came from a reduction in the labour-time value of gold and silver relative to that of other commodities, mainly thanks to the new production extracted by the Spanish empire from South America.

Marx rejected the "quantity theory". For most purposes, he assumed a money system based on a gold (or

silver) standard. The "value of money", then, would gravitate around the labour-time required to produce gold relative to the labour-time required to produce other commodities.

The money stock (which already included bank notes and bank current accounts, as well as coin) would depend on the level of activity in the economy, as measured in money-prices, which would determine the amounts of cash required for current transactions and for "precautionary" stashing.

In no system is the money stock fixed at will by the central bank or the government. Today most money is created not by minting coins, or by a central bank printing IOUs (bank notes), but by commercial banks.

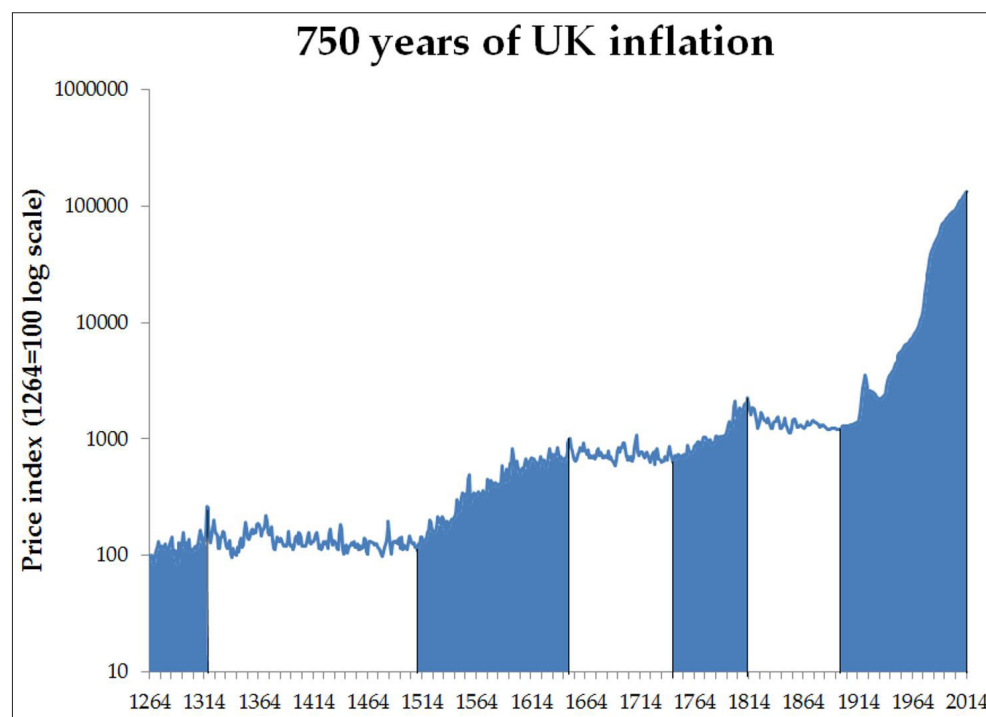
When you deposit your £100 in your bank account, and the bank lends out £90 of that to someone else to put in their account, retaining only a fraction as reserves in its vaults, then the total stock of money (yours and the borrower's) increases from £100 to £190 through the action of the bank.

Convertibility

In World War One and World War Two, gold convertibility was suspended and inflation rose. It was limited in World War Two in Britain by a scheme largely worked out by John Maynard Keynes: heavy taxation of the well-off, part of wages becoming "deferred pay" to be recouped after the war, rationing to limit demand for some commodities, controls on profits and prices possible only because of the exceptional war-time willingness of capitalists to comply with the government, repression of high finance. The scheme worked to some degree, though at the cost of much black-marketing. Some elements of it might work for a workers' government, too, in a limited way.

After World War Two the gold standard was restored in a looser form. Exchange rates for major capitalist currencies were fixed relative to the US dollar (£1=\$4.03, 119.1 francs=\$1...). Currency exchanges were heavily controlled by governments. Central banks (only central banks) which held dollars could exchange them for gold at \$35 an ounce.

That system "worked" too, but produced steady inflation even in the USA, and higher inflation elsewhere (except in West Germany, which practised rigid budget restraint). Currencies were, by government decisions, devalued against the dollar from time to time (£1 to \$2.80, then \$2.40). When the facility



for central banks to exchange their dollars for gold at \$35 an ounce was first used on a large scale, by France, the US, simultaneously troubled by large Vietnam war spending, ended the facility in 1971. By then the regular market price for gold was about \$300 per ounce.

Why had steady peace-time inflation re-emerged, centuries after the old "Price Revolution"? The speed and intricacy of the circuits of capital was far outstripping the capacity of gold (heavy, difficult to move physically, restricted in quantity) to facilitate it, even with more elaborate provision for tokens to be used instead of physical gold most of the time. Money was becoming "fiat money", money valid because firms and households were confident that the government or central bank would make it a ticket for an approximate quantum of labour-time on the world-market.

Finance was heavily curbed in that period compared to its debauches from the early 1980s, but it was to the advantage of banks to increase the quantity of money created by their credit operations and of bosses to nudge up or at least maintain the mark-ups on their commodities. Bosses had to reckon that workers would be able in due course to catch up by winning wage rises, but that was all right as long as the bosses could maintain their mark-ups and credit.

Indeed, some "wage-price spiral" was advantageous. Lacking a rigid link to gold to restrain such a spiral, it happened, though in the 1950s and 60s at a moderate pace. It eroded debt, and stimulated market demand and invest-

ment, creating an incentive to spend now, at current prices, rather than later, when prices would have risen.

By contrast, falling prices (deflation) are destructive for capitalism, because they encourage firms and households to hold on to their cash to seek a better deal at later, lower prices; and they make £1,000 borrowed in the past a heavier burden to repay from today's diminished revenues than the borrower expected.

The main tool for orthodox economists on the issue then was the so-called Phillips curve. By increasing public spending and loosening credit the government could move along a curve showing trade-offs between inflation and unemployment, and thus keep unemployment low with some cost in the way of inflation.

In the 1970s inflation soared, and at the same time unemployment was higher. Right-wing economists pointed out, and truly, that once sizeable expectations of inflation were embedded in economic life, the Phillips curve would break down. Expansionary government policies, so they further argued, might accelerate inflation, but would never push unemployment below the "Nairu" (non-accelerating inflation rate), originally called the "natural rate", supposedly the level required to keep the labour market operating smoothly.

That level was proclaimed to be maybe 5% or 6%, although unemployment had often been as low as 2% in the 1960s.

In France Alain Lipietz, later a maverick Green politician, developed a Marxist theory of 1970s "stagflation". He said it was driven by ebbing of basic

cs of inflation

profitability, determined by labour-time relations (how much of the working day could be annexed to produce profits, how little had to be given over to producing the value-equivalent of wages).

"Expectations", as we've seen, had become a pivotal factor in orthodox theory. Inflation as a general regime, where everyone expects all or most prices to increase as a matter of routine, generates a whole different economic life from a system with only periodic increases in the prices of these or those commodities, caused for example by crop failures, which generate no expectation of generally-rising prices.

The main writer introducing "expectations" into economic theory had been J M Keynes, in the 1930s. Marx did not write about "expectations". Yet his central arguments about understanding capitalist production as an ever-mobile circuit, about "value in process", about the centrality of credit, and so on, implied that capitalist expectations were central determinants in the flow.

The average rate of profit, which according to Marx depends on relations of exploitation in the workplace, appears (and necessarily appears) as a fixed expectation. "Normal average profits themselves seem immanent in capital and independent of exploitation; abnormal exploitation, or even average exploitation under favourable, exceptional conditions, seems to determine only the deviations from average profit, not this profit itself".

Lipietz built on this thought to argue that bosses would seek to maintain profit rates by increasing mark-up. Governments and banking systems guided by capitalist interests would adapt credit and state-led determinants of demand to suit.

Since the labour-time value of labour power (the "living wage") could not be fundamentally driven down just by financial manipulation, but only by class struggle, wages would catch up; profits and investment would remain low; inflation would continue while unemployment remained high.

The British Marxist writer Bob Rowthorn emphasised another angle on this: in conditions of fiat money, heightened class conflict would increase inflation, as the state adapted to more intense battles by both bosses and workers to improve incomes in nominal (cash) terms. Right-wingers were not entirely wrong to say that a "wage-price spiral" was driving inflation; only, for workers, a spiral of both wages and prices was better than a spi-

ral of prices alone. Some economists of the so-called "post-Keynesian" school have built on ideas like Lipietz's and Rowthorn's for their accounts.

Meanwhile right-wing economists had a new version of the quantity theory – "monetarism". To control inflation the money stock had to be increased at a constant rate, paralleling the longish-term trend of output growth. In the 1970s that meant a clampdown on credit, designed to slow down bank-created money.

The theory was soon shipwrecked. Few denied that with fiat money, central policies increasing the money stock could, beyond a certain point, produce inflation. But even the most deft central bank would find it difficult to adapt the money stock exactly to targets. There were now several different measures of the money stock, ranging from notes and coins through to the sum total of all bank account balances. Which one to target?

Lever

As the Bank of England economist Charles Goodhart wryly commented, once a particular measure was targeted effectively, it would cease to be an effective lever for economic regulation.

Bourgeois economists also used a version of elements of Keynes's formula in World War Two: balance the government budget, so there's no extra money pumped into the system by government spending to allow for mark-ups to be validated. Now this was done not, as with Keynes, by heavily taxing the rich, rationing, etc., but by welfare cuts.

In the 1980s, interest rates were pushed high to tighten credit. Finance was now a more globalised system. The leading countries scrapped exchange controls and fixed exchange rates, so that exchange rates (between the pound and the dollar, for example) "floated" freely, and foreign-exchange markets expanded. This gave the system an added shock-absorber and source of flexibility in anything like normal times, though an additional instability to be watched in crises.

The "Thatcherite" policies "worked" to reduce inflation – but only by way of bringing long periods of slump, union-bashing, high unemployment, and increased social inequality, which of course reduced market demand and pushed bosses to moderate prices and seek redress instead via cutting labour costs.

After that came the "Great Modera-

tion", an era of relatively low inflation rates and interest rates until the 2008 crash.

The theory was that central banks, now given independence from government so that their chiefs could calculate without concern for political consequences, were sagely "targeting" a pre-set moderate inflation rate, usually 2%. With hindsight, the appearance of expert fine-tuning was an illusion.

Low overall inflation and interest rates also survived the 2008 crash, despite some price spikes and despite governments running big budget deficits and creating large amounts of "base money" (notes and coins) to offset the slump. Many came to believe that central banks had found reliable ways to "target inflation".

Inflation was high in some capitalist countries, and even became hyperinflation (80 billion per cent, month-to-month) in Zimbabwe in 2008-9. But in relatively stable and prosperous capitalist countries it remained low, where it had been high in the 1970s and 80s. Why?

Low class struggle was a factor. Although market demand generally increased only modestly, less than in the 1960s or 70s, employers could maintain or increase profits by squeezing labour costs more easily than by pushing for increased mark-up.

A central factor, documented by the Marxist writer Michel Husson, though he did not discuss its relevance to inflation, is that in the leading capitalist countries investment remained low while profits rose. A larger part of surplus value went to the personal revenues of capitalists and their adjuncts (lawyers, bankers, managers, and so on), and a smaller part to fixed investment (new machinery and buildings).

There has been, as many orthodox economists put it, a "global savings glut".

According to Marx the fundamental social quantity is the rate of surplus-value, i.e. of profit plus interest plus rent plus taxes. How much of that surplus-value appears as interest, and how much as profit, depends on the balance of forces between money-lending and producing capitalists.

The high interest rates of the 1980s, and the corresponding high revenues of banks and financiers then, appeared to fit neatly with an increased weight of finance within the capitalist class. But then from the 1990s high finance was able to continue high revenues, scooping up its cut through fees and so on,

both from firms and from households, with relatively low interest rates.

For Keynes, interest rates were set by the processes of balancing savings and investments (i.e. fixed investments, investments which involve paying out cash with saleable results expected to come only later and over time). If lots of people want to save, but there is only a weak demand to borrow for fixed investment, then interest rates will be low.

That fits the picture of the "Great Moderation" era. The propensity to save had increased through rising social inequality (richer people save more than poor people), and through more people saving directly or through pension funds for longer retirements. Governments of the leading capitalist countries were able to sell bonds (IOUs carrying interest payments) at low interest rates because of a high propensity of those savers (and of the Chinese and other states, building up their foreign reserves) to seek safer long-term assets rather than go for buying shares which may boom but then may also slump.

Inflationary impulses were being soaked up by those savings, even though poorer people were reducing their savings (spending more on credit, and in the process further swelling the revenues of high finance).

Market demand grew relatively slowly, while the underlying workplace and labour-time determinants allowed for higher rates of profit; so employers felt less pressure from labour costs, less pressure to increase mark-up, and less confidence that they could sustain sales if they did increase mark-up.

Well-off people increased their savings during the Covid lockdowns, and have in 2022 been spending from those savings. That, with the supply blockages caused by lockdown dislocations, Brexit, and the Ukraine war, set off a round of price rises which now looks as if it may have grown over into a general regime of "embedded" inflation.

And class struggle probably plays a role, as in the 1970s. It would be easier for governments to quell inflation if workers passively "soaked up" the price rises by way of accepting lower living standards. But history gives no grounds for confidence in bourgeois governments to tame embedded inflation in any short time scale and without great social cost, whatever concessions workers make. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/ec-infl

Connolly, the socialists



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

There were no major European wars between the wars of Bonaparte and the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, not for 99 years.

There were important wars. In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 Paris was occupied and the Prussian king proclaimed at Versailles to be Emperor of Germany, with sovereignty over such other German states as Bavaria.

During the German occupation of France occurred the Paris Commune, when the workers of Paris created their own state, or semi-state, before it was sunk in blood and repression, followed by a decade of suppression.

And there were wars outside Europe: in America there was the Civil War of 1861-5, the first war of modern slaughter. Frederick Engels foresaw 20th century warfare there in the power of vast slaughter held by modern guns and the bombs.

But in Britain, for example, war came to be the specialty of a small professional elite (heavily staffed, in fact, by professional Irish soldiers from small towns), and of the British Army in India.

After the Bonaparte wars, Britain pursued a policy independent of reactionary post-revolutionary Europe and helped Greece establish an independent state. A series of wars established the independence of Serbia from 1869, Bulgaria from 1878, Romania from about 1862.

Towards the end of the century, the leading European states turned to competition to build colonial empires. At an 1878 international conference, Africa was divided amongst the "Great Powers".

Germany, now unified (except Austria and Sudetenland), began to challenge Britain in the production of battleships from 1898. Germany called the new policy "Weltpolitik", or "world policy". James Connolly called it a "system of international brigandage". Anglo-Irish statesmen, particularly Sir Roger Casement, began to theorise about a German-ruled "Freedom of the Seas" if Britain's power were broken.

Britain and Germany came within sight of an armed naval clash at Agadir in North Africa in 1911. Serbia, which from 1912-3 controlled much of Macedonia, and Kosova as an outright colony, was in conflict with the Austro-Hungarian empire over Bosnia-Herzegovina, ceded since 1878 to the Austro-Hungarian empire.

On 28 June 1914, a nationalist celebration day for Serbs, a member of a Serb nationalist secret society shot dead Austria's Archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo. The fuse was lit towards the most terrific war in recorded history.

Austria-Hungary, a large, lumbering, ramshackle land empire, reacted slowly but with deadliness. They gave Serbia an ultimatum that would remove it from the ranks of sovereign and independent nations. It included demands for Serbia to dismiss whatever functionaries the Austro-Hungarian government might name, and to have "representatives of the Austro-Hungarian government" operate in Serbia for the "suppression of subversive movements". Under the ultimatum, Serbia would have had not much more than, and maybe not as much as, Ireland would have had with Home Rule.

The question was, who would back Austria? Like all the powers, it was part of a network of alliances, some of them secret.

Lord Grey, the British Liberal Foreign Secretary, coined an effective metaphor for what happened in Europe next. All the powers, he said, were roped together by treaties, like men climbing a mountain: when one lost his footing, they all went toppling into the great abyss.

Russia was tied to Serbia, and France to both Russia and Serbia. France and Russia were tied to Britain.

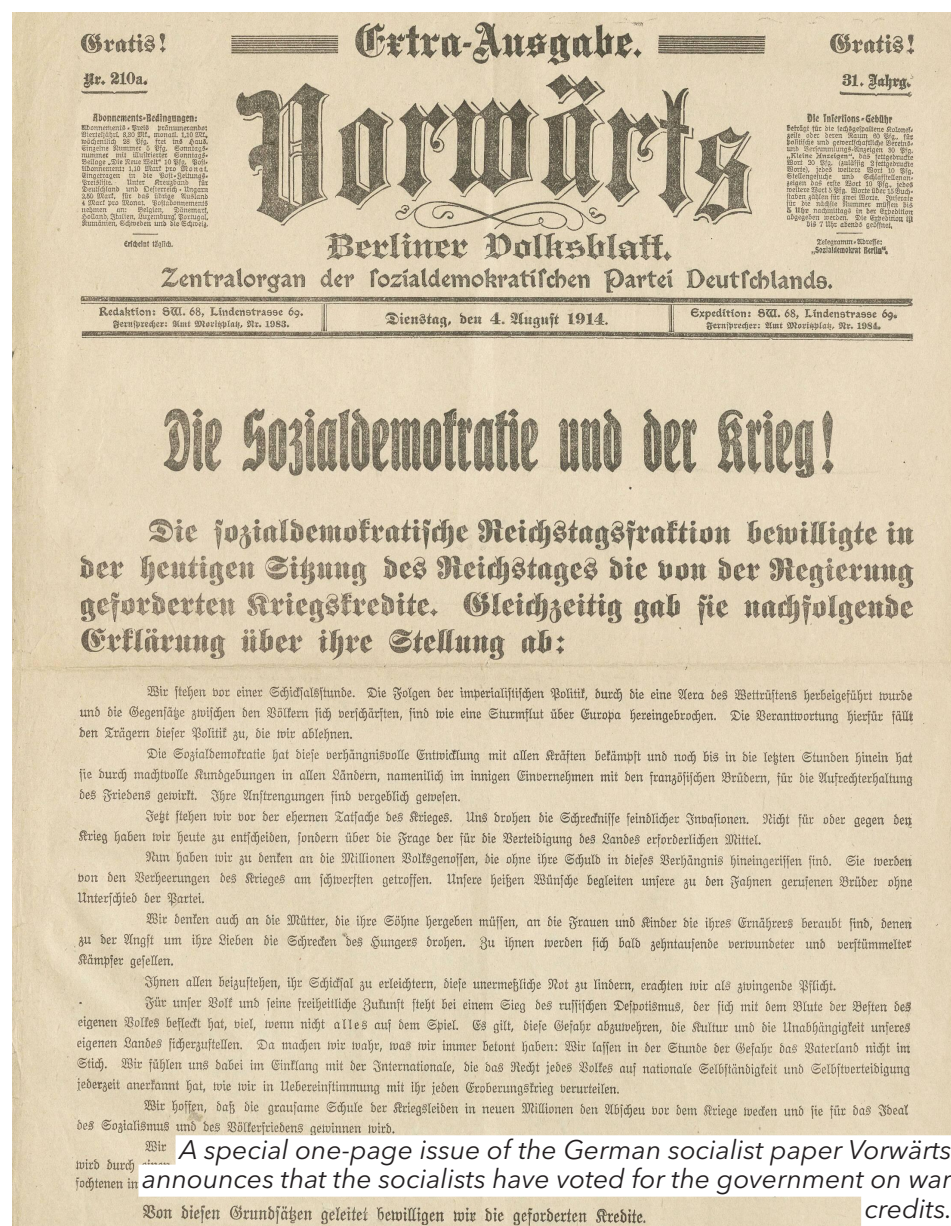
No one asked Ireland. But at the start the war was popular in Ireland: over 200,000 Irish joined the British army.

The initiative in the war came from Austro-Hungary and Germany. Germany backed Austria's ultimatum to Serbia. Russia mobilised its army, without yet declaring war. France backed its client, Russia. Germany wanted to conquer Russia. Russia wanted to conquer Constantinople. Some observers thought that the Orange revolt in Ireland, which had had German guns since April 1914, had convinced Germany to honour its agreements with Austria because it thought a civil war likely in Britain.

On 4 August 1914 Germany invaded Belgium. After serious fighting, all of Belgium fell, except a small area near Ypres, and areas of northern France.

British forces landed in France and Belgium, and the land was soon covered with a network of trenches, the site of impasse and vast slaughter until the new supply of US soldiers at the end of 1917 and the drying-up of Russian soldiers at the beginning of 1918.

The socialist argument developed in the years up to 1914 captured the



world as it was. It was impossible to champion one side for the sake of the oppressed on that side and not simultaneously to champion the oppressors of that side. To base an attitude to the war on championing one particular cause within it was to take sides in a world of empires in blood-drenched impasse.

That war was coming was widely known in the socialist movement. They did not know what it would mean exactly; but the general idea was that a break-up of the system was coming and soon. The labour "great unrest" in the UK from 1911, of which the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14 was part, was itself part of that expectation.

All socialists agreed in campaigning against the war which they saw as certain if capitalism survived. There were different schools among the socialists as to what to do in the event of war. James Connolly agreed with the French paper *La Guerre Sociale* and its founder Gustave Hervé, who wanted to call a general strike in response to a war. So did Dora Montefiore, who came to Dublin to try to evacuate the strike-bound children to homes that could look after them during the Labour War.

Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg argued that the movement could not call a general strike at will, but could and must "intervene in favour of [a war's] speedy termination and... utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule".

A catastrophe hit the international socialist movement when most of its parties backed their "own" governments in August 1914. That was the responsibility of all those parties, but the direct responsibility above all of the German party, the SPD.

It was the leading party in the international movement. It had a national daily paper, *Vorwärts* (*Forward*), and over ninety local daily papers, and was the largest single party in the parliament, the Reichstag.

A muted Anti-Socialist Law had been abandoned in 1890 after twelve years. Male workers had the vote, though the parliament they voted for had few powers. German workers had a sort of welfare state, the most advanced on the world. In setting up the beginnings of something similar in Britain and Ire-

sts, and August 1914

land in 1909, Lloyd George followed at a distance.

To socialists, Germany, an advanced capitalist country ripe for socialism, pointed the way forward. Instead, the German Socialists backed the war; and "socialism" became the 1917 Russian Revolution in an extremely backward territory, not ripe for socialism.

The SPD had a fine tradition of free discussion and then discipline once a decision was made. Many SPD members of the Reichstag, including the party leader, Hugo Haase, elected after the recent death of the previous long-time leader August Bebel, were against the majority decision of the Reichstag fraction to back the Government on war. Yet Karl Liebknecht, Otto Rühle and others all obeyed the rule to vote for what had been decided. Liebknecht voted against war credits only on the second vote; Otto Rühle, the first to join Liebknecht, only on the third vote.

The SPD's Reichstag vote had tremendous moral authority. The Kaiser and the General Staff were surprised that the socialists were voting for the war credits. Thereafter the SPD majority backed all the German government did – the invasion of Belgium, which was already under way at the time of the first vote for war credits, and the Austrian invasion of Serbia, which eventually killed maybe a quarter of Serbia's adult male population.

There had been widespread demonstrations against war in July. Jean Jaurès, whose socialism lay in the tradition of the French Revolution and less in Marxism, spoke in Paris against war, and was shot dead for it on 31 July. H M Hyndman, who would back the war as a "police action against German militarism", spoke at Trafalgar Square against war, with Keir Hardie, who would not support the war. A minority of the British Marxists, who published a lacklustre paper, *The Call*, and had a separate organisation from Easter 1916, also opposed the war. Somewhat pacifistic, Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party was the effective British opposition to the war, publicly in contact with such German opponents of war as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. (See Fenner Brockway's memoir of 1938-44: Brockway was in Lincoln jail with De Valera after the 1916 Rising.)

But the majority German socialists spoke much about Russia, but said nothing about the invasion of Belgium and France. The German socialists' vote and active support for the government more than anything determined what happened.

Did it follow that Germany was responsible? That by backing Austria's

declaration of war on Serbia (from 29 July) and its invasions of France and Belgium, Germany created the Great War?

That was not how the revolutionaries saw it. War had been expected as a result of the entire system.

The international socialist movement called an extraordinary conference in 1912 (one day, 24 November, shortened from a planned two days) to issue a manifesto against the war it saw coming. Dora Montefiore, a delegate from the British organisation, left the British Socialist Party in protest at the conference's flimsiness, as she saw it.

The argument of the majority was that almost the whole world was divided into colonies and spheres of influence exploited by the European big powers. The world was dominated by finance capital, mainly Britain, Germany, and France, but some other countries too. The blocs dominated by the great financial-capitalist powers included imperialisms of different sorts – very backward Russia and ramshackle Austro-Hungary, for instance.

You couldn't defend France and Belgium, for example, just by defending France and Belgium. You could not support one side in the name of backing the oppressed (of say Serbia) without opposing the oppressed of the other (say Ireland). The world was rotten-ripe for socialism. The whole system had to be uprooted, which is what international socialism had said it would do.

Many individual causes within the war were just, or could be. Serbia's cause was patently just... But in a world war you could not support part of the system without supporting the system.

The International had made its judgment. Getting the parties to take its advice was not quite the same thing.

The Serbian socialists, the Bolsheviks, Martov's Menshevik Internationalists, the Bulgarian "Narrow Socialists", and the Italian socialists opposed the war. Others supported it or temporised.

James Connolly met the war as a revolutionary and a supporter of the Basle Manifesto.

So he argued at the outset of the war, even if his arguments always had an Irish particular look. For instance, he and others foresaw a famine with high prices in the towns, as in the accursed mid-1840s. A potato famine in Mayo in mid-1879 had triggered the agitation that led to the Land League, the tenant farmers' "trade union movement", and over time that led to great changes in Ireland, North and South.

In neither 1879 nor 1914 did general famine develop as feared. Whatever about that, Connolly was with those

determined to oppose and resist war, come what may.

As I wrote in *Solidarity* 651, Marxists tend to hold that Ireland lacked a revolutionary party then. In fact Ireland had a growing revolutionary party: the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In his first article on the war, *Our Duty in This Crisis*, Connolly specifically rejected the support for Germany in the World War which the IRB had advocated in the years leading up to that war. Yet he would be co-opted to the IRB leadership three months before Easter 1916.

The IRB had been in existence as a secret revolutionary republican party since the year 1858. It was founded by James Stephens and John O'Mahony in Tralee and then Paris, in association with the generally Blanquist secret societies. O'Mahony organised the Fenians in America, which gave the IRB its popular name.

The method of the secret societies was to accumulate enough guns, powder, and men, and to rise up when they were ready, not taking other considerations into fundamental account.

Auguste Blanqui, who spent most of his long life in jail, was called by no less than Karl Marx himself "the real leader of the proletarian party".

Political selection was less select among the socialist secret societies than it later became, but it was serious. Their basic concerns were the tech-

nique of insurrection, of taking power; and the Parisian working class, on whom they were based, which defined them politically. Marxists would match the techniques of insurrection to the rhythms and movements of society and trade.

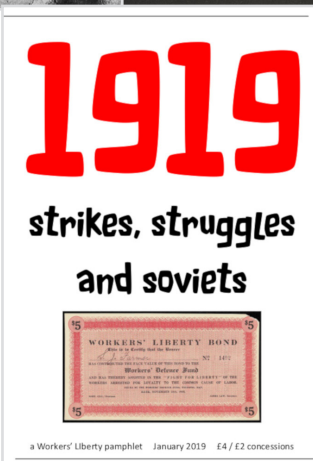
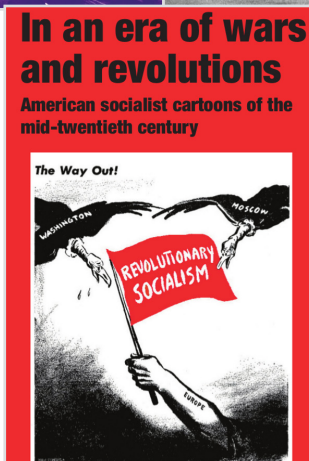
James Stephens was Fenian Head Centre until he was deposed in 1867 for letting the chance of insurrection go by. The leading British Marxist, H M Hyndman, who was a member of the British Land League in the 1880s and claimed an ancestor hanged in the North in 1798, was a friend of Stephens, and in his memoirs said that Stephens was on social questions "an advanced man". Yet for the IRB the political and power question in Ireland came first: their thinking was shaped by the idea that with mass post-famine emigration it was "soon or never".

One of Connolly's paradoxes was that the man who ended as he did, in the IRB, spent his formative period as an advocate of a peaceful road to socialism: that's what the De Leonites were and remained.

Connolly began to be influenced by the IWW and others as to the permissibility of revolutionary force about 1908; and then of course, by the Irish nationalist-republicans. □

• Part of a series: workersliberty.org/connolly

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Unison HE branches strike from 24 Nov



By Vicki Morris

Nineteen Higher Education HE branches of the public services union Unison are organising a second round of [strikes](#) of university admin and other staff since the start of term, most striking on the same days as the UCU (lecturers etc.) on 24/25 November, and some on 30 November.

The dispute is over pay. The union called for a rise in 2022-23 of RPI+2% but the employers imposed an offer of around 3%. Some universities also made non-consolidated bonus payments.

National

The national negotiations are conducted on behalf of universities by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). Against UCEA policy, University of Glasgow made a consolidated offer for pay rises from 6 to 12.9% which the branch accepted.

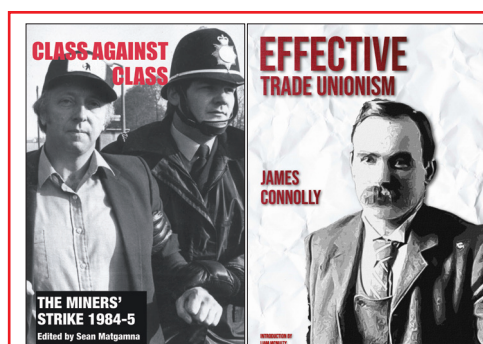
A small minority of all Unison HE

branches are striking, but more than the nine who struck over pay last year; and the number is set to grow as several branches who did not make the threshold for striking in September, and some branches who opted out of balloting last time, have opted into a second round of balloting in February 2023.

UCEA has announced its members consider the 2022-23 pay negotiations

finished but has offered to open 2023-24 talks early, dangling the prospect of a little extra for 2022-23 as part of any bargain struck. They are keen to stop the growing trend of militancy among the lower-paid support workers represented by Unison. □

• Vicki Morris is a member of the Unison HE Service Group Executive, writing here in a personal capacity.



In 2022, in the largest strike wave in a generation, we have much to learn from James Connolly's writings as a socialist and union activist; and from the 1984-85 Miners' strike. £10 for both books, usual price £14. workersliberty.org/strike-books



This 2022 limited-time only xmas offer covers recent British labour movement history. Three books for £10. Usual price £16. workersliberty.org/uk-history-xmas-22

Strikes in Scotland 24 and 28 Nov

By James Rink

Teachers in Scotland have voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action to force the Scottish Government to improve the 5% pay offer already on the table from three months ago.

With a 71% turnout, 96% of EIS members voted in favour

of taking industrial action. The first one day strike is scheduled for 24 November.

Ambulance workers in the Scottish Ambulance Service have also voted to take industrial action over pay.

A one day strike has been called by the GMB for 28 November, and Unite has called a work to rule from the preced-

ing Friday. Nurses in the RCN are planning industrial action, across all Health Boards in Scotland, after rejecting an improved pay offer from the Scottish government (£2,205 rise) on 9 November.

An online consultation by Unison with members in NHS Scotland reported on 15 Nov with 61% rejection of the same

offer. Workers across the public sector are prepared to take action.

Unfortunately, a lack of coordination and planning on the part of the trade unions may blunt the impact.

"Reprioritise"

The Scottish Government is reviewing its spending against

the background of an overall planned £615m cuts.

It has been "reprioritising budgets" to allow marginal improvements in pay offers while simultaneously cutting money from services including the NHS. This unacceptable and damaging strategy that can only further weaken vital public services. □

London busworkers strike

By Mark Simon

Bus drivers working for Abellio at Beddington, Battersea, Hayes, Waltham, Southall, Twickenham will strike for ten days running up to Christmas. The strikes on 22-25-26 November and 1-2-3-9-10-16-17 December follow an intensive organising campaign which

resulted in ballot with turnouts of 90%, 85%, 68% and 58%, and yes votes from 97% to 100%. Two previous ballots this year on more restricted demands failed to reach the threshold.

The strike aims to break a two-year pay deal that only delivered 2.1% this year. Abellio is one of the lowest payers in London, so the drivers' union, Unite, is demanding £20 per hour basic rate, a change to schedules, and no bus route cuts. Abellio made £40 million in profit in 2021. Unite has found that Abellio has moved millions out of the London bus operation into international accounts over the last decade.

Bus drivers at Metrolink Travel have voted overwhelmingly to strike, with yes votes ranging from 100% to 95% and turnouts of between 73% and 60%. Drivers at Kings Cross, Holloway, Cricklewood, Lampton, Harrow Weald, Edgware, Willesden, Perivale, Brentford and Potters Bar also voted to reject an

offer of 9.5% from the company by 74%. Unite's demands include an RPI+ pay rise, a new technology agreement,

more leave, longer breaks and grading changes. Reps are planning to coordinate the strike dates with Abellio. □

Defend Radeck, defend the union

By Mark Simon

Unite members at London United's Fulwell bus garage are being balloted for industrial action over the sacking of their shop steward, Radeck. Radeck was suspended and then sacked just for the crime of answering a simple question on a union WhatsApp group about who had gone into work on strike days. Management say that giving the names of the few who broke the strike he has committed an act of gross misconduct. Radeck has over 15 years of a clean disciplinary record as a driver,

so this is an act of revenge against a recently elected and highly effective trade unionist.

In the summer London United Drivers struck for four days and won a 9% yearly pay rise back dated to December 2021. The dispute ended with Radeck suspended but before he was sacked. A minority of Unite reps argued then that the dispute should not be ended until Radeck's suspension was withdrawn.

Support for Radeck is strong in Fulwell and among the reps in other London United garages. The ballot closes on 5 December. □

More online

Ukraine voices

New book from the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign
bit.ly/uscreview

2 and 5 Nov

Why poor turnout on TUC-sponsored protests?
bit.ly/2and5nov

Escalation needed in rail disputes

By an RMT rep

The rail union RMT is re-balloting in both the national rail and London Underground disputes, with ballots due back on 15 November and 8 December respectively.

Focus has been on securing the required turnout and yes vote, but that must be combined with an extensive discussion about the next steps in the disputes. Simply renewing the mandates, and hoping the mere fact that the union *could* call further strikes will be enough to force concessions via negotiations, will not cut it; a significant escalation of action, plus greater cross-union coordination, will be necessary if workers are to win.

In both disputes, RMT began with something of a bang. London Underground workers struck for 48 hours in March, split across two days to maximise impact. In the national rail dispute, a three-day staggered strike in June spread impact across a whole week. Both disputes had a significant amount of energy and enthusiasm.

But recently RMT, having moved strikes planned for 3, 5, and 7 November at the request of the Royal British Legion so as not to disrupt its London "Poppy Day", then cancelled those strikes altogether in exchange for a promise of "intensive negotiations."

Drivers' union Aslef has named a further strike involving its members at

13 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) for 26 November, but the strike is only for 24 hours. Although Aslef has yet to strike for more than 24 hours consecutively in the current dispute, it has previously called at least two 24-hour strikes at a time.

Smaller rail union TSSA also recently cancelled planned strikes on Network Rail.

RMT members on London Underground struck again on 10 November, alongside Unite members on LU and elsewhere in Transport for London. RMT's dispute there focuses on jobs, pensions, and conditions. The 10 November strike was the first since 19 August. A further strike is planned on 25 November, involving three station groups and the Special Requirements Team, a department of mobile station staff.

Since mid-2022, RMT has stepped back to only calling 24-hour strikes. Sometimes two 24-hour strikes relatively close together have been announced in quick succession, but often only a single day's strike has been announced, with weeks – or, in the London Underground dispute, months – in between action. Drivers' union Aslef has taken a similar approach to its action on the TOCs.

The opening salvo of strong action from RMT seemed to signal an understanding that sporadic 24-hour strikes would not be sufficient to win a dispute of this magnitude; the scaling back of the action since jars with that.

The RMT's cancellation of the strikes it had moved to 5, 7 and 9 November, in exchange only for the promise of further talks rather than any concrete settlement, risks narrowing the horizons of the dispute. The Rail Delivery Group, which has been negotiating with RMT on behalf of Train Operating Companies, says it plans to make formal proposals by 18 November, and "asked" that RMT cancel strikes "to allow for" a two-week period of negotiations towards those proposals.

RMT statements following the cancellation of the strikes said that the offer of talks "without preconditions" had "removed the reason for the current phase" of strikes, recalibrating the dispute away from a fight for concrete demands (an above-inflation pay rise; no job losses; no detrimental changes to terms and conditions) towards a fight over the parameters of negotiations.

A subsequent union circular on 10 November clarified that Network Rail's agreement to halt the imposition of its "Modernising Maintenance" job cuts and restructure plan had been the immediate reason for withdrawing the strikes. But, again, the aim of the dispute and the action is not merely to pause imposition while negotiations take place, but to win an agreement



that avoids job cuts altogether. Maintaining clarity about these concrete demands is also necessary for the dispute's success.

Where coordination between unions has taken place in the disputes so far, it has tended to be on the basis of one union calling a strike and other unions subsequently naming the same dates, rather than direct discussion between unions leading to a collective decision to call united action. Coordination even within a single union has sometimes been difficult; on London Underground, station staff struck alone on 8 June, and on 25 November workers at four station areas will strike, despite the issues (job cuts and imposition of worse conditions) being part of RMT's all-grades dispute and ballot.

Fracturing

In the national dispute, had the November strikes taken place, they would have seen a fracturing in the Network Rail and TOCs action, with Network Rail workers striking on 5, 7 and 9 November, with TOCs workers striking only on 5 and 7 November.

On days when only one union has been striking, there is almost no culture of the members of non-striking unions refusing to cross their picket lines. On London Underground, Aslef and TSSA members are covered by the legal protection of RMT's ballot and can join RMT strikes without any risk. On national rail, the situation is slightly more complex, as Aslef and RMT members are not necessarily covered by each other's ballots. Nevertheless, the principle of never crossing a picket line should supersede other concerns. Where workers have refused to cross other unions' picket lines in the rail disputes, there have been no serious disciplinary reprisals.

Some workers argue that on national rail united action is superfluous, as either RMT or Aslef striking individually leads to significant disruption, and that having members of the non-striking union in work and being paid, but without any work to do, somehow adds to the impact by further hitting employers' costs. On its own terms, this view is flawed: having Aslef members work through RMT strikes means some

trains can run, and if RMT members work through Aslef strikes then trains driven by managers and scabs are guaranteed to have stations to stop at, staffed by RMT members. But more fundamentally, dismissing the importance of united action entrenches a situation where workers identify solely with their own union, or even their own job role, rather than as rail workers engaged in a collective fight.

Within all unions, keeping the disputes on track requires the maximum degree of transparency, communication, and democracy. RMT has held report-backs and briefings from negotiations, although some members on TOCs feel the communication has been more extensive on the Network Rail side. Briefings and report-backs are essential for ensuring members are fully informed, but also needed are democratic assemblies where reps can deliberate over the strategy for the dispute. The significant numbers of RMT reps who opposed the union Executive's decision to suspend the November strikes must channel that dissent into the development of a collective strategy for escalating the dispute.

Some have proposed that the union calls strikes every Saturday for a sustained period. That would undoubtedly be an escalation from the status quo, but it is doubtful whether it would be sufficient to win the union's demands.

Whenever rail and Tube workers have struck this year, the action has been solid and impactful. The strength of RMT's 10 November strike on the Tube showed that, despite total intransigence from management, the action has not frayed. On national rail, a clear resolve remains despite the protracted nature of the dispute and frustrations around the cancellation of strikes. Both disputes are a long way from collapsing into defeat.

But, having come this far, we owe it to ourselves to aim for something more than a fudged compromise or merely blunting the sharpest edges of bosses' attacks. As we work to get the vote out in our new ballots, let's also remind ourselves that we're in this fight to win, and focus discussion on what kind of action will be necessary to achieve that. □

Next steps

Escalate the action: RMT should use its hopefully renewed mandate to call a programme of strikes, escalating the number of days involved, continuing to use hardship payments wherever possible to support members most in need.

Coordination: Unions should hold multilateral discussions, as openly and democratically as possible, to discuss coordination. Ideally, all unions should strike together, naming the same programme of escalating action. If there are days when one union is striking but others are not, rank-and-file members of non-striking unions should refuse to cross the striking union's picket lines.

Maximise transparency and democracy: In all unions, regular assemblies of reps must be held to hear report backs from negotiations, hold negotiators to account, and discuss next steps. Although each union's constitutional arrangements differ, reps' assemblies should be able to hear and vote on proposals that can then be progressed through the unions' formal democratic structures. □

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What the “NHS crisis” means



Diary of a paramedic

By Alice Hazel

Recently I was faced with the crisis in the NHS in very concrete and immediate terms.

Working out of a GP practice, I visited a patient at home. He'd been discharged from hospital two days before and had gone downhill rapidly since.

His condition was declining in front of my eyes. I called an ambulance. It'd be at least three hours, the call-taker told me: that's for an acute situation. It was 10 o'clock. I was due to finish home vis-

iting at 12.30 and had three more patients, potentially equally sick, to see that morning.

Feeling terrible I left the patient at home, under the watchful eye of his family, with my phone number and assurance I would come back if they called me.

In clinic later in the week I saw another patient who needed admitting. She agreed to get a family member to take her in a car. Ideally, she would go by ambulance, but it was not an immediately life-threatening emergency.

I called the ward to arrange admission. Engaged. I sent the patient off to hospital, saw another patient, and tried them again. Engaged. I noticed a message: everyone was struggling to get

through, the system was completely blocked up. I send an email hoping it would get through to the relevant person and the patient would be let onto the ward.

Dealing with complex situations and ill health is hard, but working within an NHS in crisis creates its own additional pressure. In response to this people are leaving.

Two people in my relatively small workplace went in just one week recently: K, a young worker who'd done her job for six months and had enough, and an experienced nurse taking early retirement. The talk over break is muted congratulation for them and everyone else planning their escape. □

Dispatch from the Elizabeth Line



Diary of a railworker

By Steve Allan

The late cancellation of the national rail strikes in early November did not spare the Elizabeth line on the grand opening of through running, 6 November. And it didn't take long for the house of cards to fall again after a slight breath of wind.

The new timetable means a broken-down train at Shenfield can cause delays as far as Heathrow. Taking the brunt will be station staff as per usual, who are now being asked to do more

work for the same pay. To cope with increased demands on the service, the company is hiring more agency staff to operate as "Customer Information Assistants" (CIA for short!)

There is a known software bug in the system which causes the passenger information display to malfunction when trains are out of whack. They will be required to work up to twelve-hour shifts delivering manual public announcements.

RMT union reps are incensed that the company is employing more agency staff, despite the agreement that this would be a temporary arrangement when the line opened and that these staff would be brought in-house. The

mood music is that we are as close to entering a dispute with the employer than at any time in MTR's four-year ownership of the concession.

It's also the time of year when senior management ask for our opinion in the annual staff survey. Staff are encouraged to engage constructively and that "every piece of feedback will be considered". Reps are encouraging members to have their say, and have also launched their own consultation about what we want to see prioritised in next year's pay claim.

This sort of passive engagement will not get members more involved, which is even more important now as workplace issues are likely to sharpen. □

Liverpool dockers win on pay

By Gerry Bates

Liverpool dockers, members of Unite, have won pay rises of from 14.3% to 18.5%, backdated to June 2022, by their five weeks of strikes. They voted to accept the offer from Peel Ports on Thursday 11 November.

Without the offer, they would have

been on strike again from 14 November. The victory can be put down to determination and organisation. The dockers struck for two weeks at a time, rather than the one-day strikes used in other disputes. There were picket lines 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And decisions were taken by mass meetings on the picket line.

Unite dockers in Southampton and Hull refused to work ships redirected from Liverpool, and defied bosses' insistence that this refusal broke anti-union laws.

The background is years of patient effort to rebuild organisation after it was beaten back in the long 1995-8 strike. □

Another film from Glauber Rocha



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Antonio das Mortes (1969) was the Brazilian film-maker Glauber Rocha's final part in a loose trilogy with *Black God, White Devil* (*Solidarity* 652) and *Enchanted Earth* (1967). The Portuguese title of the film translates as

The Dragon of Wickedness Against the Holy Warrior (think St. George and the Dragon, set in Brazil).

Antonio das Mortes (who features in *Black God...*) is a hired killer whose main targets are the Robin Hood style bandits, the Cangaceiros. As the gangs are steadily eliminated, his "livelihood" begins to disappear. A landowner pays him to kill Coirano, the leader of one of the last gangs of Cangaceiros.

Antonio is happy that he can resume

his "trade". However, he soon realises that Coirano is no gun-toting hoodlum but an idealist who takes the side of the poor and the dispossessed. Here, the politics of the South American 1960s morph into the Brazil of the 1940s.

Antonio steadily begins to question his attitudes and beliefs. The three Rocha films mentioned have been issued on DVD by Mr. Bongo Films: check out their [website](http://www.bongofilms.com) to see if they are still available. □



PCS decides on 18 Nov



John Moloney

We balloted 214 bargaining units and we won in over 120 areas, including Home Office, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Transport. Disappointingly we lost in Revenue and Customs (HMRC) – but the union Executive has taken, what I think is the correct decision to re-ballot those members as soon as possible in the New Year.

The ballot wins puts us in a position to take widespread action. Of course, the focus of discussion is now around what sort of action that should be.

I think we need to take action as soon as possible, and certainly this year. I also believe we need to start our campaign with an all-out strike in December for one or two days. We need to be prepared to take the kind of action that can win. All-out action with selective strikes can win. We should of course aim to coordinate directly with other unions where possible, whilst also fighting our dispute on its own terms.

The Executive meets on 18 November, and I hope the meeting will discuss and agree a programme of action stretching over at least the next couple of months. We've got £4 million available for strikes, with more money to come, so we can fund very effective action.

Whilst union's main focus is on the national struggle, we continue to have a number of local disputes. Our outsourced members at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for example have strikes planned in November and December. The threat of strikes has led to progress in talks, and the branch now feels that is sufficient to justify suspending the first strike day, planned for 16 November. Other strike days, on 23 and 30 November and 7 and 14 December, still remain on. □

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

NHS unions move towards strikes

By Kelly Rogers

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) announced on 9 November that 176 Trusts across the UK had passed the threshold in their strike ballots and voted for action. That's 100% in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Wales missed the threshold in only one of its Trusts (by only nine votes!). The short-fall comes from England, where Trusts are much larger.

This RCN result should encourage members and activists in the bigger health unions, Unison, GMB, and Unite, to push for big turnouts in their ballots. The Unison ballot closes on 25 November, GMB on 29th, and Unite on 30th for their first wave.

The RCN is waiting for the budget on 17 November before calling strike days. A Unison official at the SOS NHS conference on 12 November said that Unison are already preparing to work with other unions to call strikes and RCN have sent similar messages.

Coordination can lead to more effective national strikes and will serve to break down barriers between the health unions.

A key take-away from my work organising in the RCN ballot has been just how easy it has been on the ground. Practically every time I walked onto a ward, I would end up talking to a member who would tell me how they "wouldn't have considered striking a year or two ago" but now feel like they "have no choice."

The results are especially remarkable because the RCN lacks any serious rank-and-file organisation, with a tiny number of reps relative to the size of the union. Branches are huge and unwieldy, covering thousands of members across geographical areas, rather than employers or workplaces.

Without a layer of reps and activists to call upon, the RCN started this campaign from square one. It brought

together a small army of "Voting Volunteers" – lay members who very often hadn't been "involved" with the union before in any meaningful sense. What happens to these members, and whether they can develop into an activist layer, will to a great extent determine the RCN's future.

Guys and St Thomas's in London, the largest NHS Trust in the UK, got over the line; but a number of large Trusts failed by a few percentage points to pass the threshold – meaning that thousands of nursing staff, very recently moved to action, have been left disappointed.

The anti-union laws are set up so that abstentions are effectively counted as "no" votes. One London nurse told me that RCN members in his Trust voted 97% to strike on a 43% turnout – over five hundred for strike, against 17 no votes. It was 88 votes short of having a legal strike ballot. If those 88 had all voted against strike, then the Trust would have a legal strike mandate.

There is a very strong case for rebalancing in such Trusts. The results don't reflect the conversations that Voting Volunteers and organisers have had when walking the wards, but they do reflect the missing ballot papers widely reported and more likely in London because members change address more often.

The RCN's membership is only just learning to flex its muscles, and it is a long time since other unions in the NHS called strikes widely, too. Once the strike days are called, it will be down to a new layer of activists to hold the union leaderships to account, push for a calendar of strike dates and demand a strategy that will win.

The other issue we need to raise immediately is workers and union control of emergency cover. Workers know what cover is life and limb. Bosses will try to cover higher than the usual pitiful staff levels they are prepared to provide. Unions must put their members



at the fore of these decisions, not nod through exemptions with managers. □

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UCU demo on 30 November

By a UCU member

Staff represented by the University and College Union will be joining Unison colleagues on the picket lines in three days of action: 24, 25 and 30 November. Thanks to victory in an aggregated ballot, virtually all universities are involved in the dispute on pay and conditions. Some employers – particularly those hit hard by action last year

– have been offering local bonuses, but none has yet delivered a rise to match inflation. There will be a national demonstration on 30 November, beginning 1pm at King's Cross, London, to coincide with a key employers' meeting. At Birkbeck University of London staff are expected to declare a formal dispute after management announced 140 roles are at risk of redundancy. □

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Murdoch dumps Trump, but DeSantis poses threat

By Tom Harrison

"Xi is a great gentleman. He's now president for life. Maybe I'll want to give that a shot." During the course of his two hour long rambles which pass for speeches, Trump often makes favourable references to Chinese dictator Xi Jinping. At one rally recently he spoke approvingly of the way Xi's regime "dealt" with alleged criminals: a "speedy trial" invariably leading to a death sentence, followed by the executioner's bullet getting mailed to relatives of the deceased.

Trump's liking for despots and their ways is well known. He's also a big fan of Kim Jong Un, and then there's the highly suspicious fawning before Vladimir Putin at the 2018 Helsinki Summit. When Trump talks about wanting to be "president for life", he is not joking!

Unfortunately for Trump though, a majority of American voters don't want to live in a repressive one-party state. They demonstrated this in last week's midterm elections where, in one way or another, they convincingly rejected election denialism and many Trump-approved candidates.

Along with a lot of pollsters, Trump had predicted a "red wave" of victories for Republican Party candidates. Instead, that wave turned out to be little more than a trickle. Few seats changed hands in the House of Representatives, and the GOP failed to take control of the Senate. In Pennsylvania, a high profile Trump-endorsed Senate candidate, the quack TV doctor Mehmet Oz, suffered a humiliating defeat, as did all three main election-denier candidates in Arizona.

As in 2020 there will be a run off for a senate seat in Georgia. Trump is backing former NFL football star Herschel Walker, who currently narrowly trails Democrat Raphael Warnock. Walker has a track record for domestic violence and, despite his anti-abortion politics, encouraged two of his former girlfriends to have abortions.

The decision by the reactionary judges in the Supreme Court to overturn the Roe v Wade judgement, thereby giving some states the green light to ban abortions, was the other significant reason why Republicans lost out. Walker is not the first and certainly won't be the last male politician to be exposed as a gross hypocrite on this issue.

At the time of writing we don't know whether Trump will make his promised "big announcement" of another presidential run now that the red wave has failed to materialise. With all his tantrums and flailing, Trump is beginning to look like a pathetic loser. His political backers are prepared to overlook a Trump-organised insurrection, but draw the line at their party losing out electorally.



Many thought a Republican move to dump Trump would take place immediately after the 6 January 2021 attack on the Capitol. Many Republican politicians dissociated from Trump then, only to swing back into line in the following weeks and months. But the Murdoch-owned media have turned against Trump. The front page of Thursday's *New York Post* caricatured Trump as "Trumpty Dumpty". Fox News also got in on the act with calls for the GOP to "move on" from Trump and set its sights on the rising star that is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

Rupert Murdoch doesn't like backing losers, as his track record in British politics during the Thatcher and Blair years shows. DeSantis presents himself as a safer electable bet, particularly if he stands against the ageing Joe Biden, and given the multitude of legal threats Trump faces, which will come to a head next year,

Trumpist

Yet DeSantis is a Trumpist sans Trump. His "victory" in Florida came with vigorous voter suppression and intimidation. Anti-gay and anti-woke, he presents himself as a kind of Trump "with a human face", but shares a similar authoritarian agenda.

Should DeSantis replace Trump as Republican candidate, then attention should focus on the autocratic way he's been running Florida. He uses his state police for political purposes, most recently sending them out to arrest people for alleged voter fraud. Such arrests were largely bogus, with arresting officers bemused and apologetic when carting their victims away.

Nevertheless, DeSantis enjoyed a good photo op, positioning himself in front of a couple of ranks of uniformed coppers to deliver a "tough on voter fraud message" on TV, following the Trump rigged-election playbook.

The targets of this intimidation were almost exclusively black voters, who were threatened with up to five years imprisonment. A couple of cases of actual fraud by people who lived in The Villages (a retirement-home area) only received

small fines, but then that's where a lots of retired white Trump supporters live.

DeSantis employed partisan bias again during the recent hurricane when he lifted voting restrictions in three heavily Republican districts, but not in Democrat leaning areas. He's also redrawn the Florida congressional map in what has been described as one of the most heavily gerrymandered exercises in US history.

His record tackling the Covid pandemic – 82,000 plus dead in Florida – hasn't been impressive either. He tried to cover up the death rate figures and had his police invade the home of a whistleblower, data scientist Rebecca Jones, who was trying to get the truth out.

If the GOP gets a slim majority in the House, a lot of infighting is expected between those Republicans who previously bent the knee to Trump in order to keep their seats and the out and out "crazies". Kevin McCarthy expects to replace Nancy Pelosi as Speaker, but may be denied the role. He and his ilk face a choice between having some kind of limited bi-partisan cooperation with Biden, or following an agenda set by the likes of Marjorie Taylor Greene.

Trump pinned his hopes on a big win in the House that would enable it to operate as his legal team, investigating Hunter Biden, impeaching the Attorney General, attacking the FBI, and otherwise helping to mitigate his legal woes. That now seems much less likely. And if he does get indicted, the temptation to choose a "clean" presidential candidate will only grow.

How far Biden can now be regarded as a "lame-duck" President now is debatable. It is now routine for the legislative agenda of US Presidents to be stymied after two years in office – yet another example America's outdated and dysfunctional constitution, alongside the "It's a Republic, not a Democracy" cry of those who support a set-up where Republicans could win the Presidency in 2000 and 2016 with a minority of the votes.

Although the Republican Party represents the most aggressive capitalist force in American politics, the Democrats can't be regarded as an acceptable alternative for the American working class. Bernie Sanders and many others do advocate policies which benefit workers' interests, but the party's leadership is wedded to corporate capitalist and imperialist interests.

The two party political straitjacket confining the US political system has always been difficult for socialists to break out of historically.

Yet, as in other parts of the world, there has been an upsurge in working-class struggle in the

America. Teachers, and rail, health, and gig-economy workers have been in struggle. Socialists can build on these struggles in defence of the social and economic interests of the working class with the aim of establishing a truly independent workers' party in the USA.

And if nursery rhymes are to be used political articles, then let's see the end of Trumpty Dumpty, but also the Tweedle Dee Democrats that complement his party of Tweedle Dums! □



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 □



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UKRAINIAN WIN IS THREAT TO PUTIN

By Dan Katz

On Friday 11 November the Ukrainian army rolled into Kherson city centre to be greeted by relatively small but ecstatic groups of what remains of the Ukrainian population.

Kherson, and a large surrounding area on the right bank of the Dnipro river, had been overrun during the first phase of the Russian invasion in early March 2022. Overnight on Thursday 10-Friday 11 November partisans raised the Ukrainian flag in Kherson centre, and across the region enormous bill boards declaring Kherson would be Russian for ever were torn down.

Kherson had a pre-war population of 280,000. Immediately after Russia's occupation began nearly half the population fled. More recently, as Russian forces began to lose ground and withdrawal looked inevitable, Russia moved thousands of civilians out of the area. Some collaborators went willingly, others were bullied into leaving.

The pre-war population of Kherson was largely pro-Ukraine. 90% (on an 83% turnout) voted for Ukrainian independence in the 1991 referendum. In the 2020 local elections about 30% of the vote went to pro-Russian parties.

In March and April regular demonstrations against the occupation were held in Kher-

son until they were violently repressed. Pro-Ukraine partisans killed local collaborators and activists put up anti-occupation posters across the city.

Hundreds of people disappeared during the Russian occupation. Former police and army personnel, journalists, lawyers and local politicians were targeted by the occupation force. Torture was routine; some were killed.

On 3 November Ukrainian police officials claimed they have found the bodies of 868 civilians in recently liberated areas in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Kherson. Police are now investigating murders and sexual attacks made by Russian troops in Kherson.

Looted

The Russians have also looted the area. Kherson's hospitals and schools have had equipment removed. Ambulances and fire engines have been taken to the Russian-occupied left bank. And Russian soldiers have stolen enormous amounts of private property including cars, computers, furniture and kitchen goods.

Dangers remain for Kherson. The retreating Russian army has heavily mined the region including, apparently, public buildings and the Kherson sewerage system. Russia may blow the Kakhovka hydro-electric dam on the Dnipro which

would flood a vast area, including the city.

Russian stragglers, the remnants of the occupation force, may well still be hiding out.

The Ukrainian victory is the result of a long-running military campaign which began in July. The Ukrainian army has used effective, US-donated HIMARS artillery, to destroy bridges, supply lines and Russian command centres.

The newly-appointed commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, Sergei Surovikin, appeared on Russian television on Wednesday 9 November, apparently asking the Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu for permission to order his troops to leave Kherson city, and arguing that the Russian position had become untenable.

Putin generally allows officials to take the blame for defeats, hiding behind them.

Nevertheless, anger at this humiliating withdrawal from an area that Putin claimed to have formally annexed in September, has become visible even on heavily controlled Russian television. Putin's ability to deflect criticism is decreasing.

Hardline foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova even admitted that Russia is now willing to hold talks with Kyiv. This is a big step backwards from Russian demands, early in the war, that Ukraine unconditionally surrenders. □

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban