

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Tories cutting



Unions fighting back

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

See inside

The consequences of Liz Truss

Andrew Gamble on the Tories' implosion and the new austerity

Pages 8-9

Labour and the "trend of Begret"

The last five polls give "rejoin EU" an average lead of 57-43%.

Page 6

The strike wave in France

A Paris transport worker describes the fightback

Page 11

Labour expels top trade unionists

Activists must rally the unions to resist the neo-Blairite drive

Page 5

Which side are you on?



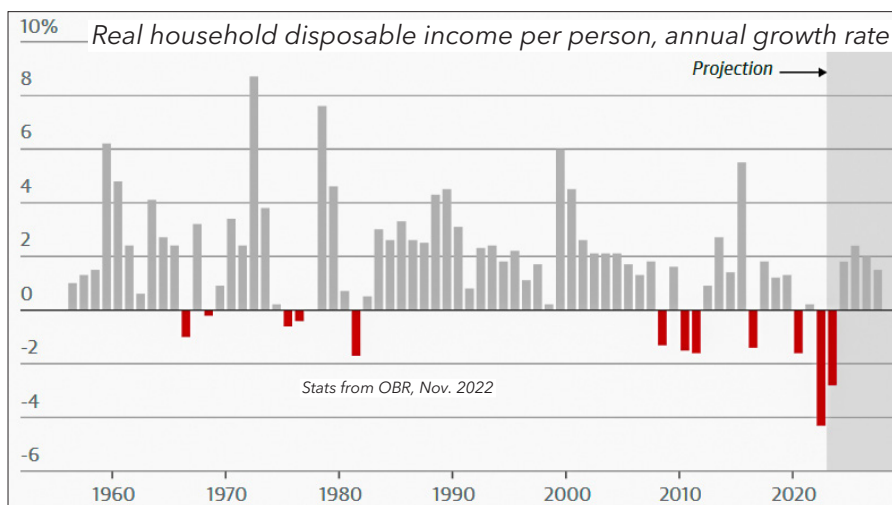
Editorial

After 12 grisly years of “austerity” – cuts to living standards and public services to further enrich employers and the rich – and decades of rising inequality, the working class in the UK faces a dramatic new assault. One that poses a stark challenge to workers, the labour movement and every individual who wants a better society.

The growing surge of workers’ struggles can defeat these attacks and start to turn things around – *but only if we organise to take it much further.*

Under the Tories’ plan, people in this country will suffer the biggest fall in living standards on record: a 4.3% cut in real incomes this coming year and 2.8% the one after. Both years will be records. For many, particularly on low incomes, it will be much worse. On Thursday new chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced that, instead of taking measures to bolster living standards and services, the government will take back £55 billion in new spending cuts and tax increases – mainly cuts, and tax rises very much *not* targeting the heaped-up wealth of the rich.

Probably this will deepen and pro-



long the UK’s economic recession. The Tory leaders know that: their intention is to calm “the markets” while creating an opportunity to push down the working class even further.

Entwined with the assault on living standards come new laws planned to further constrict the right to strike and revive the worst aspects sifted out of this year’s authoritarian Police Bill. Alongside those come virulent persecution of refugees and migrants, and determination to avoid serious action on the climate crisis.

The situation really is grim. Cause for hope can be found in the growing revolt of those with the power to turn things around: the organised working class and labour movement. 2022 will probably see the most work days lost to strikes since 1989, with struggles in many sectors.

This year many struggles have already

won inflation-matching or -busting pay rises. To turn the tide generally, we need to learn from what has won and what has not – in the UK and far beyond; identify, generalise and develop the best features; rally to every struggle that breaks out; and spread and coordinate strikes far more widely.

The challenge is posed to everyone in society, outside the ruling class and its political representatives. This is a war. Which side are you on?

Do you support strikes, picket lines, demonstrations, and look for ways to express and activate your support – or passively submit to the Tories’ attack?

Do people who consider themselves activists, socialists, fighters for social justice throw themselves into organising for this conflict, or let the difficulties of the struggle and the demands of everyday life stand in the way?

And this reckoning poses sharp challenges for organisations that claim to represent working-class interests as a labour movement.

Are our trade unions serious about fighting and striking with the determination it will take to defeat the Tory/ruling-class assault? Though strike figures are sharply up, they are still so far historically low, and repeated cancelled strikes even by more militant unions

show the reluctance to escalate.

What are unions doing to rouse their members and the wider working class in political campaigning to fight and win an alternative to Tory cuts and repression? At the moment few unions are making clear, vocal demands – let alone running real campaigns – even for increased public spending and taxes on the rich.

The fight for pay rises is a necessary starting point. It is not enough even in its own terms. The Scottish government has cut funds for NHS services to accommodate bigger increases for public sector workers.

If the leadership and stance of the unions are weak, those of the party they fund and sustain, the party that claims to represent the labour movement in politics, are a scandal. Labour’s leaders are determinedly evading both the challenge posed by the Tories’ cuts and that posed by the strikes. Continued evasion leads inescapably to collaboration with “austerity” and continuing it under a Labour government. The issues, of public finances and social regression, will not disappear by 2024; in fact the Tories have scheduled most of the gouging for after then. How will a Labour government respond?

For every activist and supporter of the labour movement, there is another challenge: are we doing everything we can to push our unions into aggressive action, including action to drag Labour to supporting unions’ – and its own members’ – demands? □

The “iron cages” of capitalism



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Andrew Gamble (inter-viewed on pages 8-9 this week) titled his book on Friedrich Hayek *The Iron Cage of Liberty*. Hayek (1889-1992) was a theorist of ruthlessly free-market capitalism, influential with Thatcher.

The “iron cage” image came from [Max Weber](#): “Fate decreed that the cloak... [of] care for external goods... should become an iron cage... Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inex-

orable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today... victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support [i.e. of asceticism] no longer”.

Weber (1864-1920), today considered a founder of sociological theory, was in politics a sort of bourgeois liberal, though very hostile to revolutionary socialism. Amidst the red-baiting which led to the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, he [wrote](#): “[Karl] Liebknecht belongs in the madhouse and Rosa Luxemburg in the zoological gardens”.

Weber and Hayek shared a view that socialism was an older moral value which capitalism had made inoperative. Capitalism had prevailed

because of its superior productive capacity. It imposed an “iron cage”: for Weber, of rationalisation, bureaucracy (hierarchical, rationalised administration), and “disenchantment of the world”; for Hayek, of market constraints.

For Hayek, free markets were the only means with the capacities for creating and processing social information adequate to run complex modern societies. The only morality workable was the individual-responsibility morality of the market participant. He saw values such as solidarity and altruism as rooted in an archaic past, not in the modern conditions of the working class. They could lead only to totalitarianism (driven by the attempt to do the impossible) and to economic decay. For

Hayek, in contrast to Rosa Luxemburg, the alternatives were (as Gamble puts it), (free-market) “capitalism or barbarism”.

The Tories are now introducing a more specific “iron cage”, mediated through financial rather than goods-and-services markets: the “iron cage” which limits public policy to what gains the confidence of “the markets” on the basis of the predictions of the Office for Budgetary Responsibility.

Both Weber and Hayek were defenders of capitalism, but, paradoxically, overstated the bleakness. Capitalism is a cage on humanity, but not as “iron” as that. Karl Marx in *Capital* already showed that workers under capitalism can win elements of the “political economy of the working class” such as shortening of the working

day, and to win better wages than those of the supposed “iron law” of subsistence-level.

Even if free markets cannot foreseeably be dispensed with entirely – and Hayek’s arguments on that score, against Oskar Lange and others in the 1930s, have force – we know it is possible to modify them and to remove them from large areas of social life such as schooling and health care. Not only possible, but necessary, for ecological survival.

The true limit to the flexibility of the “cage” is the capitalist class adapting to every gain of the working class by more sophisticated methods of claw-back (also sketched in *Capital*). We can break out of the cage by overthrowing and expropriating that class. □

Strikes escalate again

By Ollie Moore

Railworkers will strike on 13-18 December and 3-8 January, and run an overtime ban on Network Rail from 18 Dec to 2 Jan (see details on p.13).

Those strikes, and the six further strikes by postal workers (Communication Workers' Union, CWU) in December represents a meaningful escalation, after a period of lull, in the major national disputes in the current strike wave.

Strikes are already spreading into education, with UCU and some Unison strikes planned for 24-25 and 30 Nov, and teachers and other school workers in NEU and NASUWT returning ballots in Jan. Nurses could soon strike, following RCN's ballot return – and, with other health unions' ballots due back soon, possibly alongside other health workers. The British Medical Association, which represents doctors, has now formally announced a plan to ballot its junior doctor members from 9 Jan. Firefighters will ballot for industrial action over pay from 5 Dec to 23 Jan.

Civil service union PCS has announced that it will call selective action in the Home Office, the Depart-

ment from Transport, and Defra. Workers' Liberty and other leftists in PCS had called for at least a one-day all-out national strike too, and are advocating one be called in January if not now.

Some victories continue to be won in local disputes. Outsourced workers at the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) organised by PCS have won 11%. Unite mem-

bers on West Midlands Metro, part-way through a planned programme of 52 day of strikes, have won a pay increase totalling 20 percent for some grades. An indefinite strike by Stagecoach bus workers in Hull has also ended, after workers accepted a deal Unite says is worth 20% over two years.

Wherever significant pay increases are being secured, it is via sustained and sometimes indefinite action. Unite is also spreading its bus workers' strikes to new companies, with Abellio and Metrolink workers in London due to strike for multiple days in November and December.

Local

As local disputes proliferate, new national disputes are launched, and existing ones escalate, cross-union strike committees in each town will be even more needed. These committees can act as hubs for building solidarity and fundraising for strike funds, as well as forums for workers in different unions to discuss strategy and coordination. The bodies which ought to be best placed to launch such committees are local Trades Councils, which should already have connections with local union branches. In some places, Trades Councils have become semi-active or moribund; now, amidst the most significant upsurge in workers' action for a generation, is surely the time to revive them. □



Upcoming events

Our 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 23 November, 7pm: Bloomsbury Workers' Liberty: Support the Russian Anti-War Movement! Room 227, Main Building SOAS, WC1H 0XG

Thursday 24 November, 5pm: Close Down Manston Camp – London vigil for victims of the border regime. The Home Office, Marsham St., SW1P 4DF

Thursdays 24 November, 1 and 15 December, 7:30pm: North London series – Strike waves in British history. Menard Hall, Galway St, EC1V 3SW

Saturday 26 November, 11am: All the Rage: socialist feminist dayschool. Pelican House, Bethnal Green, London E1 5QJ

Monday 28 November, 7:15pm: Reading group on *The Retreat from Class*, hosted by North and West Yorkshire branch

Tuesday 6 December, 6.30pm: India Labour Solidarity meeting. Room B104, Brunei Gallery SOAS University of London, WC1H 0XG

Wednesday 7 December, 7.30pm: Workers' Liberty London Forum: LGBTQ rights. Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont St, London WC1N 1AB

Saturday 10 December, 2-5pm: Protest for human rights, democracy, and freedom in China, PRC embassy, 49-52 Portland Pl, London W1B 1JL

Sunday 8 January, 11am: The Lucas Plan – reading group

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



Ballots

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

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

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

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

5 Dec-23 Jan: Firefighters (FBU) ballot for action over pay

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

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

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

Strikes

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

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

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

22 Nov: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London (Unite) strike

24 Nov: Teachers in Scotland (EIS) strike

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

24-25 Nov and 30 Nov: Lecturers and other workers at 150 universities (UCU) strike; Unison members at 19 universities strike on varying days.

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

25-26 Nov: Bus drivers at six Abellio garages in south/west London (Unite) strike

26 Nov: Train drivers at 12 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 and Metrolink garages (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

8-9 Dec: Bus drivers at Metrolink garages in London (Unite) strike

9 and 11 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

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

13-18 Dec: Workers in Network Rail and 14 Train Operating Companies strike (RMT: see details p.13)

14-15 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

15-16 Dec: Bus drivers at Metrolink garages, London (Unite) strike

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

23-24 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

3-8 Jan: Workers in Network Rail and 14 Train Operating Companies strike (RMT: see details p.13)

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

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

Conspiracy theories about the Poland missile



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

At 3.40pm (local time) on Tuesday 15 November, a Russian-made missile fell on the Polish village of Przewodow, killing two people.

Within hours, Joe Biden and Poland's leaders said they believed the missile, though Russian-made, had been fired by Ukraine, defending itself against a massive wave of Russian missiles targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

The first news of this, apparently passed to Associated Press by "a senior US intelligence official", appeared to blame the Russians, but even so most initial reports in the mainstream media were cautious, making it clear that the incident may well have been accidental and the missile might not have been fired by Russia.

A few alarmist headlines about the threat of World War 3 were countered by Nato's Jens Stoltenberg, saying the organisation was "monitoring the situation" and stressing it was "important that all facts are established."

None of this fits with the picture promoted on sections of the left, of Nato and western leaders itching for a showdown with Russia. Patrick Cockburn – often a sharp critic of Western foreign policy and no fan of Nato – writing in the *i* newspaper, noted: "The alacrity with which presidents and prime ministers attending the G20 summit in Bali jumped out of bed in the middle of the night to confer about an explosion in a village in east Poland shows how fearful they are that the war will spread."

The *Morning Star's* initial response (editorial, 17 November) was to be "thankful that Nato chiefs ... concluded it was the result of a stray Ukrainian missile fired in an attempt to intercept the hail of Russian missiles hitting western Ukraine [so] we are not yet in a direct Russia-Nato war – World War III." The same issue of the paper carried a piece by Stop the War's Lindsey German acknowledging that from early on "the world leaders gathered at the G20 summit ... were beginning to admit that this was not a deliberate attack and that the missile might have been from Ukraine", though German's use of the word "admit" might be taken as suggesting that these leaders were reluc-

tant to recognise this – whereas the evidence and the time-scale suggests the opposite.

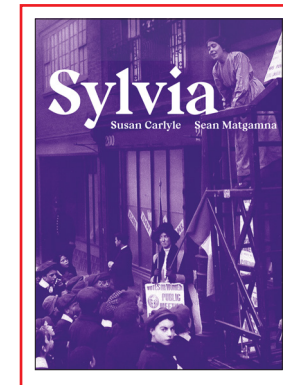
Nato's Article 5 (committing all members to a military response if any one of them is attacked) does not appear to have been even considered and (despite German claiming otherwise) even article 4, which involves just a "consultation" of members, was (according to Stoltenberg, quoted in the *Guardian* on 17 November) not invoked.

But these relatively measured responses were clearly not sufficient for the people who run the *Morning Star*. The edition of 19-20 November carries a full-page article by Kenny Coyle (who usually writes about how happy the citizens of Hong Kong are to be under the benevolent rule of the Chinese Communist Party) claiming that "US intelligence deliberately planted disinformation in the mass media to avert a public relations disaster."

Coyle's lengthy piece contains not one shred of hard evidence for this claim, beyond the widely acknowledged fact that the first information to the media about the missile strike came from a "senior US intelligence official." Coyle explains away the fact that Biden,

Stoltenberg and US Brigadier General Patrick Ryder had all very quickly (on Tuesday evening) issued statements making it clear that they doubted it was a deliberate Russian attack, or even a Russian missile at all, by using a truly bizarre piece of conspiratorial circular thinking: "Note how many times US officials respond to press reports originally planted by other US officials... This is a fairly common method of news management by US intelligence agencies."

What Coyle cannot explain is why all these senior US and Nato figures were so keen to avoid a confrontation with Russia: he simply cannot get his conspiratorial head around that plain and obvious fact. □



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

No shop steward, no hope



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

In my life as a working-class and trade-union activist, I guess I've usually been described by such words as "Oh, you know Bob, he's a militant". For me it's a great badge of honour, however many in the trade union movement scorn genuine militants.

Another description used by both employers and more than a few union crawlers: "Oh, Carnegie, he is belligerent". To be honest up, until about a decade ago, that side of my nature was often seen. I would not say I've mellowed, but sometimes

you get more with honey than with vinegar.

Overall, I guess I'm just a working-class person who believes workers should not be treated like shit, that we have rights to safe workplaces and decent pay and a life that shines from above and not below.

The reason I've brought this up is that last week I walked off a job after being asked to do unsafe things and then being abused for it. I won't go into detail. The two other traffic controllers, and the leading hand in particular, knew it was wrong, and stood there as if mute.

In my working life I have always, and I mean always, stood up for the underdog; but last week in the middle of the night there was no one to stand up

for me. Instead of engaging in a heated argument I removed myself from the job.

As I reflected on the events, the primary importance came home to me of having a delegate or shop steward on the job and how exposed you are without one. In the award-wage work I've been in, the only person I've met with a union card has been me. We have a self-reinforcing circle: no union members, no shop steward, no rights.

Being moved along is the constant feature of my working life. It's the price you pay as a fair dinkum militant. I've always put on the brave face and said what those of the left (and myself) have expected me to say: "The battle has been worth it".

Now in my early 60's, doing unorganised minimum-rate

work with all the uncertainty it brings. I wonder more and more frequently whether always choosing combat is the right path. Could I have chosen a different path? The answer for the first question is maybe, and the second question yes.

We all carry certain regrets and disappointments. In life, my "black and white" world outlook has not much helped. I have not seen the nuances that are so important in form-

ing strong opinions. I hope no reader thinks this is a sob story. I am very very fortunate to have led an adventurous sort of life. I've had wonderful opportunities.

Some I've grabbed with both hands and several I have squandered. I guess that is life.

Anyway, fellow workers, next week I'll be writing on a huge dispute I was involved in all through 1985 in Queensland, Australia. □

Distributing Solidarity

In the coming weeks of many strikes in Royal Mail, *Solidarity* will be sent by courier to sellers outside easy hand-to-hand reach of branches receiving bulk bundles; individual subscriptions will be sent by Royal Mail, but in bundles of three issues at a time. The paper is also available online, in pdf, and in audio, at workersliberty.org □

Malta begins shift on abortion rights



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Malta's government is to propose a change in the law to allow abortion when a mother's life or health is at risk.

Malta, a Catholic country with more than one church per square kilometre,

was the last EU state to have a total ban on abortion.

Malta's current criminal law states a doctor who knowingly provides a woman with the means for a termination faces a jail term of 18 months to four years and a permanent professional ban. Any woman who arranges her own termination can also face up to four years in prison, although no woman is thought to have faced criminal charges in recent years.

Ministers promised to review the law when a US tourist was denied an

abortion after she began to miscarry. Andrea Prudente, who was 16 weeks pregnant, was told doctors could do nothing while the baby's heart was still beating though it had no chance of survival. After days in hospital she was allowed to fly to Spain for a lifesaving abortion.

Maltese Health Minister Chris Fearné said a legal amendment would go before parliament in the coming days to ensure doctors were now legally protected in cases of medical complication that left a mother's life at risk or

her health in grave jeopardy due to the pregnancy.

The change will still leave Malta with extremely restricted access to abortion. There will still be no provision to terminate pregnancies in cases of rape or incest, or in cases of fatal fetal anomaly. Maltese feminist groups blame influence of the Catholic church. Schools still show discredited 1984 anti-abortion film *The Silent Scream* and other anti-abortion propaganda.

Prime Minister Robert Abela told the *Times of Malta* earlier this month that the government were aware women in Malta had been accessing abortions.

"These past months I've met tens of women who aborted using a tablet. Conservatively, around 300 or 350 women abort this way every year," he said. "All these women told me the same thing: that they had been stigmatised and that none of them had found any sort of support."

Most Maltese women who access abortion do so by leaving the country, a route unavailable to those without money or trying to keep an abortion private from partners or family members. □

Further council cuts looming

By Katy Dollar

Local authorities will face a spending squeeze following the Tories' Autumn Statement. Their funding may not have been cut directly, but it will have been significantly reduced because of inflation and no commensurate increase in funding.

The Government is giving local authorities in England the ability to set higher Council Tax by increasing the referendum limit to 3% per year from April 2023. It is also giving local authorities with social care responsibilities the ability to increase the adult social care precept by up to 2% per year. The ability to raise council tax by up to 5% could make up some of the shortfall – but only some,

and by squeezing local residents already struggling with inflation.

Poorer areas expect a greater level of arrears on rents and council tax. Unless wages and benefits rise with inflation, there will be higher needs for council back-up services from working-class communities.

Yet we face further cuts to already beleaguered services. Proposed council budgets will be published in the next weeks and some Labour councils have been warning of "awful decisions".

Councils have been making workers redundant for much of the decade 2010-2020. Now low wages and worsening workloads and conditions have led to staff shortages in local government. Over half of councils

report having insufficient staff to run all services normally.

In March the Low Pay Commission announced new forecasts for the National Living Wage that are the highest ever seen. Using the upper end of their forecast (where the actual rise usually falls), the minimum would increase by almost 20% in less than two years, 19.2% by April 2024. If pay does not rise across local government, over a third of all local government staff will be on the National Living Wage. A decade of below-inflation pay rises is now a problem for councils as well as council workers.

Local government unions are not yet mobilising to fight low pay or cuts. Unison said only: "It's time for this inept government to step

aside for one that would see well-funded public services as a driver of the economic growth the UK so desperately needs."

And GMB: "This disgraceful Tory Government is out of ideas, out of time, and should be out of office." Unite denounced the Autumn Statement, but seems to have said nothing about the local-government cuts specifically.

Labour has not pledged to reinstate local government funding or to increase public sector pay. Unison and GMB and Unite, and local Labour Parties, should be fighting in Labour for these demands. We must also get mobilising for the 2023 pay campaign and get ready to fight cuts to council jobs and services. □



Activist Agenda

Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong will support the China Deviants protest at the Chinese Embassy (49-51 Portland Pl, London W1B 1JL) from 2pm on Saturday 10 December, and is working on plans for its own protest earlier that day outside the Apple store in Regent St. □

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

Labour expels top union figures

By Martin Thomas

Labour's new lead in the opinion polls has encouraged the unreconstructed Blairites who now run Keir Starmer's office to push further to make the Labour Party ultra-safe for capitalism.

Labour has expelled Andrea Egan, president of Unison, and Martin Mayer, formerly a Unite rep on Labour's National Executive. The charges are risible: "liking" social media posts from Socialist Appeal (Egan) and Labour Against the Witchhunt (Mayer), many years ago, when (even if you think the current bans are right, which we don't) those groups were entirely Labour-legal.

Unite is supporting Mayer. As we understand it, Unison's line on Egan is not clear. Egan is part of the left-wing majority on Unison's National Executive

which the union's right-wing top officials abhor, and Unison rules allow the officials to fob off the issue by saying that it must be dealt with by the union's Labour Link structures.

Activists will press both unions to defend their longstanding elected representatives, and rally other unions to join them.

Local parties

Difficulties are created for local Labour Parties by the vague but oppressive edict that they should not discuss individual disciplinary cases, made in March 2019 by the then "Corbynite" general secretary Jennie Formby. But the Labour Party (at least in the London Region) has ruled admissible motions which oppose general bans, like the ban on Workers' Liberty. There must be a good chance for admissibility of

motions noting the Egan and Mayer expulsions and stating the general case against the bans and against retrospective application.

In [responses](#) to the Tories' 17 November budget, John McDonnell MP stood out as raising the wages issues clearly, and Unite's Sharon Graham stood out from other union general secretaries in picking up on the Progressive Economic Forum's findings on the "fiscal black hole". The supposed "black hole" is a guess at a gap in five years' time between two predictions, both very approximate – not something that Labour should be intimidated by.

Graham, however, blamed acceptance of the "black hole" vaguely on "the political class", as if acceptance could be avoided only by avoiding politics. In fact, Unite has political weight in the Labour Party, and activists will demand

that it should use that weight politically.

Unnamed Labour HQ people have briefed the media that even if Jeremy Corbyn complies with what so far has been demanded of him, a full apology for his inept comments about antisemitism following the ECHR report, they will stop him standing again for Labour in Islington North.

The *Morning Star* reports former Unite general secretary Len McCluskey as seizing on that to say that Corbyn should stand against Labour and activists should give up on Labour. That throw-in-the-towel response is exactly what the new Blairites want, especially at a time when anger is brewing in the soft left, centre, and even old right of the Labour Party about the exclusions and Starmer's slavish "pro-business" orientation. □

The New Pangaea and biodiversity



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

The government's Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, Defra, has announced a £156,000 fund aimed at protecting Britain's sea bird population. Of the 4,400-plus islands in the British Isles, a number are particularly important for migrating sea birds. The fund is designed to improve "biosecurity" measures and prevent invasive predators, like rats and stoats from getting to these islands.

Alongside direct predation, habitat destruction, climate change and the production and release of biocidal chemicals, invasive species are one of the great drivers of the current mass extinction event. 270 million years ago today's continental landmasses formed a single supercontinent Pangaea. Tectonic movement split Pangea apart around 200 million years ago.

Since that time, the world's biota on different land masses have evolved separately in a history punctuated by Earth's fifth mass extinction event: the famous meteor strike that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. These separate evolutionary trajectories ended around 50,000 years ago,

as humans discovered seafaring and started the process of remixing the world's biota.

That is why we now see green parakeets in European cities, earthworms in New England and why Chilean grasses grow on Antarctica's soil. Human movement is creating what Earth scientists call the New Pangaea, an homogenisation of species which for hundreds of millions of years evolved separately.

When humans travel they bring an astonishing range of living being with them. One study found that during a summer in Antarctica, 70,000 seeds from other continents hitched a ride with the human visitors. The earliest seafarers who settled the Polynesian islands brought with them rats, lice, fleas and pigs.

The most devastating episode in this remixing was the so-called Colombian Exchange. When the European colonialists landed in the Americas, they brought with them an onslaught of micro-organisms, plants, and animals of the Afro-Eurasian landmass. European capitalist expansion was experienced in the Americas as a generalised ecocide. The scale of this Great Dying was such that forests regrew on land once populated by humans and other megafauna, drawing down such quantities of carbon that it is thought to have been a factor in the Little Ice Age that led

to famine in 17th century Europe and China.

Since then, the pace and volume of global travel has increased exponentially. The Center for Invasive Species Research at University of California-Riverside estimates that California now gets a new invasive species every 60 days. The arrival of invasive species increases biodiversity on a local level, but globally leads higher rates of species extinction and homogenisation.

Greater care over "biosecurity" might slow the movement of invasives, just as Covid safety measures can slow the spread of the pandemic. But this process of homogenisation cannot be halted short of a collapse of international travel. Moreover, the greatest threat to biodiversity is not too much movement but too little. As the planet warms, many species will need to migrate to survive. Many will not be able to fast enough and their flight paths will be blocked by human infrastructure, mostly high-input monoculture farming.

A more serious policy of species conservation would restore large areas of land to the ecological balance of the Pleistocene and create wildlife corridors. Land that is currently used for inefficient livestock farming or blood sports should be rewilded. This might involve the deliberate movement of

species as we seek to reintroduce habitat-creating large animals: beaver, boar, wild horses, wolves.

The biodiversity of wild places is determined mostly by scale. Larger areas hold a greater abundance of species. In Britain ecological restoration could be achieved with barely any effect on food production. Turning the aristocracy's deer and grouse parks into wilderness would free up 20% of the UK land mass.

At sea, preventing rats from preying on ground nesting birds is the least we can do. Sea birds could also do without persistent organic compounds, microplastics and anoxic dead zones. Sea birds' food source has been decimated by for-profit fishing. According to best estimates fish stocks have collapsed by between 75-95% in the last 100 years. Ocean acidification and the dying of the coral reefs are now inevitable tipping points that will further denude the seas of life.

The biosecurity grants are ecological gardening when what we need is revolutionary change in land use and sea conservation. A society committed to ecological restoration would need to create space for other species to move and migrate in the face of the coming crises, and where necessary facilitate that movement by rewilding initiatives on land and sea. □

Labour and the "trend of Begret"

By Mohan Sen

The "trend of Begret" – people who supported Brexit changing their minds – "is accelerating and looks set to cause a growing problem for the... Conservative Party", wrote Matthew Goodwin, an academic focused on the Eurosceptic hard right, on 18 November. It may – it should – cause a problem for the Labour leadership too.

Goodwin identifies the main things driving this as "younger and more pro-EU voters entering the electorate and people who did not vote at the 2016 referendum changing their mind". In any case, it is indisputable. The view that Brexit was right has not held a lead in polls since May 2021, and the gap has widened and widened. The last five polls on rejoining vs staying out give "Rejoin" an average lead of 57-43%.

But when this trend of opinion and the UK's growing

economic chaos generated media speculation about a "Swiss-style deal" with the EU – Switzerland is largely in the EU's Single Market, and its free-movement area, despite not being in the EU – the government was quick to placate right-wing Tory barking by dismissing the idea. And the Labour leadership did the same.

In the same week Keir Starmer told the UK bosses' confederation CBI that businesses must wean themselves off "low pay and cheap labour". He didn't mean that he was backing the current strike wave; rather, that employers should abandon their current demands for looser immigration laws.

The way to attack the low pay and lack of workers' rights that constitute "cheap labour" is to push up wages with inflation-busting pay rises for all workers, radically increase the minimum wage, and empower trade unions by abolishing anti-strike laws. And, in fact,

at least to reverse the Tories' curbs on free movement and migrants' rights, and so put migrant workers and therefore all workers in a more secure and stronger position.

Trade unionists and Labour Party activists must fight for our organisations to push Labour to drop its squalid anti-migrant posturing and adopt these kind of genuinely pro-working class policies, as demanded repeatedly by its conference.

Ironically, re-entering the EU Single Market and Customs Union, and increasing immigration, would be the easiest ways for Labour to boost economic growth, as its leadership obsessively claims to want – and thus avoid the trap the Tories have set by scheduling the bulk of their cuts for after 2024. Heavy taxation of capital and the rich is needed too, but here is a "tax-free" contribution!

On its own timid terms Labour's policy – calling for stronger links with EU and a

plan for economic growth, but opposing increased immigration, free movement and therefore Single Market membership – is flatly self-contradictory.

The labour movement should demand the UK rejoin the Single Market and Customs Union immediately, and launch a serious discussion about reversing Brexit. □



Our audio

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

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

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

How work visas help Musk

By Andi Brookes

Twitter right now is weird: a funeral wake where the subject is still alive, just. Its chaotic breakdown since 27 October, has been livestreamed to an audience of millions through leaked emails, saluting emojis, Titanic memes, and spicy tweets from senior leadership.

On Wednesday 16 November, Elon Musk, currently live action role-playing as a tech CEO with one of the world's largest social media platforms, issued an ultimatum to the remaining workers at Twitter. In the email, Musk invited staff to be part of "hardcore" Twitter 2.0: long hours, aggressive deadlines, and engineers revered above all else. If people

wanted to stay to build something great, they should hit the "Yes" button in the email. If reports from journalists are to be believed, 75% of remaining staff "missed" the 48 hour deadline to sign up.

This follows a tumultuous three weeks, where Musk has fired thousands of workers across the globe (with minimal regard for labour laws), overseen the rollout of "Twitter Blue" (which deserves its own separate article), and insisted that programmers at the company print out Twitter's code so that he could review it, in a move more David Brent than Steve Jobs. He's also ordered the company "back to the office" while simultaneously locking everyone out due to sabotage fears.

If that sounds exhausting, imagine actually still working there.

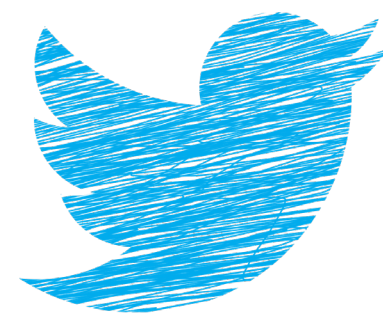
Temporary visas

So who are the people currently signed up to Twitter 2.0? Arguably more importantly, why haven't the employees left at Twitter simply ignored Musk and taken over control of the company for themselves? One of the simpler and most frustrating reasons is that remaining employees are predominantly tech workers on H1B and other temporary US visas, that are tied explicitly to their employment at Twitter. If they get fired or laid off, they have 60 days to find another job, at a time when thousands of people from the same company are also looking, or their

visa expires.

It's yet another example of workers being trapped and robbed of their agency to organise because their immigration status is directly reliant on their current job. In common with many migrant workers in the UK, if they lose their job in retaliation for pushing back on unfair, unsafe, and illegal work practices, they face deportation away from friends, family, and the lives they've built. It doesn't matter if you're a programmer or a domestic worker, work-based visas are deliberately designed to harm the ability of people to organise in their workplaces.

That's why it's important for socialists and the left to continue pushing for freedom of movement, for everyone,



rather than "skills" or "needs-based" visas, tied to specific workplaces. The latter are regressive stop-gaps that principally serve the needs of capital ahead of workers' rights, or their livelihoods. The former allows workers to organise and rebel against the bosses without fear of imminent deportation, encouraging the solidarity in action we need to see. □

Looter capitalism in Iraq



Interview

By Nadia Mahmood

Nadia Mahmood, an activist of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq in Baghdad, spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity.

This latest scandal, about the [plundering](#) of money from Iraq's tax commission, has not caused that much uproar here. It's not a new issue. Ever since [the fall of Saddam Hussein in] 2003 there have been more and more revelations about theft of resources by officials connected to political parties, whether that's Shia or Sunni Islamic parties or Kurdish ones.

Only ten days ago someone was killed because he revealed information about a group of high officials who had stolen oil.

Everyone speaks against corruption – even those most responsible for it. On the other hand, genuine anger about corruption has been expressed repeatedly in popular protests, including the big waves in 2011, 2015, 2018 and 2019.

The corruption in Iraq is linked to the system of power-sharing between different ethnic and sectarian parties instituted after 2003. Under Saddam Hussein, when Iraq was under economic sanctions, we already had vari-

ous groups, tribes and family networks, running private economic activities over the borders. When the regime was overthrown, under the occupation, many of these groups turned themselves into political parties of one sort or another.

It's a system of sharing power in order to loot. The different political forces get access to the budgets of ministries, and through various mechanisms they line their pockets. Ministers are fundamentally loyal not to the government but to their organisations, and the government feels it has to satisfy the demands of these various forces.

All this relates to capitalism in a particular way. These political parties and organisations even compete with the bourgeoisie as such. If you are a capitalist and say you want to open a factory, you may not be allowed unless you share the profits with certain organisations with militias.

Militias also extort from those who own smaller businesses, down to restaurants and small shops.

This is why some capitalists supported the popular uprising in 2019 – for example some traders, in the hope the movement would replace the government and rid them of these kind of exactions.

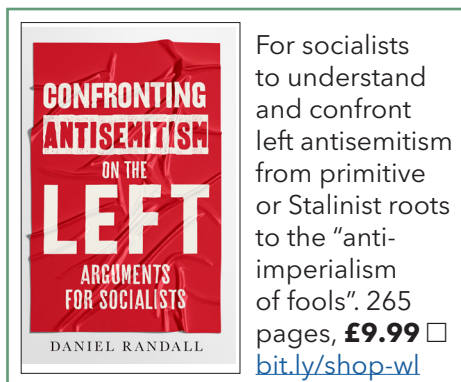
Meanwhile foreign corporations do not want to invest or work in Iraq. The Iraqi government's official philosophy and rhetoric is neoliberal, emphasising the growth of the private sector. The international institutions, the World Bank, the IMF and so on, and the US govern-

ment, push this. It simply doesn't work in its own terms, because private capitalism cannot grow in this situation.

The new government is led by [Mohammed Shia' Sabbar] al-Sudani, who comes from the Shia Islamist Dawa Party – a party led by Nouri al-Maliki, who was previously prime minister and known for becoming a billionaire from almost nothing through corruption and looting. Its anti-corruption rhetoric is laughable.

All the main parties in Iraqi politics operate in roughly the same way. Ideology is secondary to interests, though Islamic parties use Islam to justify their looting, saying it is a religious duty to reclaim wealth and resources that should not be entirely in private hands.

This year Shia militia leaders got a "food security" law passed, supposedly in order to support people in response to rising food prices. In reality it nothing to address this issue; it was a project for the Islamic Shia organisations to loot money from the state budget. □



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, £9.99 □ bit.ly/shop-wl



China's reported seven-day-rolling-average Covid case count (which may be much less than the real count) is now at an all-time peak, surpassed only by a spike on 16 April. A surge in Guangzhou has brought ultra-lockdowns only in areas of the city, not a city-wide ultra-lockdown as in Shanghai earlier. But the government has still not moved to the vaccination drive for elderly people, with more effective vaccines, and the expansion of healthcare, necessary to move away from its hopeless drive for "zero Covid".

Even in the rest of the world, where Covid rates are not (or not yet) showing the increase in the Northern Hemisphere winter which we feared, measures are necessary:

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

The politico-economic co



Interview

By Andrew Gamble

Andrew Gamble, author of *The Conservative Nation and other books*, talked to Martin Thomas from *Solidarity*

There's been a long civil war in the Conservative Party over Europe. It became more intense after the 2016 referendum. A majority of Conservative MPs and Cabinet Ministers voted Remain, but 57% of voters who had voted Conservative at the general election only a year before in 2015 repudiated David Cameron and voted Leave.

Ever since 2016, the party has been disoriented. It has radical factions who want to do different things with Brexit, and a bigger group of MPs who haven't known what to do.

Normally the Conservative Party has a strong instinct for power and governing. But Brexit came to mean anything you wanted it to mean, and the consequences of that have meant a rollercoaster for Conservative governments ever since. It reached a head with the 44 chaotic days of the Truss government, which abandoned a lot of the moorings which have traditionally kept the Conservative Party oriented towards the practical tasks of governing, securing a majority, and keeping the financial markets happy.

The result has been an extraordinary meltdown in electoral support, and in the Conservatives' confidence about whether they are a serious governing force any longer.

Thatcherism still casts a long shadow over the party. They're all in thrall to it. In what passed for a leadership debate in the summer we heard constant calls for a return to Thatcherite mantras: a small state, low taxation, deregulation.

But the Conservatives since Brexit have been presiding over an increasing state, especially under Boris Johnson, and even more so now with Hunt. The tax burden in Britain has reached its highest level for 70 years.

The Truss episode was a desperate attempt to resist this political logic by trying to live out a fantasy image of the

Thatcherite decade. A lot of people who were around in the Thatcherite era, like Nigel Lawson, Norman Lamont and David Willetts, have pointed out that Thatcher was first and foremost about sound money and that at first she increased taxes. She did not cut them until much later.

The Thatcher myth still inspires the constant refrain that "the Conservative Party is not about raising taxes".

Hunt and Sunak are pleading that they have to raise taxes to get the markets back on side, in order to be able to govern at all, and so they are moving in a directly anti-Thatcher way as many in the party understand it, though probably they are doing exactly what Thatcher would have done in this situation.

Boris Johnson's famous cake philosophy – eating your cake and having it – was another example of the loss of moorings. The 2019 manifesto promised huge new public spending, but no extra taxes to fund it. Johnson constructed an electoral coalition based on offering different groups of voters contradictory things. To the Red Wall seats he offered huge public spending and a "levelling-up" programme which would have required a vast transfer of wealth from the south to the north. Meanwhile in the south he was promising Conservatism as usual: protection of your pensions, your property and your inheritance.

That worked in the particular political circumstances of 2019. But there was never a possibility that he was going to be able to deliver on those promises in government. And when the pandemic hit that was quite fortunate for them, because it meant they had excuses to postpone a lot of decisions.

Pandemic

Dealing with the pandemic led to a huge increase in public spending. Eventually they were faced with some very unpalatable choices. And it was then that the Johnson project began to fall apart.

Truss came in and said: what we've been doing for the last 12 years hasn't been Conservatism at all. We have to move away from the advice of the Bank of England, of the Treasury, of the Office of Budget Responsibility, of the IMF, and go back to a true Conservative policy of cutting taxes and deregulation in order to get the benefits of Brexit. And there's only two years to the next election, so we have to front-load it all in a dash for freedom and for growth.

Suddenly you had the *Daily Mail* with a huge headline saying this was at last a true Tory Budget. Alister Heath, editor



of the *Sunday Telegraph* and a regular columnist in the *Daily Telegraph*, hailed it as "a moment in history that will radically transform Britain". There was a huge outpouring of ideological fervour on the Tory right in support of Truss and what she was doing.

And within a week, it started to unravel. The markets were spooked and Truss was in freefall.

It is the most extraordinary episode in the history of the Conservative Party that having ejected Johnson the party chose to elect a leader, Liz Truss, who ran on a platform of rejecting much of what the party had done and stood for in its twelve years in government. In its ideological desire to use "Brexit freedoms" to deliver much faster economic growth the Truss Government enacted an extreme form of what it understood as Thatcherite economics – but was more accurately a version of Reaganite supply-side economics, without the advantages of having the "exorbitant privileges" of the dollar.

At long last, a true Brexit! Conservative commentators like Alister Heath, David Frost, Andrew Lillico and Matthew Lynn cheered it to the rafters. Then it exploded on the rock of market scepticism, and the Conservatives have gone into complete reverse.

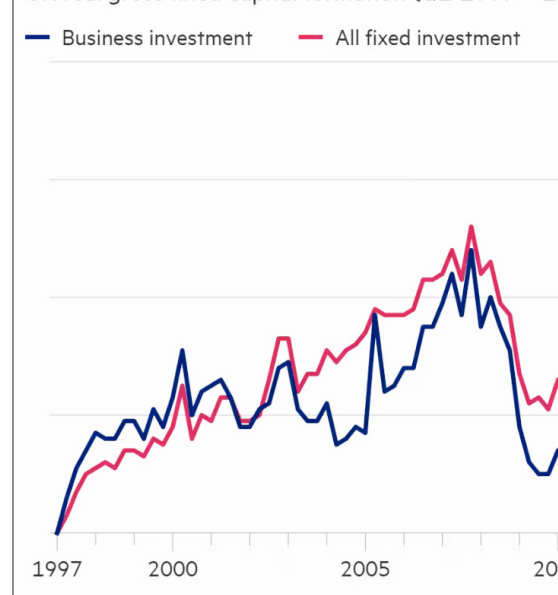
It is possible that Sunak and Hunt will now restabilise the Tory party around budget-balancing and bashing the unions. I think that's the direction they're going to go. The Conservative Party has got its survival instinct back.

But the Conservative Party is now massively unpopular in the country. The public is not going to quickly forget the total chaos and incompetence of the Johnson years and of the Truss interlude. It has real consequences in terms of the cost of living crisis, rapidly rising mortgage bills and so on.

And Hunt and Sunak have got to carry with them this immensely fractious party, many of whose MPs have deposed not just one leader but two in very recent times, and only a few years back deposed Theresa May as well.

The Truss experiment has discredited the right-wing libertarian Reaganite hard Brexit faction of the party. It's going to be very hard for those people to regain momentum. Sunak and Hunt are the last chance the party has to avoid an electoral wipeout.

UK real gross fixed capital formation (Q1 1997 = 100)



But the popularity of the Conservative party is not going to increase over this winter, and the prospects are so bleak in terms of recession and the hit to living standards that there is little prospect of any let-up over the next 12 months. Even if there turns out to be some upside in 2024, the damage is so deep that it's very unlikely that the Conservatives will get credit for it. There will be a lot of Conservative MPs who conclude that the next election is lost for them, and they may start rebelling.

Labour

Meanwhile, Labour has reverted to being so cautious and timid that it is not prepared to talk about Brexit or to question economic orthodoxy.

There is an irony here. A lot of what Truss and Kwarteng said about the policy consensus created by the IMF, the Bank of England, the Treasury, and the OBR, was things which many economists on the left agreed with. Arguments for the need to break out of the straitjacket of Treasury thinking on how the economy was managed were one of the positive points of the time when McDonnell was shadow chancellor.

The Labour leadership wants above all to present itself as a responsible alternative government, and therefore it has endorsed the Treasury and Bank of England view of the world. Starmer and Reeves will not question the basic OBR judgements, even though that means accepting a fiscal straitjacket five or six years into the future which will heavily



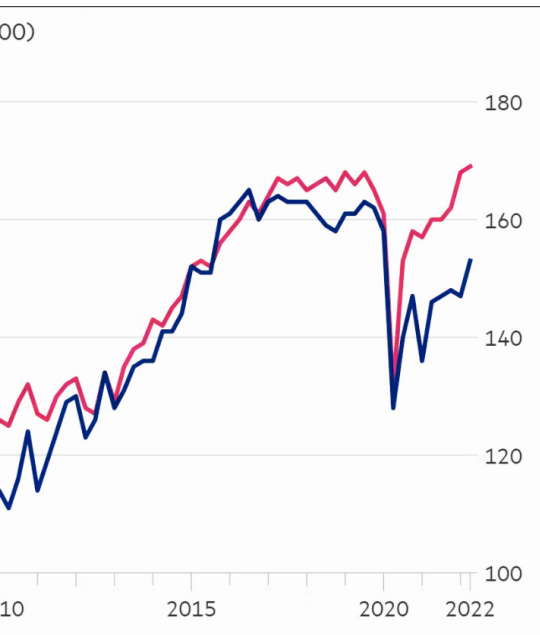
Corrections

The 2019 deaths of migrants crossing the Channel mentioned in *Solidarity* 653 were due to suffocation, hypoxia, or overheating, not to freezing. □

**AWL conference
29-30 April**

The Workers' Liberty conference 2022 will be in London on 29-30 April. □

Consequences of Liz Truss



constrain them in what they can do if they win the election in 2024.

Labour is going to face a very difficult inheritance in 2024. It will be quite unlike 1997 when the economy had been growing for four years, and then continued to grow right through the early 2000s.

The Truss government, by the incompetence of the way it launched its growth plan, has damaged the chances of all future growth plans. It has reinforced Treasury orthodoxy. The current Labour leadership seem keen to stay within the parameters of the establishment consensus.

If the OBR says that a fiscal package is going to require additional borrowing, that will spook the markets; the government will immediately be facing higher interest charges; and with the public debt being as large as it is, then that has huge knock-on effects for public spending, because available spending-power will be taken up in debt-service payments. So the OBR has a stranglehold now over government policy choices.

Conservative commentators have pointed out that the OBR's assumptions on growth and on the negative impact of Brexit on the economy are substantially flawed because the OBR model assumes immigration at 100,000 a year, (the Government's target which it has never achieved). Currently it's running at 250,000. Belatedly the OBR has now recognised this and in its November report increased the figure in its model to

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. □

over 200,000. If it had not done so the prospective figure for growth would have been even more gloomy than it was.

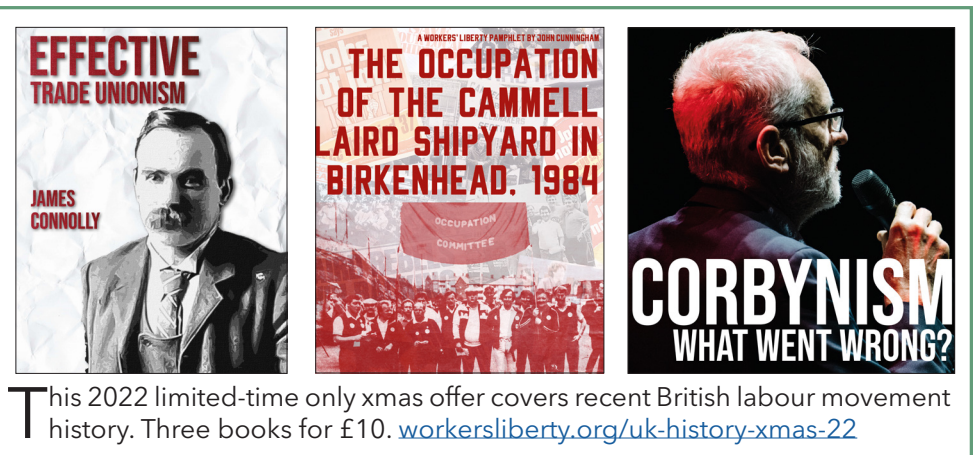
The Sunak government still speaks about controlling immigration. Actually the urgent need, as the CBI keeps saying, is to increase immigration because of its positive effects on economic growth and fiscal revenues. But a major political obstacle to doing that is the political stance of the current Home Secretary, Suella Braverman.

If the assumptions in the OBR model are wrong, then you get wrong predictions. But policies are determined by what the OBR projects. It would be good to see Labour distancing itself to some degree from this new orthodoxy. There is a lot of good radical thinking to challenge some of those assumptions. On the left of Labour, and beyond, it has been argued for many decades that Treasury orthodoxy needs to be confronted.

Orthodoxy

One of the lasting legacies of George Osborne turns out to be that his creation, the OBR, has further entrenched Treasury orthodoxy in the governance of economic policy.

Other leading capitalist countries allow a lot more discretion over fiscal policy. Most of them have moved to independent central banks, but having an independent body which in effect controls your fiscal policy is a British innovation.



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

That is a very serious issue for a future Labour government, and any government that wants to pursue a radical economic policy: how to find ways to overcome this entrenched Treasury orthodoxy, which emanates from several interlocking institutions.

The government can choose to spend more on health, and less on education, but the overall amount it has to spend is going to be fixed. So it can't choose to borrow to create higher growth, which would then cover the spending, because the OBR will say that creates a "black hole".

The reinforcement of that constraint is one of the effects of Truss having tried to take on the orthodox consensus on economic policy and failing so spectacularly. All the economic libertarians are in absolute despair and saying it's back to "declinism" and collectivism and socialism... If only...

It is an equal problem for the left, be-

cause this orthodoxy has led to an increasing gap between living standards in the UK and in many other European countries. It is a recipe for economic failure.

There's still lots of positive thinking around green transformation. There are a lot of ideas bubbling up from the bottom about how actually the economy can be restructured.

There have got to be a lot of very radical changes in our political economy if we're going to survive the climate emergency. Hopefully the moment will come when the pressure can be created for radical change.

At the present moment, off the back of Brexit and the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis and the energy crisis, things are very bleak. But perhaps this is the moment when we need not less radical thinking, but more radical thinking, more thinking outside the box on how we address the long term problems and not focus all the time on the short term policy cycles and the circus of Westminster politics. □



Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to [our pamphlets](https://workersliberty.org/publications/) including:

- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers' Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Shapurji Saklatvala: Socialist Rebel in Parliament
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
- Automation and the working class □

workersliberty.org/publications/

West Papua: occupation and deforestation

By Bill Davies

The case for the West Papuan people to have the right to self-determination, including separation from Indonesia, the state power which currently rules their territory, is straightforward and unanswerable.

The Netherlands was the colonial power over the whole archipelago most of which is now Indonesia. It stayed in West Papua after quitting Indonesia in 1949. In the early 1960s, the US government pressured the Netherlands to accept newly-independent Indonesia as a successor to its rule rather than look to the potential for West Papuan self-determination. The territory (one half of the island of which the other half is the now-independent state of Papua New Guinea, at the time under Australian control) was invaded in 1963 by Indonesia, which then officially annexed it in 1969.

Selected representatives of the West Papuan people were forced at gunpoint to sign an agreement to accept Indonesian rule – this, ironically, was officially called the “Act of Free Choice”.

Since the 1960s, the military occupation has been brutal. West Papuans, a Melanesian people with an ethnic and cultural heritage clearly distinct from Indonesians, are not included in Indonesian society as equal citizens, but regarded as inferior and savage, only to be conquered, controlled and repressed.

The Free West Papua campaign reports: “Over 500,000 civilians have been killed in a genocide against the indigenous population. Thousands more have been raped, tortured, imprisoned or ‘disappeared’ after being detained. Basic human rights such as freedom of speech are denied and Papuans live in a constant state of fear and intimidation.” It is clear that West Papua is an oppressed and subjugated colony of Indonesia. It is reported that 70% of the West Papuan population have signed a petition calling for a referendum on independence.

The global climate crisis casts a different light on this struggle.

West Papua, along with Papua New Guinea, is home to the third largest rainforest in the world. Although a fraction the size of the Amazon, it is the largest in South East Asia, a region which accounts for about 20% of the world’s tropical rainforests. Indonesia produces, by far, more palm oil than

any other country in the world – and the palm oil industry is a notorious driver of deforestation in South East Asia.

Indonesia continues to occupy West Papua, in large part, because it is rich in mineral resources. Indonesia is plundering West Papua for gold and copper, and has been seeking to develop a coal mining industry. The Grasberg gold mine in Mimika regency (region) of West Papua is one of the biggest gold and copper mines in the world. At the end of 2020, its provable reserves were 15.1 million tonnes of copper, 0.8 million tonnes of gold and 3.7 million tonnes of silver.

The mine is operated by a partnership between Indonesia’s state-owned mining company and the US company Freeport-McMoRan. Indonesian imperialism in West Papua is backed to the hilt and intertwined with US imperialism, which encouraged Indonesian conquest in the first place and sees Indonesia as a reliable economic partner for profit-making trade and investment.

In 2013, the UK government, through its ambassador to Indonesia, shamefully made clear its support for Indonesia and its opposition to West Papuan self-determination: “The position of British government on this matter is quite clear. We respect the territorial integrity of Indonesia and do not support calls for Papuan independence... We regard Papua as being part of Indonesia. That has always been our view, and has not changed.”

In March this year, a meeting between EU and Indonesian government representatives addressed a range of concerns about human rights matters elsewhere (Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Middle East and Myanmar) and restated a continuing commitment to work together, but without any reference to West Papua.

Russia has been a major arms supplier to Indonesia for many years, and China has significant trade with, and investment interests in, Indonesia. Australia and New Zealand governments also tend to keep quiet (at best) on the human rights situation, and certainly offer no support for the idea of West Papuan self-determination.

With the big powers lined up on the side of Indonesia and with few allies among governments (only a few Pacific island nations), the West Papuan people have struggled even to gain a hearing for their plight at the United Nations, although UN-appointed hu-

man-rights experts concluded earlier this year that: “Urgent action is needed to end ongoing human rights violations against indigenous Papuans” and called for Indonesia to lift the ban on independent journalists and human rights monitors in the territory.

The West Papuan government in exile, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), is making the case for its people’s right to independence. It is also emphasising the link between self-determination and ecological sustainability, including the launch of its Green State Vision (GSV) in November 2021 to coincide with the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow.

Self-determination

The GSV emphasises that the West Papuan people have been living in a sustainable relationship with the natural environment of their homeland, that they have an intimate knowledge of their local environment and also the cultural values and priorities to preserve ecological balance and harmony, and that the possibility of a sustainable ecological future depends on West Papuan self-determination.

The vision includes commitments from an independent West Papua to: “making ecocide a serious criminal offence; restoring guardianship of natural resources to indigenous authorities, combining Western democratic norms with local Papuan systems; ‘serving notice’ on all extraction companies, including oil, gas, mining, logging and palm oil, requiring them to adhere to international environmental standards or cease operations.”

It should be emphasised that the Green State Vision is not simply proposing a throwback to an essentially archaic tribal society. The document makes clear, for example, that there will be the right of all to free healthcare and education and that the rights of women, children and minorities will be protected (although there is little detail on this).

There is certainly reason to think that an indigenous people whose traditional way of life depends on preserving and maintaining, rather than plundering and destroying, the natural environment of their homeland, will be a more effective custodian of the rainforest than a colonial power seeking to exploit resources and accumulate wealth. However, there would be huge pressures from international capital-

ism on any future independent West Papua, and there would inevitably be the emergence of a West Papuan ruling class with its own distinct class interests, even if it is restrained to some extent by a democratic constitution and the weight of traditional cultural expectations.

It is both likely and entirely understandable that independence would bring more technological, industrial and infrastructural development which would have at least some environmental cost.

More damaging scenarios are certainly not out of the question given the pressures a newly independent West Papua would face in a brutal capitalist world. However, as stated already, the merits of the case for West Papuan self-determination do not depend on having faith in the Green State Vision as a guarantee of preserved biodiversity and sustainable development.

An oppressed and clearly distinct nation must have this right anyway. And hope on the ecological issues lies with arguing for just-transition politics in workers’ movements in neighbouring countries of South East Asia and Australasia, and indeed elsewhere in the world. We need politics which combine building effective solidarity with oppressed nations, and with workers and other exploited classes within oppressed nations, with demanding of richer governments that they help to ease the path to sustainable and socially-equitable development for any nation which succeeds in throwing off colonial oppression.

The issue is sharper in nations with ecologically-pivotal, resource-rich environments. □



Banner over motorway in Iran: “Careful your foot doesn’t slip on the blood”

The strike wave in France

By a Paris transport worker

A worker and union activist at RATP, the Parisian equivalent of Transport for London, spoke at an online meeting hosted by Tubeworker and Off the Rails on 17 November, discussing the recent strike wave. He is a supporter of L'Étincelle, a revolutionary socialist tendency within the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (New Anticapitalist Party, NPA).

This morning (17 November) there was a rally in front of my company's headquarters. It's not the first. Last winter, we were on strike during the annual wage negotiations. On 29 September, a long-term strike movement was born, a bit like yours, it seems to me. On 18 October, my workshop experienced its first picket. On 10 November, the train maintenance workshops experienced a mobilisation unprecedented since the strike movements of 2019.

As everywhere in the world, France is experiencing a period of serious inflation. Wages have not followed suit. So discontent has mounted.

Unions called a strike day across all sectors for 29 September. Workers' anger over the issue of wages was great, but it was difficult to see how that anger connected with the unions' routine call for a one-day strike.

Then, oil refinery workers went on strike. They decided to embark on an indefinite strike. They did not plan to stop after one day. After they'd been on strike for 10 days, the shortage began, leading to endless queues at gas sta-

tions.

On 12 October, Macron announced that he would "requisition" the refinery strikers [legally compel them to return to work]. This was very unpopular measure. At the demonstration that followed, on 18 October, everyone was scrambling for a sticker. On this sticker was a slogan: "It's the profits that must be requisitioned, not the strikers".

The union leaders surfed the wave of indignation caused by 12 October. They called a strike a week later, on 18 October. Between the two, some of the refinery workers had resumed work, and some of the anger had died down. During this respite decided by the bureaucrats, one can imagine the number of discussions with the government – discussions that took place behind the backs of the workers.

But 18 October went well anyway. In the absence of anything better, we had to make the most of it, with strike calls, leaflets, organising meetings. We knew that we would need a good turnout on the 18th in order for it to be swiftly followed up on.

On the day, general assemblies took place everywhere in the SNCF [French national railway]. These assemblies of strikers, unionised and non-unionised [in France actual union membership is lower than in the UK, only 8% nationally – but many of those members are active and moreover non-members take part in strikes], were not being held for the first time.

It is the result of a history of numerous

struggles at SNCF since the great strike of winter 1995. Struggles in which revolutionary far-left militants have fought for and won a practice that, on each day of the strike, there is a general assembly of all strikers. Every day, the assembly discusses and votes on whether the strike's objectives have been achieved and whether to continue the strike.

These are three examples of things that have been adopted by a majority of some general assemblies:

- €500 per month pay increase
- €2,000 per month minimum wage
- Inflation-proofing wages by linking them to price rises (the "sliding scale of wages" as advocated in Trotsky's "Transitional Programme")

On the question of continuing the strike, bureaucrats accepted that the general assemblies could decide. We took them at their word and we got the assemblies to vote. But we also clearly advocated for our view that, if we want wage increases for all workers, we need an indefinite strike.

The bureaucrats said there were not enough of us on strike. For them, it is always too early or too late to go into battle. 150 general assemblies were held on 18 October. They brought together between 30 and 100 strikers each. 60 assemblies decided to continue the strike the next day. Others did not, especially when there was no leftist activist to propose it. The bureaucrats announced in advance that it would not lead elsewhere. Naughty, but clever. But the undermining work was done, and the next day the strike was too small for the question to continue.

Although the atmosphere has momentarily subsided, the problem of wages is far from being resolved. Many workers now have two things in mind: one, that we must demand wage rises and not bonuses, and two, that the only way to get them is a real strike.

The government has felt that the situation was on the verge of changing around 18 October. So, with the complicity of the far right, it is trying

to divert attention onto immigration. It would like to suggest that low wages are due to refugees and immigrants. This is a typical but inhumane diversion that could have very serious political consequences by strengthening the far right even more. The other thing that this government is preparing is pension reform. They want to vote in secret in the National Assembly that we work two years more, retiring at 64 instead of 62.

We will have many reasons to fight, and we will! ☐

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/fr-strikes



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 ☐

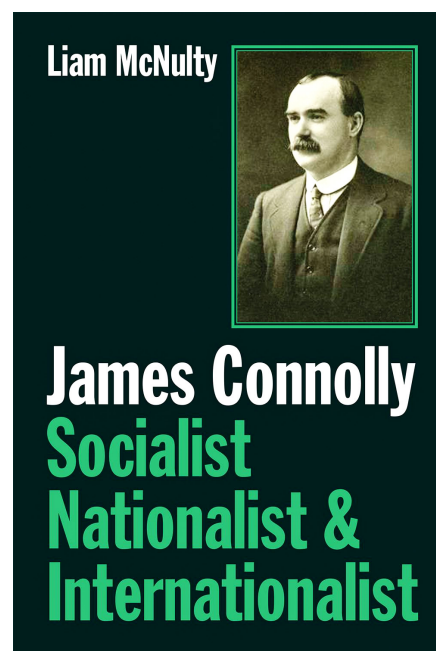
Pre-order new book on James Connolly

Liam McNulty's book *James Connolly: Socialist, Nationalist, and Internationalist* will be published by Merlin Press in mid-December 2022.

It discusses Connolly not just as an Irish hero, but traces how he was shaped by and responded to the international socialist and labour movement of his time. It traces his influences and influence through a transnational network of working-class activists, socialist agitators, and revolutionary nationalists.

The cover price will be £25 (400 pages). Workers' Liberty can offer a cheap rate for advance orders: £16 if collected by hand (at a Workers' Liberty meeting, for example), £20 with postage.

Send payment via workersliberty.org/payment and email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us. ☐



Our videos

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **Playlists include:**

- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- Black Lives Matter
- Socialist commentary on the Covid-19 crisis
- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- An introduction to Marx's Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins ☐

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Getting the imaginary into reality



Documentary review

By Luke Hardy

For 50 years filmmaker Patricio Guzman has documented Chile and its people, their moments of greatest hope and periods of darkest despair. His most famous work, *The Battle of Chile* (1975), depicts the movement of Chilean workers with their hopes raised following the election of Salvador Allende's reformist socialist government and how that ended in the bloody 1973 coup d'état. The dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet that killed or tortured many thousands of socialists, trade unionists and many others.

My Imaginary Country, Guzman's latest documentary, is about the "social outburst", a massive wave of protests

and riots across Chilean cities that started in October 2019 over under-ground fares but developed a much wider range of demands around pensions, free education, the cost of living and inequality in general. Much of the anger focused on replacing the "dictator's constitution", the constitution that was forced through by the Pinochet regime with a referendum with very little legitimacy.

Despite the restoration of bourgeois democracy in 1990 the conservative and centralist constitution from the Pinochet years remained in place.

The government tried to repress the street movement. The police used brutal methods that led to deaths and serious injury. But the government, under pressure, agreed to the convening of a constituent assembly to write a new constitution that first met in 2021. The protests also helped pave the way for left reformist Gabriel Boric's election as president in 2021.

My Imaginary Country uses a mixture of interviews and striking footage from the street battles with the security services and drones. It shows vast crowds on protests. The camera lingers on the stones ripped up to pelt the army, called onto the streets to enforce curfews and bans on protest. The lumbering armoured vehicles of the army roaming the street seem inhuman, like alien craft.

The film particularly focuses on the role of women in the movement and their demands. All the interviewees being women, of different ages and walks of life.

The film is an inspiring and beautiful documentary, but it leaves questions unanswered. The movement on the streets was demanding massive social change – an end to inequality, poverty and the patriarchy – but when it was translated into concrete political demands those seemed to fall far short of that: a constituent assembly for a new



constitution and a president offering relatively modest reforms. And then the proposed constitution was rejected in a referendum (after the film was made). The police and the army remain. The elites are still there.

For Guzman, and perhaps many Chileans, especially those who could remember the coup and the dictatorship, this movement felt like a cleansing fire consuming the legacy of Pinochet and his neo-liberal successors and bringing back the hopes of the early 1970s. For the fire to reach into the core of oppression, evidently it will need clearer political organisation. □



Buy our books

Order from workersliberty.org/publications

Browse, basket, and buy books, pamphlets, and publication bundles – and find more info, related resources, study guides, reviews and so on, from the same place. Some books are free to download or as audiobooks.

Prices listed exclude postage and packaging: £1 for small items, £3 for larger items, free over £30. Every third publication is half-price and 15% off over £50. □



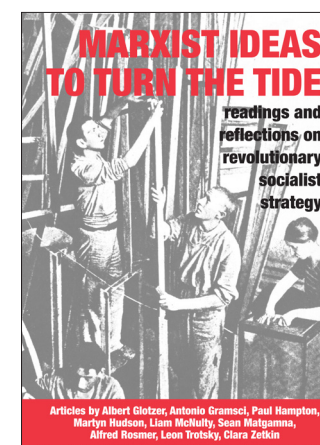
Lessons for socialist and left activists 60 pages **£4**



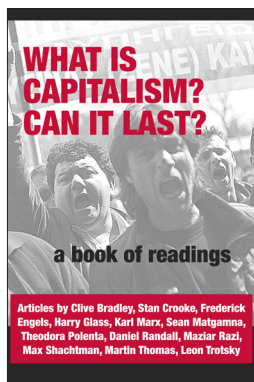
Rühle's abridgement is a good intro 131 pages **£6**



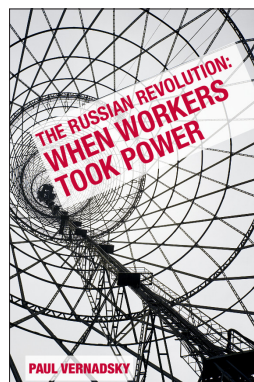
Tackling anti-socialist ideas 182 pages **£5**



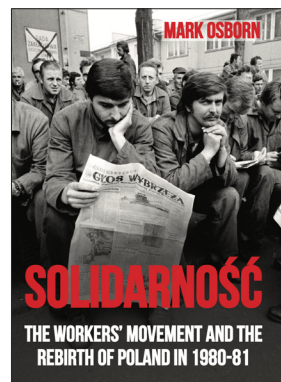
Revolutionary socialist strategy 138 pages **£5**



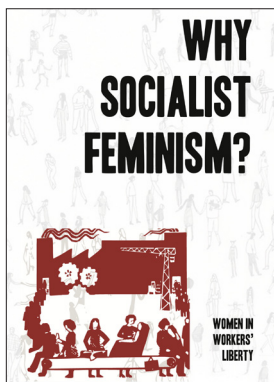
Socialist readings to understand and fight capitalism 128 pages **£5**



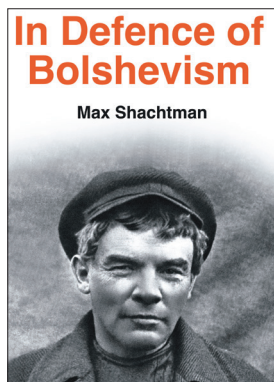
The 1917's revolution's real history, and lessons 374 pages **£12**



The history of Solidarność, from its dawn until the coup 116 pages **£5**



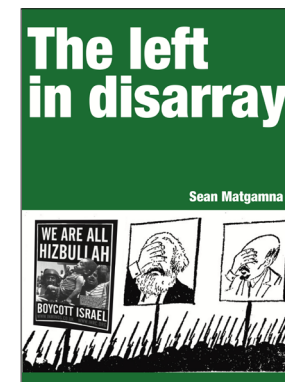
A socialist approach within recent "waves" of feminism 102 pages **£5**



Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today 312 pages **£10**



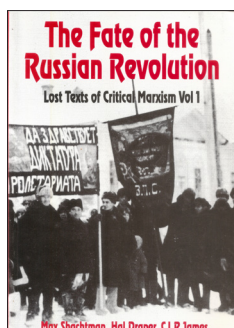
A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more 107 pages **£5**



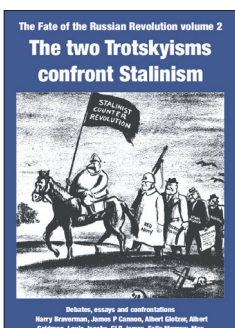
Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward 408 pages **£12**



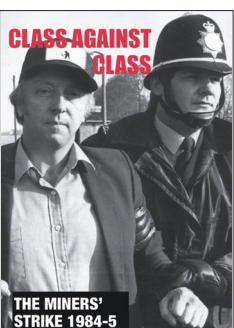
Can Socialism Make Sense? **£8**



Fate of the Russian Revolution vol.1 **£8**



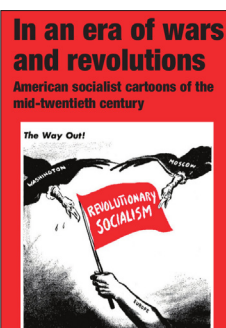
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms **£20**



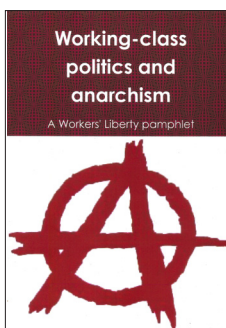
The Miners' Strike 1984-5 **£9**



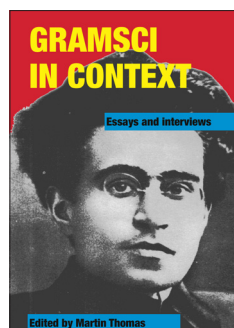
1919: Strikes, struggles, soviets **£4**



In an Era of Wars and Revolutions **£9**



Class Politics and Anarchism **£5**



Gramsci in Context **£6**

Rail workers will strike again from 13 December

By an RMT rep

Members of the rail union RMT at Network Rail will strike from 02:00 13 December to 01:59 hours on 15 December, and from 02:00 16 December to 01:59 hours on 18 December; from 02:00 3 January to 01:59 5 January, and 02:00 hours on 6 January to 01:59 hours on 8 January, with an overtime ban from 18 December to 2 January. Workers at the TOCs will strike on 13-14

and 16-17 December and 3-4 and 6-7 January (each strike starting 00:01 and ending 23:59).

We made a clear statement that we want to fight on in our dispute over pay, jobs, and conditions by delivering massive majorities for continued industrial action in our recent re-ballots. The mandate for action is larger than the one delivered in May, with a 91.7 percent majority for action, on a 70.2 percent turnout across the board. It's positive that the union has acted quickly on that mandate by calling new strikes.

The new dates improve on the previous strategy by comprising a programme of action over several weeks, keeping up pressure and mobilisation over a sustained period. The quantity of action also represents an escalation overall, although it is likely that more sustained strikes – for example, striking for three, four, or more days consecutively, or striking for an increasing number of days over consecutive weeks – will still be needed to win the dispute. Some union activists also feel the dates chosen may not be maximally impactful.

With drivers in Aslef striking alone on 26 November, meaningful coordination between rail unions remains elusive. In the immediate term, workers should refuse to cross each other's picket lines. The question of coordination *within* RMT is also posed sharply by the new programme of action. The staggering of strikes on Network Rail and TOCs,

with some overlapping days but some on which only one group of workers will strike, is designed to spread the impact of action. But it also risks siloing the two parts of the dispute, and could see RMT members who had previously been striking and picketing together now cross each other's pickets. The benefits of striking together in terms of fostering solidarity and conducting the dispute as a single, industry-wide fight-back, rather than as parallel disputes, surely outweigh other considerations.

The period of "intensive negotiations" for which RMT suspended planned strikes at the beginning of November, during which time employers have not felt the additional pressure of ongoing or looming strikes, produced nothing. 18 November, the date by which the Rail Delivery Group, the body negotiating on behalf of TOCs, said they would present new proposals to the union, came and went without any new proposals being made.

Job cuts

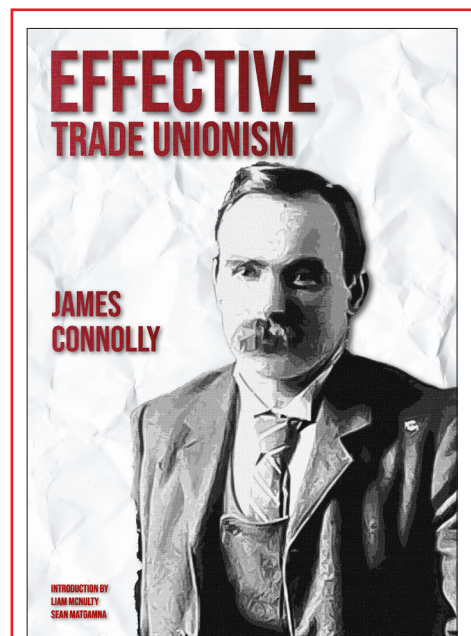
The one arguable concession had been Network Rail's commitment, in writing, to the principle that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" – i.e., that it would not seek union agreement for piecemeal elements of its plans, or begin implementation of job cuts and restructures whilst negotiations were ongoing. RMT statements suggested that this concession had been the main factor behind the suspension of strikes,

retroactively recalibrating the entire basis for the action and significantly moving the goalposts of the dispute. But Network Rail's commitment to this principle seems not to be worth the paper it was written on; no sooner had RMT issued a press release trumpeting this concession than Network Rail issued its own "fact check" document, stating that they had only agreed to pause local consultation (the prelude to implementation) on its plans for job cuts to maintenance roles until 3 December. Its statement restated its position that any pay increase must be paid for by job cuts and changes to terms and conditions.

Having not budged the employers with our strikes since June, we have no option but to escalate. We must be prepared to step up further beyond December and January's strikes. Greater transparency is also needed to ensure members are fully informed – in real time, as far as possible – of the contents of negotiations, with regular reps' assemblies that serve not only for officials and negotiators to report back, but as forums for discussing next steps.

This dispute will not be won around the negotiating table. It will be won on the picket line. We went into this fight to win an above-inflation pay rise, no job cuts, and no changes to terms and conditions.

Until the employers are prepared to concede those demands, strikes should continue – and escalate. □



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

workersliberty.org/publications

Unison to strike at 19 unis



By Vicki Morris

Nineteen Unison Higher Education (HE) branches will strike alongside UCU on 24/25 November, and some on 30 November.

The dispute is over pay: the union demanded a rise in 2022-23 of RPI +2% but the employers imposed an offer of around 3%. Some univer-

sities have also made bonus payments in an attempt to head off strikes.

While it is a minority of all Unison HE branches, the number is set to grow. Around 40 branches that did not make the threshold for striking in this round and some branches who opted out of balloting up till now have opted into a second round of balloting for more strikes, probably in February 2023. The ballots will take place before Christmas. More: bit.ly/unison-he □

Universities strike 24-25-30 November

By a UCU member

Higher education members of the University and College Union will strike on 24, 25 and 30 November in a dispute over pay, conditions and pensions. After a successful aggregated ballot, almost every UK university will be out.

Workers are demanding a pay rise of 12% or RPI plus 2%, whichever is higher, plus action on equalities, precarity and workloads and a 35-hour working week. Those covered by the USS pension scheme (mainly older pre-92 universities) are also demanding the revocation of 2021's massive cuts and a restoration of benefits.

This year's pay offer from employers was a miserable 3%, while from October 2021

to Oct 2022 prices went up by (RPI) 14.2%, (CPI) 11.1%. Higher education pay had already fallen by 17.6% in real terms between 2009 and 2019. That's at least a 25% pay cut over 13 years.

Some employers are already conceding that pay needs to rise. Many better-off universities where strikes and marking boycotts were strong last year have already paid non-consolidated bonuses of up to £1,000 or 2% of wages. The head of University College London has said that current pay levels are "not sustainable" in terms of staff recruitment, and the principal of Glasgow Caledonian admitted publicly that "we've been underpaying our staff for many, many years". It is very possible that when employers

meet on 30 November they will offer some improvement on 3%.

However, it is also very likely that any improved offer will still sit well below inflation. Some institutions have been hit hard by the government freeze on tuition fees and falling student numbers, and will push to keep costs down. The union needs to be prepared to fight on, not simply accept this narrative.

If management say they can't pay, we should challenge them to join us in a political campaign to defend higher education, rather than collapsing in the face of government cuts. We should also demand that they open the books and involve the unions in budget decisions. □

“” What we stand for

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

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

The working class must unite to struggle against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, in the workplace and wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses, to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement
- A workers' charter of trade union rights – to organise, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Here's hoping it's not the time-warp again



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

Déjà vu is a sensation that something you're experiencing has happened before. It's usually just a coincidence of similar events that link up, however briefly.

As I wait for the RMT National Executive to announce new strike dates, following our successful rebalot, I have a bit of that. Maybe by the time you read this column, the déjà vu feeling will have proved to be an illusion, and we'll be on a clear course to effective and rapid escalation. But I worry.

Six months ago we started off with an excellent three days of action, which showed not only our strength of feeling but also the effectiveness of our action. I don't know whether the union

leadership expected our management to roll over immediately, but I think it was predictable that management sat tight after only three days. The Liverpool dockers had to do five weeks of strikes – and two weeks at a time, not a few days – to win, though they have great strategic strength and face an employer making tidy profits.

The following bits of action were all de-escalation, which culminated with drawing strikes for the promise of "intensive talks". After those "intensive" talks, where management moved not one millimetre, the re-ballot results were announced: overwhelming support across the board, with the doubtful Thomases being proved wrong.

So far, since the ballot results, the union leadership has hunkered down for yet more talks with no announced actions. Surely it's trade unionism 101 that you don't walk in with an unloaded gun.

We've seen the outcome of this sort of tactic before in the Driver Only Operation action with Southern guards, where the initial ballot and action were solid, followed by month after month of vacillating by our then leadership.

Those who keep quoting the "marathon, not a sprint" argument, I'd just refer to that failed marathon.

The other red herring that keeps popping up is "we have to think about those on a lower wage at Christmas time".

If we had used the original mandate more strongly, then perhaps the dispute would not have run on so long that we've ended up near Christmas.

Nobody likes losing money, but the majorities so far show that even the lowest paid are supporting this action. And how will those lower paid members react if, after they have lost money, the union fails to call action on a scale that can achieve our aims? □

“Final position” in BT talks?

By Ollie Moore

In a 17 November message to its members working for BT, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) says it is "closing in on a final position" in its negotiations with the company.

The statement acknowledges that members have been "very patient", and are "undoubtedly keen to hear more details", but says the union "cannot communicate any specifics" of the "final position" it is apparently "closing in on". The statement ends by saying the union "envisages reaching a conclusion next week" (i.e. week beginning 21 Nov).

BT workers, who struck four times in October, might well feel frustrated with the opaque nature of this communication. It is workers themselves, not just union officials conducting negotiations, who should decide what constitutes a "final position". Workers must be able to scrutinise the contents of negotiations and any proposed settlements in real time, so to speak,

not only when a deal is presented to them by officials who declare that it is a take-it-or-leave-it "final position".

Throughout much of the trade union movement, an orthodoxy prevails around negotiations that sees the negotiation process itself as the means by which disputes are settled. This reduces the direct action of

the workers to a mere bargaining chip to be deployed by negotiators, rather than an assertion of power that is the actual means by which concessions will be forced from employers.

Insisting that negotiations take place behind closed doors risks reducing the rank-and-file membership to a stage army – and one,

moreover, without a speaking part. If the "final position" CWU officials present to BT members meets workers' demands, including for an above-inflation pay rise, it may be appropriate to accept it. But if workers feel it falls too far short of those demands, it should be rejected and more strikes should be called. □

The labour theory of value on film



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Which Hollywood film elucidates the labour theory of value? I'm no economist and no doubt someone could punch holes in the explanation, but it can be found in John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948).

Two Americans in Mexico, Fred Dobbs (Humphrey Bogart) and Bob Curtin (Tim Holt) turn their hand to gold prospecting, assisted by a cantankerous veteran gold miner, Howard (Huston's father, Walter). The trio go through various trials and trib-

ulations and eventually find gold, although their encounter with a group of bandits puts their success in jeopardy. Sitting around their campfire one night the old timer explains that gold is so precious because of the huge amount of labour that is required to extract it from the earth, despite it having very little practical use.

The film is based on B Traven's novel, written in 1927. His real identity is disputed but there is some agreement that he was originally a German anarchist and participated in the Bavarian Soviet Republic of April 1919. More bizarrely, it has been suggested that he was the illegitimate son of Kaiser Wilhelm II or the famous author Jack London after faking his death and going to live incognito in Mexico. □

PCS strikes start selective



John Moloney

The PCS National Executive Committee (NEC) has decided on an initial programme of selective action in the Home Office, including the Border Force, across the Department for Transport and in Defra, affecting ports, borders and areas of transport.

Whilst the move to action is welcome, I argued at the NEC that there should be at least one day of all-out action in December. My view is that we should have as much all-out action as possible, coupled with selective action.

Given the decision our key task now is to ensure that the selective action is as effective as possible – the same with the rebalot of HMRC, which will begin in the New Year. The union has also agreed to increase subscriptions so as to fund the selective action. That will require a discussion with, and campaign amongst, members, so that they understand the reasons why subs will be increased and are won over on this matter.

Whilst the call for all-out action in December was decided on, the NEC did agree to keep the issue of all-out action on the table. Hopefully in the New Year, we can revisit it and take all-out strike action, possibly with other unions. □

• John Moloney is PCS AGS (p.c.)

Selective action good; no national action bad

From PCS Independent Left

The PCS National Executive (NEC) has rejected calls for national action alongside announced targeted action.

The Independent Left argued at the NEC [18 November] that members being asked to take sustained selective action should be supported by at least a day of national action by all members with mandates to strike, as a springboard to the campaign.

With the posties in the CWU calling six days of action in December, and lecturers in the UCU with three days at the end of November, there could also be effective coordination with other unions.

The NEC majority opposed this, with a few areas being given the green-light this side of Christmas and no view of when – if at all – any national action will be called.

This represents a serious strategic mistake, and risks widescale demobilisation and demoralisation of those being asked to take action as well as those who have effectively been stood-down from the campaign.

On 10 November the union reported the biggest participation and largest vote in favour of action in the union's history.

That was the result of six weeks of huge member and activist engagement right across the union. During this period the union grew significantly, and new, young activists were inspired to join.

The tactic long argued by Independent Left for targeted or selective action, meant to cause as much disruption as possible, is now universally agreed as the way the dispute will be won. But targeted action must be complemented by national action.

National one day strikes on their own are rightly seen as a weak strategy, little better than a protest action.

But national action when used alongside targeted action is not protest action. Its purpose is to buoy those taking targeted action and to demonstrate in a real way that they are not acting alone. It's to give all members a stake in the campaign. It's to retain the momentum among members in all workplaces and act as a recruiting sergeant.

There are live disputes over office closures and redundancies in the Department of Work and Pension and Department for Education, both now with mandates for action, but no action has yet been called.

The action called needs to be unconditionally supported, with reps

mobilising support for the pickets. But members and reps in branches, groups and on regional committees should discuss the NEC decision and if they agree with us, propose and pass motions outlining their concerns to send to the NEC and General Secretary. The more that do so, the bigger impact it will have.

There are a significant number of members and reps who disagree with the decision, and we think there should be a forum for those individuals to discuss a way forward.

National Branches and Groups still retain the option of submitting requests for action to the National Disputes Committee and those passing the threshold already have a mandate. These committees may consult their membership and decide they want to take national action in support of the targeted action. They should discuss this with their membership and send requests to the NDC.

The NEC should reverse its decision to stand-down tens of thousands of members, but minimally needs to articulate to members whether there will be any national action in the New Year. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/selec-s

Get Solidarity every week

Trial sub (6 issues) £7; Six months (22 issues) £22 waged, £11 unwaged, €30 European rate.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923). Standing order £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms online. □

Contact us



[020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

solidarity@workersliberty.org

Write to: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

Production team: Martin Thomas (editor), Sara Lee, Sacha Ismail, Dan Katz, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle □

Jacob's strike escalates

By Jayne Evans

From 14 November, the industrial action at the Jacobs factory in Liverpool Aintree was increased to all-out permanent strike. This decision by the workers follows managements refusal to increase the pay offer and the company's decision to shift production to one of their European plants in an attempt to undermine the strike.

The site in Liverpool has been operating for more than 100 years and is the main UK production site for the owner, Pladis, Pladis has 34 factories in 14 countries. It employs over 17,000 people. 800 people work at the Liverpool plant.

Workers at the plant, who are members of the GMB, have been taking limited industrial action since September in their dispute over

pay. Their demand is for a 10% pay increase.

A number of years ago, workers accepted a significant wage cut to maintain the viability of the Aintree plant. That was done on the promise of potential site investment which never materialised.

They are working with high levels of flour dust, excessive heat from large ovens, and repetitive work for long periods; they maintained production through Covid surges; and, at the start of the dispute, when the workers told the bosses that their members were struggling to pay bills and feed their families – the bosses gave them details of the local food bank!

On 13 November, in a bid to undermine the strike, the employer announced that they were moving production to Portugal. The

response of the workers to this threat was to move to all-out strike. They have said that will walk out every day until the boss agrees to negotiate.

The mood on the picket line has been defiant, with large numbers and support from other trade unionists and the local community. Workers say they would rather lose their jobs than continue to be underpaid and bullied by their employer.

If the workers are to win then strike action needs to be spread to other Pladis plants both in the UK and internationally, solidarity action particularly needs to be sought from the workers in Portugal.

As a consequence of Brexit, more companies are likely to try to move production to Europe. Only international solidarity can save jobs and stop workers in one country being played off against others. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

Russian imperialism leaves Kherson in ruins

By Dan Katz

On Friday 11 November Russian occupying troops evacuated Kherson city in southern Ukraine, possibly with an arrangement made with the Ukrainians.

Serhii Melnikov, living in the village of Mylove on the banks of the vast Dnipro river, saw them go: "Vladimir Putin said Russia would be here for ever. In the end they left in five minutes and ran away like goats. We asked them why they had come. They replied: 'To make your lives better.' By the time they exited we had gone back in time 30 years. We now have no electricity, gas or water. Everyone is broke, and there are no jobs. Instead of waging war, Putin could have fixed the roads and hospitals in his own country." (*Observer*, 13 November).

As the Russians left they blew up electricity stations, bridges, and television and radio masts across the Kherson region, on the right bank of the Dnipro. In Mylove they destroyed the school and nursery as they moved out. They also extensively mined the areas they left.

The rules of war explicitly forbid such attacks on civilian infrastructure. These are Russian war crimes.

The deliberate destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure is not, however, just a matter of attempting to run down Ukrainian morale. It has a political meaning beyond that. Putin's current war aim is to take all the territory he can, and to leave territory he can't seize as part of a rump, failed state.

This alarms the US and EU states who certainly do not want a dysfunctional, broken Ukraine sitting on the edge of Europe.

Across Ukraine Russian missiles are targeting electricity generation and supply facilities. The biggest attack yet, since the Russian invasion began in February, took place on 15 November. That day Russia fired at least 85 missiles, mostly at Ukrainian infrastructure.

Kharkiv mayor Ihor Terekhov reported their metro and overground trains, which run on electricity, had stopped running.

This week the first winter snow fell across Ukraine and temperatures occasionally fell below freezing. In the centre of Kherson city the returning Ukrainian government set up emergency tents where citizens could get warm, charge their phones and use the internet. The Ukrainian government is struggling to fix electricity supply, without which nothing else will work properly.



A human chain carrying aid across a destroyed bridge, Kherson, 17 November

In Kherson Ukrainian investigators claim to have found 63 bodies with signs of torture; four sites of torture, and 11 illegal prisons; 700 people are reported missing.

The loss of Kherson, following the Russian withdrawal from around Kyiv in April and the rout of Russian forces in Kharkiv in September, is a humiliation for Putin. And, despite Putin's attempts to deflect the blame for these losses, defeats are a political threat to Putin.

Putin remains personally very popular, at 79% according to a poll conducted by Levada. However, the war in Ukraine is much less popular: only 36% of Russians want to continue the war; 57% want peace talks.

The Ukrainian victories are forcing both Russia and the West to recalibrate political responses. Putin's rhetoric now focusses on presenting Ukraine as a pawn of the West. He is aiming to win political support from developing countries where anti-Western themes get a hearing.

The US has steadfastly denied Ukraine all the quantities and types of weaponry it needs to beat Putin and drive Russia out, from concern about widening the war or causing Putin to massively escalate. The Americans now worry that future Ukrainian victories might cause Putin, in desperation and to save his position inside Russia, to use chemical or nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

One way that might happen is if Ukraine moves on occupied Melitopol next, a city on the road to Crimea. Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, and Putin will not – and can not for internal political reasons – give up Crimea.

Consequently some in the US administration, and army, want Ukraine to do a deal with Russia now. And here lies a threat to Ukraine. □



Cartoon: @gewman

NHS workers set to strike

By Alice Hazel

Following the historic vote for strike action by RCN members in 176 NHS trusts, the ballot result from the largest NHS union, Unison, is due on 25 November.

Yes votes will win with high percentages. Healthworkers across the country are convinced that they have no choice but to take a stand on pay now as the service crumbles around them. With union organisation on the ground weak in many NHS Trusts, the turnout in some ballots will be below what it is demanded by the Tories' 2016 law. Despite that, with targeted organisation and a boost from the RCN vote, Unison is likely to meet the threshold in many places.

Ambulance strikes

Results are due from the GMB ballots in 11 Ambulance Trusts on 29 November and from the first wave of Unite ballots in health on the 30th. Between the unions there will be mandates for strike action in many sections of the NHS across the country.

As the results are released union members

should be organising together across the unions in workplaces, and calling on their branches and national unions to do the same. The health unions must call co-ordinated joint action and unite to win.

Confidence

In Trusts where only some unions, or only one union, have mandates we need to build confidence in workers not to cross picket lines and we call on unions to fight for members that do this. Every worker in a group where a union has a legal strike ballot result has legal protection for striking even if they are not in that union.

Every member who voted for strikes will want to carry that out and shouldn't be stopped by the anti-trade-union laws. To build that confidence we need strike committees, recruiting volunteers and activists to build strike action locally – and supporting members by discussing the best tactics to maximise the effectiveness of action and to organise emergency cover as decided by workers on the ground. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government



POSTAL WORKERS PLAN MORE STRIKES

By Ollie Moore

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has announced six new postal workers' strikes in the run-up to Christmas, Royal Mail's "peak profit" period, as its dispute over pay, jobs, and conditions continues. The union also instructed its reps to hold gate meetings at Royal Mail workplaces on 22 November, to prepare for upcoming strikes on 24-25 November.

Strikes planned for 12 and 14 November were called off, and the CWU issued a joint statement with Royal Mail affirmed their shared commitment to resolving the dispute and to a "de-escalation of tension to avoid flashpoints and restoring calmness in the workplace."

Both sides committed to a period of renewed negotiations, with the joint statement also expressing a shared commitment to reaching a settlement by 15 November.

Those negotiations have not proved fruitful.

Royal Mail's offer is for a 7% pay rise, well below inflation, which remains conditional on the CWU's acceptance of a raft of changes to terms and conditions, including worse sick pay and an increase in compulsory Sunday working. Royal Mail is also pushing ahead with 10,000 job cuts, and says new starters are already being brought in on reduced terms – effectively imposing its planned changes without union agreement.

Given the obvious chasm between the sides, calling off strikes and issuing a joint state-

ment full of conciliatory language seems a clear misstep, which has achieved little except a pause in mobilisation, handing momentum to Royal Mail. Nevertheless, the announcement of further strikes, in the period of the year when postal workers have the most leverage, is the best way to attempt to regain that momentum.

Strikes will take place on 24-25 November and 30 November and 1 December, with the newly announced strikes taking place on 9, 11, 14, 15, 23, and 24 December. Also in the postal sector, CWU's members working for the Post Office, a separate company from Royal Mail, have voted by a 91 percent majority to renew their mandate for industrial action in their own dispute over pay. □

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban