

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

Sunak is floundering



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Making imagination, and remaking reality



Editorial

The *Economist* magazine in its 26 November issue recalled Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, a book from 2009 which asserted (glumly, from the author's viewpoint) that it had become "easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism".

Even the crash of 2008, argued Fisher, had narrowed socialist imagination. According to the *Economist's* columnist, the Tory crises and the Tories' current offer – stable management of... a record drop in living standards and a near-collapse of public services – have had a similar paradoxical effect.

It has become, the column says, "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of Tory rule". The Tories will probably lose the next election, but that's a way away. And "Keir Starmer won the Labour leadership promising to continue the programme of Jeremy Corbyn... But Sir Keir intends to win the next election on a platform of Conservative realism... within the Tory parameters of low immigration, tight spending and a distant relationship with the EU".

All this in the midst of the biggest strike wave since 1989, which is still on the rise. Many of the strikes now or soon will come up more or less directly against the government: NHS workers, civil service workers, teachers, firefighters... All the strikes face parameters set by the Tories: anti-union laws, old, new, and threatened; public budget cuts; and a coming recession designed to stop "wage inflation" in the labour market. The big disputes need political action, to break the frame of "Conservative realism". The political left needs to do much more to broaden the front for the strikes.

There have been some good, lively, strike support rallies. In the General Strike of 1926, between 400 and 500

local Councils of Action were formed and started activity in just nine days. Nearly nine months on in this strike wave, we are still short of strike support committees.

Such committees, connected with strike committees in workplaces and industries can help make connections, swell the picket lines, provide a space for formulating alternatives to "Conservative realism" of all varieties. They can develop capacity for demonstrations and other actions to push back the government on issues like the NHS, the coming new anti-union laws, and the Public Order Bill already in the works.

Mark Fisher concluded his 2009 book: "The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again".

The unexpected election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in 2015 was a "tiny event" which did tear a hole. The sequel showed that capitalist power is nothing so passive as a curtain, and that socialist imagination does not exist already full-formed to burst through as soon as a hole is torn.

Erect

Capitalists do not just erect curtains and barriers to what workers want. In fact, their curtains and barriers always have holes and gaps. People see through them. Mark Fisher's book was a best-seller because its motto was false. Many people read it *because* they believe "another world is possible". Only, they see no real way of getting there, and, partly because of that, their idea of that other world is blurred and flickering.

Capitalists gain a hegemony more like what Antonio Gramsci called a "molecular" (different from his better-known categories of consent and coercion) by constantly fractionalising our social awareness via new initiatives, via trying and often succeeding to set us onto the back foot. Every week, every day, they are discussing, strategising, training each other, drawing in new "cadres". They learn through doing, "doing" their work of exploitation and class struggle every day.

Many of those capitalist "new initiatives" are botched and inept even from a capitalist point of view: the *Financial*



Pic: [Gemma Short]

Times (28 November) wearily hopes only that the Tories do no more "stupid stuff" in the next year. But even the "stupid stuff" like Brexit can sometimes faze our movement.

The working class has far greater intellectual and social capacities. Too often those capacities are dormant. They are dormant unless we too are discussing, strategising, educating each other; drawing in new activists every week; pushing against capitalist power every week. Unless we develop a dense enough mode of organising.

Almost three years after the crash of Corbynism, many have quit the Labour Party in despair; they are scattered in fragments of scant consequence. The left that remains in the Labour Party is usually quiet and intimidated. Much other left activism is sporadic.

The strikes spur us to reverse that slide. To win, and to prompt mobilisations which can restore the health service and civil liberties and union rights, they need us to reverse that slide.

We have to reactivate as many as we can of those who were active in the Corbyn years but have now gone quiet. We have to reach the young socialists whom the Corbyn surge never organised – Young Labour and Labour Students were weaker in 2019 than in 2015 – or who were only early-teens back then, and help them become active as socialists, not just as sporadic

protesters. Workers' Liberty works to help build strike committees and strike support committees. We produce weekly picket-line bulletins to enable the exchange of information and ideas between the picket lines of different disputes; we produce and circulate this paper to develop a less blurred vision of alternatives to capitalism, of ways to get there, and of links between those and every week's issues. We organise leftists in our workplaces and union branches, and push leftists to raise their heads again in the Labour Party. We organise student solidarity groups to help the strikes.

All this work has to be done every week, and at a tempo and with an energy matching the dynamics of the strikes. Reader, it needs your help. □



Corrections

The charges on which Martin Mayer and Andrea Egan have been excluded from the Labour Party concern actions which were entirely "legal" at the time.

But they are about speaking at a meeting of Labour Against the Witchhunt (in 2018) and sharing a post from Socialist Appeal (not just "liking" posts). □

AWL conference 29-30 April

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



Make 15 Dec a solidarity day

By Ollie Moore

Thursday 15 December will see rail workers, postal workers, and nurses striking on the same day. Workers in other sustained strikes, some of them indefinite, will also be out, including factory workers in Aintree and Billingham, Metrolink bus workers in London, and workers at the housing charity Shelter. Members of the PCS civil service union in three major government departments are also taking sustained action throughout December.

Wherever strikes coincide, strikers should send delegations to each others' picket lines. A priority should be made of visiting nurses' pickets. Most nurses will never have been involved in a national strike, and the encouragement derived from supportive picket line visits from delegations of strikers from other unions could make a real difference to their confidence to prolong their strikes if necessary.

Local union branches and Trades Councils should organise joint strike rallies in towns and cities. The organisation of such events needs input from below, to ensure they are not organised at times and in locations that risks disrupting or pulling strikers away from important picket lines. But the opportunity

to bring striking workers from different industries and unions together should be taken wherever possible. At rallies, rank-and-file voices must be prioritised. However good a speaker a regional or national official may be, platforming the same (often white, male) speakers over and over again inhibits rank-and-file workers from speaking and acting for themselves.

The organisation of such local rallies will be easier where steps have already been taken to establish ad hoc, cross-union strike committees, linked to local Trades Councils. Where such steps have not been taken, organising towards joint activities on dates like 15 December which see multiple strikes can help jumpstart that process.

Teachers in Scotland struck on 24 November, the first time the current strike wave has spread into primary and secondary education beyond local disputes in individual schools. Their unions, the Education Institute of Scotland, is demanding a 10 percent pay increase. Strikes by nurses' union RCN on 15 and 20 December will see the strike wave spread into the NHS. There, the union is demanding RPI+5 percent.

Both demands have limitations; demanding a percentage pay rise, rather

than a flat-rate increase, maintains pay differentials between grades rather than boosting the pay of the lowest paid the most. And in EIS's case, their demand is now below inflation. But despite these limitations, simply making a specific demand is a significant advance on disputes where unions have not even done that. In what are perhaps the two most significant national strikes so far, on the rail and post, the RMT and CWU have not made a specific pay demand. Without clear, agreed demands, unions can only be reactive to employers' offers. And a lack of clear demands makes it hard for rank-and-file workers to hold union negotiators to account.

The disputes on the rail, post, and on the London Underground share features which makes them somewhat distinct from other disputes in the current strike wave. They rail and post disputes intertwine battles for higher pay but against radical proposals for restructures and job cuts from employers.

The London Underground dispute has no pay element at all, and is exclusively about job cuts and attacks on terms and conditions, especially pensions. Unions must resist bosses' pressure to "sell" jobs or conditions for higher pay. □

Strikes

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

Since 14 Nov: Workers at Jacob's Bakery factory in Aintree (GMB) on indefinite strike

Various dates in Nov: Non-academic higher education workers at 19 universities (Unison) strike

30 Nov: Lecturers and other workers at 150 universities (UCU) strike

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

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

Various dates in Dec, tbc: Civil servants in the Home Office, Department for Transport and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (PCS) strike

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

2-5 Dec: Workers in HM Courts and Tribunal Service (PCS) strike

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

13-15 Dec: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

13-14 Dec: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

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

15 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike

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

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

16-17 Dec: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

16-18 Dec: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

20 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike

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

3-4 Jan: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

3-5 Jan: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

6-7 Jan: Workers at various mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

6-8 Jan: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

11-12 Jan, 15-16 Feb: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike □



Upcoming meetings

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

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

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

Wednesday 7 December, 7.30pm: London Forum: The fight for LGBTQ rights. Marchmont Community Centre, WC1N 1AB

Saturday 10 December, 1-5pm: London protest for human rights, democracy, and freedom in China. From 1pm, Apple Store, Regent St., W1B 2EL; from 2pm PRC embassy, 49-52 Portland Pl, 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 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 □

Morning Star against free movement



By Jim Denham

Keir Starmer addressed the CBI last week and said Britain needs to get off its “immigration dependency” and companies need to be weaned off “cheap labour” from overseas and to “start investing more in training workers who are already here”.

This marked a big shift in Starmer’s position: in 2020, while standing for party leadership, he’d championed freedom of movement and implied he’d continue to campaign for it even after Britain left the EU.

Few commentators (the exception being the *i*’s Ian Dunt) seem to have noticed that Starmer’s argument made no sense: as Dunt put it: “Is the problem with immigrants that they are highly-skilled and thereby taking away training advantages from Britons? Or that they are low-skilled and therefore reducing pay for Britons? Starmer’s little immigration aside didn’t seem to have put the slightest thought into it.”

One might have expected the *Morning Star* to take Starmer to task over this, but, strangely, their editorial the next day (23 November) was headed “Starmer and Sunak at the CBI: immigration is not the issue.”

The argument that “immigration is not the issue” seems to rest upon the banality that “the bigger problem is that Labour has turned away from the radical reforms that the deep-rooted social, economic and ecological crises we face demand.”

Tucked away in the editorial, there is a mention of “Sunak and Starmer’s hostility to immigrants” being “not a productive exercise”, but a close reading of the none-too-coherent arguments it contains reveals something that the *Morning Star* is loath to admit: it agrees with Starmer’s arguments about the effects of immigration on the labour market. The editorial makes this plain: “It’s true that CBI chiefs only want immigration rules relaxed so they can import labour without worrying about investing in training or raising pay. Dependence on super-exploited foreign labour in certain sectors is obvious.”

This should not come as a surprise: the paper has spent years claiming that

immigration drives down wages, and in an editorial (3 Feb 2020) it welcomed the ending of free movement: “Brexit means that our nation state is no longer bound by the free and often forced movement of labour that accompanies the EU’s free movement of capital.”

In a further editorial (20 Feb 2020) the paper appeared to welcome the Tories’ points-based immigration system, stating: “It is presented as a bid to help British workers, and bosses’ ability to undercut pay and conditions by bringing in cheap labour has been a key factor in creating the ‘bargain-basement’ economy, dominated by insecure work and poverty pay, that we see around us.”

There is, in fact a long history of people associated with the *Morning Star* (and the Communist Party of Britain) using the argument that immigration drives down wages:

In 2011, the No2EU campaign (backed by the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, and the RMT rail union) published an article by Alex Gordon, then the RMT’s president and now a leading CPBer, calling for tougher immigration controls: “All nation states must have democratic control over

their own immigration policy and have the right to apply national legislation in defence of migrant and indigenous workers.”

In 2013 the late Bob Crow, then RMT general secretary, declared that “free movement within the EU impoverishes workers.”

In the closing days of the 2016 EU referendum, Len McCluskey said: “Let us be clear – what has been done in the last ten years is a gigantic experiment at the expense of ordinary workers. Countries with vast historical differences in wage rates and living standards have been brought together in a common labour market. The result has been huge downward pressure on living standards.”

What is the truth? To quote the National Institute of Economic and Social Research in January 2016, “the idea that immigration is the main or even a moderately important driver of low pay is simply not supported by the available evidence.” And, surely, for socialists, the way forward is unionisation and solidarity, not stricter immigration controls. Sadly, instead of making that case, the *Morning Star* chooses to line up with Starmer. □

The left should back Ukraine’s fight



By Dan Katz

Since sustained, massive Russian attacks on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure began on 10 October Russia has launched 600 missiles, killing 77 people.

On 23 November 12 million people were left to sit in freezing homes, without electricity, following the latest Russian barrage. Three days later 6 million were still without power. These attacks intend to undermine Ukrainians’ will to fight the Russian occupation, and to undermine normal economic and social life in free Ukraine.

Targeting civilian power and water supplies is a war crime. During the course of the whole war, after the full-scale invasion of 24 February, Russia has fired over 4,000 missiles at Ukraine, many at civilian targets.

And in response to this wave of terror attacks on Ukraine, *Socialist Worker* (SW) leader Alex

Callinicos opposes the West supplying advanced missile defence systems which would help Ukraine protect its citizens from Russian war crimes. Callinicos writes that the provision of Western anti-missile defence systems to protect Kyiv from attack is wrong because this would only provoke Russia to bomb more.

Easy to write from a comfortable chair in north London. Turn up the heating, Mr Callinicos.

That argument, if continued logically, would have prevented the left backing most anti-colonial struggles. It would give a free-hand to imperialist-colonial bullies.

Should the Vietnamese have refused Russian and Chinese



weapons in the hope that would stop the US escalating the war? The US did escalate! And then, eventually – and indeed with great human cost – lost, and was forced out.

While noting that Putin has no interest in negotiations, SW also concludes articles on Ukraine with: “Russian forces

out of Ukraine, No NATO arms supplies [to Ukraine].” What a ridiculous contradiction! How will an unwilling Russia under President Vladimir Putin get out of Ukraine without Ukraine forcing it out? And how could that happen without using the weapons which are being provided by NATO states? (Not “NATO weapons”: “NATO” is not providing weapons.)

Ukraine is a historically oppressed nation fighting for its right not to be trampled on by Russian imperialism, and has the right to take weapons from whomever will give them.

The US does not give all the weapons Ukraine demands. Far from it. The various Western powers have refused to

give attack aircraft, helicopters, advanced tanks, and long range missile systems. France and Germany have been particularly reluctant donors.

The US and its allies are backing Ukraine not because they want war with Russia, but because Russia forced the war on them, and they see limited aid to Ukraine as their best option to contain what they see as an unfortunate and alarming situation.

SW’s picture of the Ukraine war is a fiction, with reality mangled to fit a pre-existing ideological framework. Rather than rip up their worldview they bash reality to fit their prejudices. SW understands the war to be a proxy war between the US and Russia. Except that there is no symmetry here. The US is not fighting, and Russia is brutally occupying parts of Ukraine with the intention of ripping up the Ukrainian state.

The practical effect of the SW agitation is for a Ukrainian surrender to Russian imperialist aggression. And that is a disgrace. Victory to Ukraine! □

China rebels for democracy

By Martin Thomas

Street protests across China followed the death of ten people in a fire in a block of flats in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang (East Turkestan, the Uyghur region) on 24 November.

Protests in Urumqi itself, and in many other cities across China in the following few days, said that the ten had died because Covid curbs stopped them fleeing the fire.

As of 29 November, the protests had ebbed for the time being, but they represent a new peak of an agitation building up for months.

On 13 October, just before the ceremonial Congress of China's ruling party which would reaffirm the cult and the authority of Xi Jinping, a lone protester dropped banners from Sitong Bridge in Beijing. He called for food, freedom, elections, against PCR testing, lockdowns, and dictatorship, and for the removal of Xi Jinping.

Foxconn

On 28-31 October, workers at the [Foxconn](#) iPhone assembly plant in Zhengzhou, which has over 200,000 employees, fled the plant to escape the "closed loop" imposed as a Covid curb: workers were forced to stay in the factory compound, at work or in their dormitories, at all times. Even if that reduced Covid risk outside the plant, it increased it inside.

On 23-24 November workers at the plant newly recruited to replace those who had fled protested over work conditions and non-payment of bonuses they had been promised.

Protests by people locked into residential compounds under Covid curbs,

and having difficulty getting food and medicines, have been flaring up for some time. This time there have been general public protests on the streets, in several cities across China, and on university campuses, with a general political message.

People have held up blank sheets of paper as protests against censorship. Explicit calls have been made for Xi Jinping to stand down. At Tsinghua university, a leading university in Beijing, students protested with papers showing Friedmann equations from general relativity theory ("Friedmann" conveying "freed man"). University authorities responded by encouraging students to leave campus early for holidays.

Even if a new police clampdown dampens these protests, they are probably the most politicised and generalised since the actions centred on Tienanmen Square in Beijing in April-June 1989, and the Democracy Wall movement in 1978-9. The police have been quicker to move in than in those previous rounds of action, and the regime's capacities of surveillance have increased, but there are new tensions which may make this more explosive.

This round has also sparked protests by overseas Chinese in many countries, including Britain. These have included people from mainland China, who usually in recent years have kept quiet politically for fear of surveillance by Chinese embassies.

China is not communist or socialist in any sense we recognise. It has a system of vast inequality, based on the exploitation of wage-labour for the profit of private capitalists and top state officials, and with fascist-level

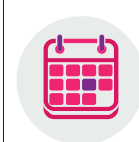
repression (no free speech, no independent media, no legal opposition parties). It has no independent trade unions, though largely unofficial strikes have become relatively common, with a peak (so far) in 2015-6.

Workers' Liberty urges the labour movement to follow the lead of groups like Labour Solidarity With Hong Kong and the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign in backing workers' rights, democratic rights, and national minority rights in China.

We want the labour movement to take an independent internationalist stance, proving itself the best ally of Chinese workers and students and opposing all wings of our own capitalist class – those friendly with the Chinese regime for the sake of their investments and contracts in China, those focused on helping US or European-based businesses outdo Chinese competitors, and those straddling the divide.

There is no equation between the Chinese protests and the far-right-tinged anti-vax, anti-lockdown, and anti-mask protests in other countries which peaked in late 2021 and early 2022. China reports very low Covid deaths, but we don't know how much its counts are underestimated and how much death and blighting of life by other means has been the cost. The ultra-lockdowns in China have been far more intense than those used elsewhere, and have been possible only with a radically repressive state system. Long ago we [argued](#) that a "zero Covid" line is unrealistic even with such ultra-lockdowns. The Chinese government is locked in a hopeless cycle of ultra-lockdown after ultra-lockdown,

while Covid counts are at their highest yet, because it has an ageing population with a low level of vaccination of elderly people; it has many crowded cities; it probably has a low level of immunity through previous mild infections; it has inadequate health-care capacities; and it has chosen to use only Chinese-made vaccines rather than more effective ones. The rational way out is a rapid drive to boost vaccination, improve ventilation in buildings, and expand health care, using more moderate lockdowns, introduced by democratic assent, to slow spread in the meantime. Such a drive is entirely consistent with the Chinese protesters' demands for democratic rights, but difficult to get from Xi Jinping. □



Activist Agenda

Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong is protesting in solidarity with Foxconn workers outside the Apple store in Regent St from 1pm on Saturday 10 December; and supporting the China Deviants protest at the Chinese Embassy (49-51 Portland Pl, London W1B 1JL) from 2pm. LSWHK has also approached left-wingers in Taiwan and the US about organising protests that day, and called on activists in UK cities outside London to organise actions – even if they are just a few people with placards and leaflets outside an Apple shop. □

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

"All The Rage" sets agendas for activity



Women's Fightback

By Alice Hazel

Events prioritising socialist feminism have been lacking on the British left in recent years, but the discussion at the All The Rage conference organised by Workers' Liberty in London on 26 November highlighted the central role of women in class-struggle movements, and the global relevance of the issues.

Around the world women are leading struggles for workers' rights, and for freedom against

repressive governments. Sessions featured women speakers from Iran, India, the US, Poland, and Ukraine. The direct communication with activists based in those countries during the event gave a real sense of the political work they are engaged in.

A delay with the Social Movement speaker in Ukraine coming on over Zoom, due to a power outage there, pointed up the difficulties of organising in conditions of war. One of the speakers on the struggles in Iran spoke of women fighting state forces with helmets made of saucepans for protection.

The opening session high-



lighted the place of women in the current UK strike wave. The importance for women,

as workers and service users, of a defence of services, especially the NHS, and local government, alongside the demands on pay and conditions, was prominent here. The need for the trade unions to broaden their struggles to include outsourced workers, often women, black, Asian and migrant workers on the lowest pay, was also raised. Women gaining their place in trade union structures will also mean a fight against entrenched sexism in the Labour movement.

The opening session discussed how many employers deny workers flexibility to account for care responsibilities, and the discussion was con-

tinued in a later workshop on childcare. A range of ideas was debated, including reducing the distinction between social and private spheres, reducing the demands and time of employed work, and the role of the state in provision. We also had sessions on Trans Liberation and Class Struggle, and on Women and the State.

The discussions will boost our ongoing solidarity work with women internationally, and help us continue to develop the ideas of socialist feminism in writing, in the pages of *Solidarity* and in *Women's Fightback*. □

COP27: no pause in capitalist ecocide



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Set against the backdrop of the Pakistan floods and famine in the Horn of Africa, COP27 was supposed to be the “implementation COP”. But this was a meeting that could not even agree to a non-binding statement that we should “phase down” (not even “phase out”!) fossil fuels. They implemented nothing: acceleration on the highway to climate hell continues.

There was so much to discuss that the talks overran by 39 hours. But in over two weeks of detailed technical discussions, representatives of nearly 200 countries achieved nothing. The 636 fossil fuel lobbyists, alongside representatives of various petrostates (including the UAE, which is hosting next year’s meeting) return home to continue their work of growing their businesses unimpeded.

The only mechanism that COP27 governments have to reduce CO2

emissions are carbon trading schemes. Carbon trading is an attempt to correct the so-called “market failure” where prices do not reflect environmental costs.

These schemes have never worked. They provide opportunities for financial swindling but have no impact on real world emissions. COP27 was presented with options such as increased transparency, methods to prevent “double counting” and tighter policing of bogus drawdown schemes. Those might fix some of the problems with carbon trading. But rich countries argued successfully against these moves. The capitalist class’s only idea to reduce levels of atmospheric carbon remains completely ineffective.

The talks also had space to discuss “non-market approaches” to draw down carbon and decarbonise the economy, but with no result.

In fact, governments could present plans for systematically decommissioning fossil fuel infrastructure, halting new exploration, electrifying everything, building smartgrids, massively expanding nuclear and renewable power sources, creating viable car-

bon drawdown schemes, and investing in energy efficiency measures like home insulation and integrated public transport. Governments could have spent the week comparing how they achieve these goals, whether they can be achieved through regulation alone or whether it is necessary to take such firms and the financial institutions that back them into common ownership.

The absence of effective initiatives on any of these fronts shows the depth of the crisis.

Conference attendees and some NGOs hailed the historic creation of a loss and damage fund. But no money has been committed to this proposed fund and there is no agreement about who should pay into it or benefit from it. The US-EU bloc’s last minute support for a loss and damage fund was an attempt to get China to contribute and speed up its emissions reductions.

Throughout the conference, the US-EU bloc attempted to position themselves as the people who are “keeping the goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius alive” against the poorer nations and China (the G77 bloc), who focussed more on loss and damages. In fact, both sides

are lost in climate change denialism.

US-EU governments claim emissions reductions in recent years but have largely offshored their emissions to China along with their manufacturing base. And the talk about courses for limiting heating to 1.5 degrees only obscures the fact current policies have us careering blindly towards 3-4 degrees Celsius and beyond.

Poorer nations, with far less control over this trajectory, are right to focus on who pays for the loss and damage. 3-4 degrees Celsius will mean many of these nations will cease to exist. But when they line up behind the world’s biggest polluter and support domestic fossil capital expansion, that is not a strategy for limiting loss and damage.

With each passing COP meeting, it is increasingly obvious that capitalism has no answers. Worse, capitalism is rooted in denialism that can only lead to escalating ecocide.

As the crises deepen and capitalists’ faith in their system falters, this may create opportunities for renewing workers’ organisation and struggle. Herein lies the hope and the much sought after alternative. □

U Nu and Burmese political Buddhism

By Hein Htet Kyaw

According to the Indian social reformer [Ambedkar](#), Buddhism is based on reason, morality, egalitarianism, and progress; it would be hard to make that claim for Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Hinduism. However, the same religion has been interpreted to serve racist, sexist, xenophobic and discriminatory ideas by monks from Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand.

For Burma, the development of political Buddhism can be traced back to its nationalist movement of U Nu, the first prime minister of Burma.

Morality

During the colonial period, U Nu reconciled Marxism and Buddhism to some extent. He maintained the view that the former could only provide material liberation from colonial rule and the latter could provide spiritual liberation. U Nu maintained a similar view after independence. In moves for a welfare economy he claimed to restore Buddhist society, which for him was socialistic in nature. U Nu also emphasised the connection between

Buddhist morality and social reform – socialism as a means of removing greed.

Burma has a lot of different ethnicities who practice Buddhism as their religion. U Nu sought to unite all those people as “moral community”, a group of people who are supposed to protect Buddhist teachings in the face of new post-colonial conditions.

According to one of U Nu’s stories, colonial intervention caused the Burmese to lose a previous Buddhist utopian social harmony. Modern Burmese would use modern political methods such as socialism to return to this utopian state, not to build communism, but to reverse the moral decline caused by colonial capitalism.

U Nu hosted the Sixth Buddhist World Council in Yangon in 1954. As Prime Minister, U Nu spent large amounts constructing a pagoda and other religious facilities in preparation for the council.

U Nu argued that his modernisation goals were superior to those of capitalist and communist models of that time (“communist” then meaning like the USSR) because these were only concerned with the

material conditions of human life, whereas his reforms aimed at spiritual rejuvenation of the people. Both capitalism and communism were deemed morally repugnant by U Nu, the former for encouraging the profit motive and the latter for advocating violent revolt and authoritarian rule.

In contrast to these two types of modernity, U Nu envisioned a path for Burma along which moral renewal combined with improved material conditions would bring the Burmese closer to spiritual elevation, resulting in the attainment of nibbāna, or the ideal Buddhist state of “freedom from desire.”

U Nu was also critical of the Marxian evolutionary view of social development. He delivered a lengthy speech to the All-Burma AFPFL Conference in January 1958 which is widely regarded as a final moment in U Nu’s separation from Marxism.

With his political Buddhism and anti-communist politics, U Nu in fact became one of the useful idiots of the western imperialist camp. There were some rumours and accusations that U Nu was funded by the western agencies. A re-

lationship between U Nu and the CIA was confirmed when former CIA official Bill Young raised international funds for the formation of the United National Liberation Front after the 1962 military coup which overthrew U Nu. They had raised more than \$2 million by the end of 1970.

The contemporary political Buddhism which Burma

(renamed Myanmar in 1989) has to face today is different from the post-colonial political Buddhism of U Nu. It is undeniable that U Nu played a vital role in developing political Buddhism; but contemporary political Buddhism is far more conservative, xenophobic, nationalistic, and reactionary than the political Buddhism of U Nu. □



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Iraq: ferment from 2019 still simmers

By Nadia Mahmood

Nadia Mahmood of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq, in Baghdad, talked to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity about her perspectives for Iraqi politics

Our slogan is that this government has to go, and the regime be changed. There is no solution to problems including corruption and looting while this government remains, or under any government elected within this framework. Problems including corruption have remained and worsened under different governments. So we do not raise slogans about particular procedures or anything like that. The whole ethnic-sectarian power-sharing framework has to go.

To allow the creation of a real alternative, we need a different system of representation. We in the Worker-communist Party of Iraq call for people to organise themselves in local committees or councils. The example of the “resistance committees” in Sudan is a good one; and there is something similar being tried in Iran.

That would also allow you to undercut the sectarian nature of Iraqi politics. Unlike say fifteen years ago, many people in Iraq now speak against political Islam; and there is little enthusiasm for the idea of ethnic-sectarian political parties. Even back in 2015, in the protests then, hundreds of thou-

sands of people raised slogans like “In the name of religion the thieves have robbed us”. Then many Islamic political parties changed their names from religious to secular political ones. Yet these kind of parties still dominate the political system.

We are doing what we can to try to mobilise and organise people around the idea of people’s councils. It’s not easy. Some people still believe it will be enough to change this or that aspect of the constitution; others reject the whole system, but it’s still a leap from there to the idea of building councils. To many people, even people who are left-wing, the idea is still strange or alien.

The last big wave of protests was in 2019, which was really a popular uprising; but there are still smaller protests all the time. There are a lot of protests by young unemployed graduates, including from colleges linked to the oil industry who now cannot get jobs; also by teachers. The main demands are for the creation of jobs and services and against corruption. The situation that sparked previous protests has not changed, and I believe things could easily be triggered again.

There aren’t many strikes. The employed working class, for now, has its head down; I think a lot of people are relieved to have a job when there is mass unemployment and want to hold on to it. In addition those who affiliate with Islamic political parties have a bet-

ter chance of getting employed, for instance in the oil industry, so that shores up their support.

The challenges we faced is that people are very sceptical or even hostile to political parties, and that spills over to even left political parties, and even to the idea of ongoing political organisation. I would say the bigger problem is convincing people of thinking about different forms of political representation from the bourgeois parliamentary kind of political one. That is to represent people bottom-up through their councils or committees or any other forms of organisation. The good news, however, is that there are now really quite a lot of young people in Iraq who are sympathetic to socialism and even engaged with socialist and Marxist ideas. This is a new and obviously very positive development. We have discussions with some of them; but we have to convince them of ongoing socialist organisation.

Unfortunately, the protests in Iran have not had a big impact in Iraq, yet at least, despite or perhaps because people are so fed up with Iranian intervention in Iraq, of Iran’s links with Iraqi militias and so on. There are those who support Iran, of course, but also those who want Iran to go away. They say things like “It’s not our business; we have our problems that we need to deal with.” This is strange, as during protests people have raised slogans for

Iran to get out of Iraq. But there is not enough sensitivity toward what is happening in Iran. This neglect and indifference could be attributed to a Arab nationalist attitude against Iran.

However, when Iran’s football team refused to sing the national anthem in support of their people in Iran, Iraqis considered them as heroes and gloried in their protest against their government.

The Worker-communist Party and the Aman Women’s Alliance are the main organised forces making a big deal of the protests and arguing of course we should support this great movement in Iran, which could even topple the Islamic Republic. A change for the better in Iran can change the whole political environment in the Middle East. □

• See also *Solidarity* 654: Nadia Mahmood on government corruption in Iraq



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Citizens spurned by the UK

By Sacha Ismail

Jailed Egyptian democracy activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah, whose profile rose during COP27 because the summit was in Egypt and he is a UK citizen, is still alive. His family has finally been allowed to see him, and reports his hunger strike was broken by the regime, which forced him to take intravenous fluids. They revealed many harrowing new details of the most recent period of his decade behind bars.

There are over 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt’s jails.

The UK labour movement

should champion Abd el-Fattah’s release as part of renewed solidarity with the [working class in Egypt](#), which is a big target of the state’s repression.

The UK government is disinclined to challenge an important ally and trading partner, even over the life of one of its citizens. When a reporter at COP27 asked Rishi Sunak about Abd el-Fattah’s case, he literally ran away.

This is part of a wider trend, of the UK abandoning or repudiating citizens found inconvenient for different reasons (while it degrades the rights of much wider layers of citizens

at home in various ways).

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British Iranian held in Iran 2016-22 and not well served by Boris Johnson as foreign secretary or prime minister, has raised this issue recently both at a protest demanding freedom for Abd el-Fattah and one demanding freedom for [Jagtar Singh Johal](#).

Johal is a British citizen, a supporter of Sikh-Punjabi separatist politics, being held and tortured by the far-right government in India. Instead of championing his rights, the Tories have effectively collaborated with the Modi regime over the case. They

tried to extradite three other British Sikhs, the “West Midlands Three” to India, but were blocked by the [courts](#).

Then there is Shamima Begum, the former Daesh supporter whose [case](#) is currently being heard by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission. Although Alaa Abd el-Fattah’s activism seems good to us, and Begum’s bad, there are common issues.

The UK government has stripped Begum of citizenship. It argues she should go to her ancestral homeland Bangladesh, where she has never lived, even though the Bangladeshi government says

she is not welcome and could face the death penalty (for her association with Islamist terrorism, of which Bangladesh has decades-long experience).

Instances of “deprivation of citizenship” have surged, from none for many years before 2006 to 148 in 2017, 73 in 2018, 82 in 2019 and 42 in 2020. Last year’s Nationality and Borders Bill strengthened the government’s powers of deprivation. And research by the [New Statesman](#) found that while 5% of white UK citizens could be at risk from the new powers, the figure for ethnic minorities was 41%, including a majority of South Asians. □

The Tories and the



Interview

By Sue Himmelweit

Sue Himmelweit is a feminist economist, emeritus professor of economics at the Open University, and active with the Women's Budget Group. She talked to Martin Thomas from Solidarity.

Jeremy Hunt has called for a report on the increasing levels of "economic inactivity" among working-age people in the UK. I think what he's looking for ways to tighten up the conditionality in Universal Credit in order to get more people into the labour force.

Really the inquiry should be into the conditions under which people can get into the labour market.

There are a lot of people waiting for NHS treatment. You're unlikely to look for a new job if you're waiting for treatment that you think might be substantial.

The "economically inactive" may also be people looking after the people who are waiting for the treatment.

And among the new numbers not in poor health themselves, I suspect many are older women looking after grandchildren. Childcare may not be available, or just too expensive to make it worthwhile.

We have multiple crises coming to a head which stop workers being workers, which is, after all, what the system wants them to be.

Our childcare system is the most expensive in the OECD. And it's fully privatised. A huge number of childcare providers went bust in the lockdowns, and that wouldn't have happened in places with public sector childcare.

It seems to me a pretty fundamental problem if capitalism runs in such a way that people can't get to be workers. Government decisions are dominated by very globalised capital, not interested in the British working class, in the way that local industrial capital would be.

It's the working-out of the decline of the British Empire. Maybe this is what it felt like to be in Rome in the decline of the 5th century CE. The decline is happening faster because of Brexit and all sorts of stupid government policies. But it's a long-term decline that has to happen anyway.

More broadly, the British government was fairly successful in getting the rest of Europe into adopting its neoliberal policies (or the rest of Europe adopted



policies like that anyway). For similar reasons, the rest of Europe isn't far behind in that process of decline. But in Britain the biggest influences on the government is very mobile capital, which doesn't have a stake in the local working class. That may be less true of other European countries.

On adult social care, there were two aspects to the Johnson reforms. The main thing was subsidising care for a larger range of people. And a very small amount of it was going into improving the care sector.

Quite rightly, the Health and Care Select Committee pointed out that a lot of money is needed to improve the industry. Even if you wanted just to multiply up a really poorly performing industry, it wouldn't be possible to do, because it would be impossible to recruit the staff.

The Autumn Statement spent some money, not enough, on improvement, and none on the issue who's going to have to pay for it.

The way I would reform who pays for it wouldn't necessarily be the same as the Dilnot reforms of 2011.

But his original plan was quite a good one. Then the Tories mucked around

with it. They not only raised the cap on individual contributions, they also said that if you currently had subsidised help, none of that went into the cap. Thus it became simply a grant to people who needed care and owned more than £100,000 in property. What Dilnot designed wasn't a subsidy just to rich people, but that's what the Tories turned it into.

I would want to have a social care system free at the point of use. The Women's Budget group has written a [proposal](#) on that. It's very costly, but it's important for this essential kind of ser-

vice that it should be free at the point of use, and that we pay for it through general taxation, which is effectively a form of redistribution through the tax system, and not just amongst social care recipients, which the current system is.

The really urgent thing is doing something about the conditions of social care. We need more of it, we need better quality. And we need workers better treated, because without that you can't get the improved quantity and quality.

As to how it is organised, I think we need a huge variety of different solutions. I'm very much with the people who favour central funding, but it should be local delivery of care, including a range of housing and care solutions.

The emphasis on keeping people in their own homes rather than going into residential care has made residential care into something awful, just a place you go to die. And there's no reason it needs to be that.

In Australia, for example, there are lots of retirement villages which may have a care home in them. In France they have care homes in localities from which the domiciliary care workers go out. If somebody who is getting care at

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uncaring economy

home gets ill, they can move into the care home for a short time and then move back again and still be cared for by the same people. There are lots of much more imaginative solutions than just either being looked after home in isolation or being put into a collective warehouse.

Many of these imaginative solutions will come out of either the charitable organisations that look after people or local authorities, not top down from central government.

I would like to see care policy mainstreamed in the same way that people talk about equality policy being mainstreamed, so for every policy you think about its implications for care. That seems very crucial for housing in particular, and town planning.

There's been all this talk about what to do with the high streets? Put care centres in the high streets, so that, for example, people can come and visit them more easily, and you can run other care services from there.

I think regulations now say new-build houses must accommodate wheelchairs and things like that; we must make sure that that's really done properly.

It will be better if more is social housing. We also need think about ways of supporting owner-occupiers in adapting houses. And the private rented sector? I would abolish that. In the meantime, all this requires much larger resources for local government.

Just turning over the funding of social care to local authorities is a really bad idea, because it's the the poorest local authorities who have the greatest need and council tax is regressive while income tax isn't.

The big issue over the next couple of years is public sector pay. The cuts that have been brought in will mean unworkable services and failure to pay workers properly.

The crunch point for public services is going to be over pay. If the govern-



ment now fixes measly increases in funding and people's costs are rising, it means a labour shortage.

The people who want to do care work, do a really good job. They really don't want to be stacking shelves in Tesco instead. And we lose so much from them moving across to stacking shelves.

Things are going to get very bad. And I don't know if they're going to get bad quietly, or if they'll get bad noisily, with lots of protest.

There are good providers in social care; but those good providers are good despite having to make a profit rather than because of being part of a profit-making system. We want to be able to retain them. We need to think of new institutional forms which give them some of the autonomy that they have now, but keep them under a public sector umbrella.

In local government we need to build

up capabilities – through the cuts, local authorities have lost expertise in even the commissioning that is all that they currently do. But I'm sure that there must be good people currently working in the private sector who can be brought in.

Some younger adults receiving social care prefer a "market solution", to be given a pot of money so they can buy their care; I think that is a very low level ambition for the system even if at the moment these people feel and probably do better out of that.

It's important that those receiving care have some autonomy, but there are lots of other ways to do that besides the market: public sector or non-profit provision, with elements of good choice within them.

If the public sector offered good enough care which met people's needs and people felt was sort of personalised enough, then there wouldn't be that many people who wanted to go to the private sector. I would like to see the private sector just dwindling; private for-profit care is basically poor-quality care. I can't really see a necessary reason to stop people employing their own assistant. Nevertheless, over a process of building up good public care, I would hope to see the private sector fades away rather than is closed down.

With residential care, not so much with domiciliary care, we've seen private equity coming in just to extract profits. And the only way to make care more profitable is to treat workers worse, because it's so labour intensive.

They also use the buildings or the

land as collateral. And they become "too big to fail", so they have a lot of leverage.

The Boris Bill was going give everybody the right to ask for local authority care, in order to stop the two tier market that there is now at the moment, where self-funders are charged more to subsidise the care system because local authorities don't pay enough to cover the full cost of the care places they buy.

Private for-profit care costs a lot more than it needs to, and it's poor quality care because competition makes firms cut costs and you can't cut costs in care provision except by employing fewer workers and paying them less. It's not good for the workers, but it's also not good for care recipients.

The notion that the market will deliver choice doesn't work for care because decisions about care are usually made in a crisis where there isn't much choice; and after the crisis, the market doesn't work for delivering high quality care because people don't know about alternatives. Even if you think consumer sovereignty works in general for a market economy, it doesn't for care.

There is some advantage in having some grant-funded non-profit operators because they're innovative and they can specialize in particular sorts of care. The non-profits have got the expertise now that local authorities don't have any more. Even if that isn't true for care in general, it will be true for some specialised forms of care. □

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James Connolly, Ge

The war upon the German nation



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

At first James Connolly responded to World War One in line with the international socialist movement's Basle Manifesto of 1912, as we saw in our last instalments of this [series](#) on Connolly, in *Solidarity* 652 and 653. From late August 1914 he shifted to a pro-German stance in line with the previous writings of the *Irish Republican Brotherhood*.

Now that the first drunkenness of the war fever is over, and the contending forces are locked in deadly combat upon the battlefield, we may expect that the sobering effect of the reports from the front will help to restore greater sanity to the minds of the people.

There are thousands of Irish homes today from which, deluded by the foolish declaration of Mr. Redmond that Ireland was as one with the Empire in

this struggle, and the still more foolish and criminal war whoops of the official Home Rule press, there went forth sons and fathers to recruit the armies of England. If to those thousands of Irish homes from which the call of Mr. Redmond drew forth young Irishmen we add the tens of thousands of homes from which reservists were drawn, we have a vast number of Irish homes in which from this day forward gibbering fear and heartbreaking anxiety will be constantly present – forever present at the fireside, unbidden guests at the table, loathsome spectres in the darkness grinning from the pillows and the coverlet.

Each day some one of these homes, some days thousands of these homes will be stricken from the field of battle, and news will come home that this young son or that loving father has met his doom, and out there under a foreign sky the mangled remains, twisted, blown and gashed by inconceivable wounds will lie, each of them in all their ghastly horror crying out to Heaven for vengeance upon the political tricksters who lured them to their fate.

Poor and hunger-harassed as are the members of the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union, is there one of them who today has not a happier position and a clearer conscience than the so-called leaders of the Irish race, who are responsible for deluding into enlisting to fight England's battles the thousands of Irish youths whose corpses will ere many months be manuring the soil of a foreign country, or whose mangled bodies will be contemptuously tossed home to starve – a burden and a horror to all their kith and kin?

Read this report from the *Daily News and Leader* of the 25th inst. of the statement of an Alsatian peasant who saw some of the fighting in Alsace. He says:

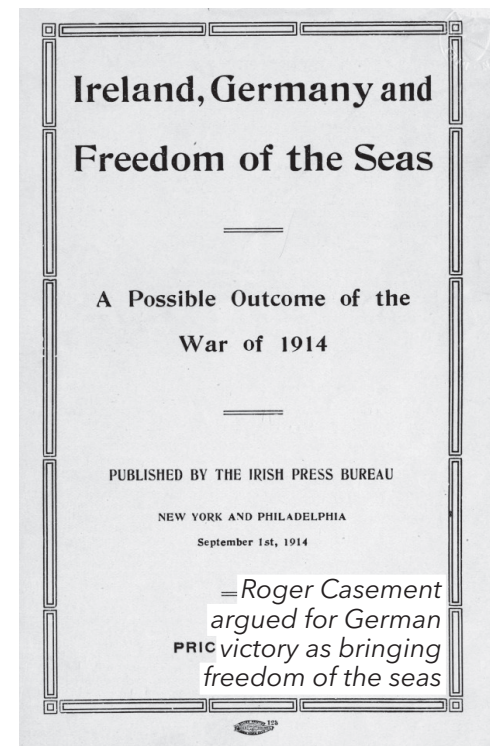
"The effects of artillery fire are terrific. The shells burst, and where you formerly saw a heap of soldiers you then see a heap of corpses or a number of figures writhing on the ground, torn and mutilated by the exploded fragments."

And when you have read that then think of the many thousands of our boys – for God help us and them, they are still our brave Irish boys though deluded into fighting for the oppressor – around whom such shells will be falling by day and by night for many a long month to come. Think of them,

and think also of the multitude of brave German boys who never did any harm to them or to us, but who rather loved us and our land, and our tongue and our ancient literature, and consider that those boys of ours will be busy sending shot and shell and rifle ball into their midst, murdering and mangling German lives and limbs, widowing humble German women, orphaning helpless German children.

Such reflections will perhaps open the way for the more sane frame of mind I spoke of at the beginning of this article. To help in clarifying the thought of our people that such sanity may be fruitful in greater national as well as individual wisdom, permit me, then, to present a few facts to those whose attitude upon the war has been so far determined by the criminal jingoism of the daily press. I wish to try and trace the real origin of this war upon the German nation, for despite all the truculent shouts of a venal press and conscienceless politicians, this war is not a war upon German militarism, but upon the industrial activity of the German nation.

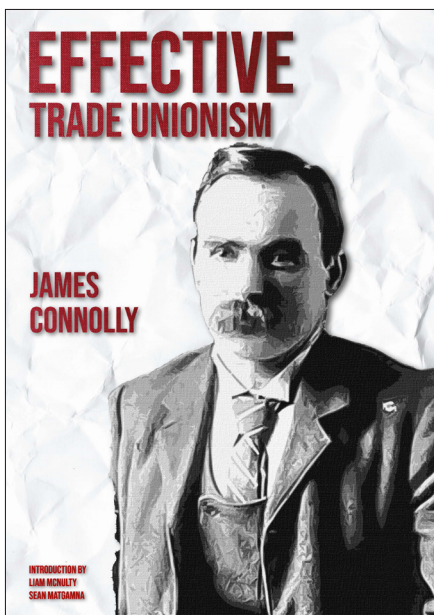
If the reader was even slightly acquainted with the history of industry in Europe he would know that as a result of the discovery of steam as a motive power, and the consequent development of machine industry depending upon coal, Great Britain towards the close of the eighteenth century began to dominate the commercial life of the world. Her large coal supply helped her to this at a time when the coal supply of other countries had not yet been discovered or exploited. Added to this was the fact that the ruling class of England by a judicious mixing in European struggles, by a dextrous system of alliances and a thoroughly unscrupulous use of her sea power was able to keep the Continent continually embroiled in war whilst her own shores were safe. Whilst the cities and towns of other countries were constantly the prey of rival armies, their social life crushed under the cannon wheels of contending forces, and their brightest young men compelled to give to warfare the intellect that might have enriched their countries by industrial achievements, England was able peacefully to build up her industries, to spread her wings of commerce, and to become the purveyor-general of manufactured goods to the civilised and uncivilised nations of the world. In her own pet phrase she



was "the workshop of the world," and other nations were but as so many agricultural consumers of the products of England's factories and workshops.

Obviously such a state of matters was grossly artificial and unnatural. It could not be supposed by reasonable men that the civilised nations would be content to remain for ever in such a condition of tutelage or dependence. Rather was it certain that self-respecting nations would begin to realise that the industrial overlordship by England of Europe meant the continued dependence of Europe upon England – a most humiliating condition of affairs.

So other nations began quietly to challenge the unquestioned supremacy of England in the markets. They began first to produce for themselves what they had hitherto relied upon England to produce for them, and passed on from that to enter into competition with English goods in the markets of the world. Foremost and most successful European nation in this endeavour to escape from thralldom of dependence upon England's manufactures stands the German nation. To this contest in the industrial world it brought all the resources of science and systematised effort. Early learning that an uneducated people is necessarily an inferior people, the German nation attacked the work of educating its children with such success that it is now universally admitted that the Germans are the best



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

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German warmonger

educated people in Europe. Basing its industrial effort upon an educated working class, it accomplished in the workshop results that this half-educated working-class of England could only wonder at. That English working class trained to a slavish subservience to rule-of-thumb methods, and under managers wedded to traditional processes, saw themselves gradually outclassed by a new rival in whose service were enrolled the most learned scientists co-operating with the most educated workers in mastering each new problem as it arose, and unhampered by old traditions, old processes or old equipment. In this fruitful marriage of science and industry the Germans were pioneers, and if it seemed that in starting both they became unduly handicapped it was soon realised that if they had much to learn they had at least nothing to unlearn, whereas the British remained hampered at every step by the accumulated and obsolete survivals of past industrial traditions.

Despite the long hold that England has upon industry, despite her pre-emption of the market, despite the influence of her far-flung empire, German competition became more and more a menace to England's industrial supremacy; more and more German goods took the place of English. Some few years ago the cry of "Protection" was raised in England in the hopes that English trade would be thus saved by a heavy customs duty against imported commodities. But it was soon realised that as England was chiefly an exporting country a tax upon imported goods would not save her industrial supremacy. From the moment that realisation entered into the minds of the British capitalist we may date the inception of this war.

It was determined that since Germany could not be beaten in fair competition industrially, it must be beaten unfairly by organising a military and

naval conspiracy against her. British methods and British capitalism might be inferior to German methods and German capitalism; German scientists aided by German workers might be superior to British workers and tardy British science, but the British fleet was still superior to the German in point of numbers and weight of artillery. Hence it was felt that if the German nation could be ringed round with armed foes upon its every frontier until the British fleet could strike at its ocean-going commerce, then German competition would be crushed and the supremacy of England in commerce ensured for another generation. The conception meant calling up the forces of barbaric powers to crush and hinder the development of the peaceful powers of industry. It was a conception worthy of fiends, but what do you expect? You surely do not expect the roses of honour and civilisation to grow on the thorn tree of capitalist competition – and that tree planted in the soil of a British ruling class.

But what about the independence of Belgium? Aye, what about it?

Remember that the war found England thoroughly prepared, Germany totally unprepared. That the British fleet was already mobilised on a scale never attempted in times of peace, and the German fleet was scattered in isolated units all over the seven seas. That all the leading British commanders were at home ready for the emergency, and many German and Austrian officers, such as Slatin Pasha, have not been able to get home yet. Remember all this and realise how it reveals that the whole plan was ready prepared; and hence that the "Belgium" was a mere subterfuge to hide the determination, to crush in blood the peaceful industrial development of the German nation. Already the British press is chuckling with joy over the capture of German trade. All capitalist journals in England boast

that the Hamburg-American Line will lose all its steamers, valued at twenty-millions sterling. You know what that means! It means that a peaceful trade built up by peaceful methods is to be struck out of the hands of its owners by the sword of an armed pirate. You remember the words of John Mitchel descriptive of the British Empire, as "a pirate empire, robbing and plundering upon the high seas."

Understand the game that is afoot, the game that Christian England is playing, and when next you hear apologists for capitalism tell of the wickedness of Socialists in proposing to "confiscate" property remember the plans of British and Irish capitalists to steal German trade – the fruits of German industry and German science.

Yes, friends, governments in capitalist

society are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the capitalist class. The British capitalist class have planned this colossal crime in order to ensure its uninterrupted domination of the commerce of the world. To achieve that end it is prepared to bathe a continent in blood, to kill off the flower of the manhood of the three most civilised great nations of Europe, to place the iron heel of the Russian tyrant upon the throat of all liberty-loving races and peoples from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and to invite the blessing of God upon the spectacle of the savage Cossack ravishing the daughters of a race at the head of Christian civilisation.

Yes, this war is the war of a pirate upon the German nation. □

• *Irish Worker*, Dublin, 29 August 1914

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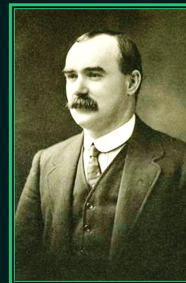
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Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
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The friends of small nationalities

By James Connolly

The "war on behalf of small nationalities" is still going merrily on in the newspapers. That great champion of oppressed races, Russia, is pouring her armies into East Prussia land offering freedom and deliverance to all and sundry if they will only take up arms on

her behalf – without undue delay. She is to be the judge after the war as to whether they did or did not delay unduly.

The Russian Socialists have issued a strong manifesto denouncing the war, and pouring contempt upon the professions of the Czar in favour of oppressed races, pointing out

his suppression of the liberties of Finland, his continued martyrdom of Poland, his atrocious tortures and massacres in the Baltic provinces, and his withdrawal of the recently granted parliamentary liberties of Russia. And to that again add the fact that the Polish Nationalists have warned the Poles against putting any faith in a man who

has proven himself incapable of keeping his solemnly pledged faith with his own people, and you will begin to get a saner view of the great game that is being played than you can ever acquire from the lying press of Ireland and England.

Of course, that should not blind you to the splendid

stand which the British Government, we are assured, is making against German outrages and brutality and in favour of small nationalities. The Russian Government is admitted by every publicist in England to be a foul blot upon civilisation. It was but the

continued on page 12 →

→ from page 11

other day that when the Russian Duma was suppressed by force and many of its elected representatives imprisoned and exiled, an English Cabinet Minister defiantly declared in public, in spite of international courtesies:

"The Duma is dead! Long live the Duma!"

But all that is forgotten now, and the Russian Government and the British Government stand solidly together in favour of small nationalities everywhere except in countries now under Russian and British rule.

Yes, I seem to remember a small country called Egypt, a country that through ages of servitude evolved to a conception of national freedom, and under leaders of its own choosing essayed to make that conception a reality. And I think I remember how this British friend of small nationalities bombarded its chief seaport, invaded and laid waste its territory, slaughtered its armies, imprisoned its citizens, led its chosen leaders away in chains, and reduced the new-born Egyptian nation into a conquered, servile British province.

And I think I remember how, having murdered this new-born soul of nationality amongst the Egyptian people, it signalled its victory by the ruthless hanging at Denshawai of a few helpless peasants who dared to think their pigeons were not made for the sport of British officers.

Also, if my memory is not playing me strange tricks, I remember reading of a large number of small nationalities in India, whose evolution towards a more perfect civilisation in harmony with the genius of their race, was ruthlessly crushed in blood, whose

lands were stolen, whose education was blighted, whose women were left to the brutal lusts of the degenerate soldiery of the British Raj.

Over my vision comes also grim remembrances of two infant and I look on the map in vain for them today. I remember that the friend of small nationalities waged war upon them – a war of insolent aggression at the instance of financial bloodsuckers. Britain sent her troops to subjugate them, to wipe them off the map; and although they resisted until the veldt ran red with British and Boer blood, the end of the war saw two small nationalities less in the world.

When I read the attempts of the prize Irish press to work up feeling against the Germans by talk of German outrages at the front, I wonder if those who swallow such yarns ever remember the facts about the exploits of the British generals in South Africa. When we are told of the horrors of Louvain, when the only damage that was done was the result of civilians firing upon German troops from buildings which those troops had in consequence to attack, I remember that in South Africa Lord Roberts issued an order that whenever there was an attack upon the railways in his line of communication every Boer house and farmstead within a radius of ten square miles had to be destroyed.

When I hear of the unavoidable killing of civilians in a line of battle 100 miles long in a densely populated country, being of, as it were, part of the German plan of campaign, I remember how the British swept up the whole non-combatant Boer population into concentration camps, and kept

it there until the little children died in thousands of fever and cholera; so that the final argument in causing the Boers to make peace was the fear that at the rate of infant mortality in those concentration camps there would be no new generation left to inherit the republic for which their elders were fighting.

This vicious and rebellious memory of mine will also recur to the recent attempt of Persia to form a constitutional government, and it recalls how, when that ancient nation shook off the fetters of its ancient despotism, and set to work to elaborate the laws and forms in the spirit of a modern civilised representative state, Russia, which in solemn treaty

with England had guaranteed its independence, at once invaded it, and slaughtering all its patriots, pillaging its towns and villages, annexed part of its territories, and made the rest a mere Russian dependency. I remember how Sir Edward Grey, who now gushes over the sanctity of treaties, when appealed to to stand by and make Russia stand by the treaty guaranteeing the independence of Persia, coolly refused to interfere.

Oh, yes, they are great fighters for small nationalities, great upholders of the sanctity of treaties!

And the Irish Home Rule press knows this, knows all these things that a poor workman like myself remembers,

knows them all, and is cowardly and guiltily silent, and viciously and fiendishly evil.

Let us hope that all Ireland will not some day have to pay an awful price for the lying attacks of the Home Rule press upon the noble German nation.

Let our readers encourage and actively spread every paper, circular, leaflet or manifesto which in these dark days dares to tell the truth.

Thus our honour may be saved; thus the world may learn that the Home Rule press is but a sewer-pipe for the pouring of English filth upon the shores of Ireland. □

• *Irish Worker*, Dublin, 12 September 1914

This 2022 xmas offer is a specially selected set of socialist publications on historic topics, especially good for gifting to friends and family, or for holiday reading. workersliberty.org/xmas-22-five



Scotland: yes to a referendum, no to raised borders

By Ann Field

The UK Supreme Court announced on 23 November that it had unanimously voted that the Scottish Parliament could not hold a referendum on Scottish independence without the agreement of the Westminster Parliament.

Legally, the judgement was crys-

tal-clear. And anything but surprising. Politically, though, the judgement resolves nothing.

It ignores the basic political and democratic right of nations to self-determination. It ignores the indisputable mandate which the Scottish National Party (SNP) gained in the 2021 Holyrood elections, and arguably even earlier, to hold a second referendum

on Scottish independence. SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon responded to the judgement by declaring her acceptance of it and promising that, in Scotland, the next general election would be a de facto referendum on Scottish independence. But no-one – least of all Sturgeon and the SNP – can explain what that actually means.

Scottish Labour responded to the

judgement by evasion. While maintaining opposition to the demand for Scottish independence, Scottish Labour could and should argue for a democratic devolution of the power to call a referendum to Holyrood. But like Labour at a national level, it is too busy chasing Tory voters to do that. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/ref-scot

Firefighters ballot 5 Dec to 23 Jan

By a firefighter

Firefighters in the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) voted to reject their employers' 5% pay offer by a 79% majority, on a 78% turnout. The FBU has now announced a 5 Dec – 23 Jan ballot for industrial action. A firefighter and FBU rep spoke to Solidarity.

The result in the referendum speaks for itself, it's a huge turnout with a huge majority to reject the offer. In the run-up, some people thought it was going to be closer than it was. But the outcome was clear. It shows there's a clear appetite for a fight.

There's obviously a focus now on preparing for the strike ballot from 5 December. The result isn't a foregone conclusion, but the strength of feeling demonstrated by the pay referendum makes us pretty confident we'll get the result we need. So we'll also be using the run-up to the ballot and the ballot period itself to discuss what kind of action we need to take to win.

We've started that discussion in union meetings with the various watches on my station already. There's a definite sense that if we're going to do this, we should do it properly. People are already talking about striking for several days, or a week, or even taking indefinite action. Proposals on programmes of action will be formulated and agreed in branch meetings in individual stations, which are the basic unit of union democracy. From there they can be sent up to the area organisation, then to the region, and then to the National Executive, which is the body which will ultimately make the decisions on if and when we strike, assuming we do get the ballot result we need.

One tactic also being discussed is hour-long strikes, which has been tried before. Following firefighters' pay strikes in 2002-3, the Blair government introduced new laws which mandated fire services to provide scab crews during strikes. These crews have to be hired for a flat fee, even if the strike

they're being hired to break only lasts an hour – it'll cost London £1 million a day. So the thinking is, if we strike for an hour, we only lose an hour's pay, but it puts financial pressure on the employer by making them shell out for these scab crews. I'm not fully convinced by this tactic, and the consensus in my station so far is that we should name sustained strikes as well or instead.

A potential issue in the dispute is what we're actually fighting for in terms of a pay increase. The union leadership's position is that it's the employer's responsibility to make us an offer, which will then be put to members, and it's for the members to decide what's acceptable. That sounds formally very democratic, but the problem with that is that allows the employer to set the pace. Indeed, that's why we're only beginning our strike ballot now, because the employer made a revised offer which was then put to consultation and referendum. Formulating an agreed pay demand amongst the membership

would ensure there's still a democratic process, but we could then pursue that demand proactively rather than responding reactively to employers' offers. Certainly we shouldn't be accepting any pay settlement that doesn't see our pay keep pace with inflation.

The question of coordination with other unions come up in the discussion a lot, and it's something people are very keen on. We're conscious that we're a small workforce, and we don't want our action to get "drowned out" by other, larger, strikes, but we also see ourselves as part of a wider fight against the Tory government.

As well as the general principles of working-class solidarity, we share an immediate industrial battle with other public sector workers to force the government to agree pay increases.

Coordinated strikes will increase the pressure on the government and make it more likely that we and other workers will get results. □

Universities to strike again in February

By Vicki Morris

Thursday 24 and Friday 25 November saw a national strike by University and College Union (UCU) members in Higher Education. A third day of strike is set for 30 November, with a national demonstration in London which will march to the office of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), the employers' representative in pay talks.

UCU is demanding "a meaningful pay rise to deal with the cost-of-living crisis as well as

action to end the use of insecure contracts and deal with dangerously high workloads". Many branches are also in dispute over cuts by employers to the USS pension scheme.

UCU says: "The UK university sector generated record income of £41.1bn last year with the 150 vice-chancellors facing action collectively earning an estimated £45 million...the sector can more than afford to meet staff demands."

While that is true, some institutions are struggling financially in the competitive world of HE. The industrial fight for

better pay must go alongside a political campaign for the marketisation of the sector to be reversed and for it to be generously funded as a public service, benefitting staff, students, and the wider community.

At 19 institutions the UCU branches were joined by their local Unison HE branch striking against the same 3% pay rise for 2022-23 that has been imposed on UCU.

A further 40 Unison HE branches will soon begin balloting to join the dispute, with the result due in early January.

Without a substantially better offer on pay and pensions for 22/23 and 23/24 it is likely that the next steps will be more national strike action in February by UCU and by those Unison branches with a mandate. UCU also has a campaign of Action Short of Strike.

The rest of the labour movement and students should build support for the HE strikers, and UCU and Unison activists should cooperate together with the aim of shutting down campuses on strike days. Activists also need to discuss what strategy can win – that is

likely to require escalating the action.

Meanwhile, at Birkbeck University of London the UCU, Unite and Unison branches are now formally in dispute with the employer over failure to agree to rule out no compulsory redundancies in a cost-cutting exercise necessitated by recent poor management decisions. □

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

BT: a flat-rate offer, but beware the detail

By Ollie Moore

The CWU is urging its members in BT, who last struck on 24 October, to accept a new offer on pay from BT management. The union says the deal includes "a £3,000 permanent increase" for the year 2022-3, with "a further review from 1 September 2023 to allow for further negotiations to resolve pay, grading and structuring issues."

The reality is more complex. The proposal is in fact for a further £1,500 flat-rate increase, payable from 1 January 2023, to which the CWU is adding the £1,500 increase BT already imposed for 2022-2023 to get the £3,000 figure. As the new rate is payable from January, rather than the new financial year

in April, BT workers will get three more months' pay packets at the higher rate than they would if it were paid from April.

The cumulative pay rise over the two years represents an increase of between six and 16% depending on grade.

Inflation

Pay rises formulated as flat-rate increases, which benefit lower-paid workers most, rather than percentage rises are certainly preferable. Unions in pay disputes should make specific demands for flat-rates equivalent to an above-inflation increase.

BT workers may also want to consider whether, having struck several

times on the basis that the imposition of a £1,500 increase for 2022 was unacceptable, it now makes sense to agree on the basis of a 2023 increase which does not improve on that amount. The £1,500 figure only represents an above-inflation increase for some BT workers. For others, it will see their pay fall behind inflation.

If the deal is accepted, the 1 September 2023 review day for the pay settlement means CWU members can launch a renewed fight for a further increase in less than a year's time, also seeking to ensure a pay rise is not made conditional on detrimental changes around grading and other conditions. □



More online

Political prisoners in Belarus
1,450, and the number continues to rise.

bit.ly/pp-brus

Reflections on the World Cup

Memories and musings from Len Glover

bit.ly/wc-qa

“What we stand for

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

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- 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

Leaves on the line, unwelcome plans



Diary of a Tube driver

By Jay Dawkey

While the weather is disturbingly mild, leaves are still falling from the trees and it is raining more often. The "wrong sort of leaves" can be just as detrimental as a failed signal or a defective train to a "good service".

When the leaves fall onto the track and it rains, the tannins in the leaves react with the water and they cling to the steel rails. There is some chemical reaction with iron, creating a slick surface so that wheels become like ice skates on ice. Some of the Tube stock

can deal with the conditions better than others.

If London Underground has to suspend a part of the line, that means trains cancelled, diverted or reversed somewhere earlier. The disembodied voice coming over the radio can be, if I am unlucky, the only person I speak to for an entire shift.

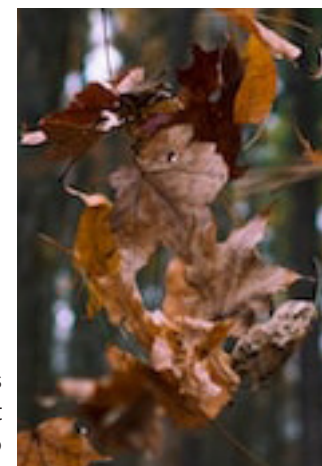
Drivers can be surrounded by people on the stations and on our train, but on the rare occasions when we might not need to make a public announcement to the passengers, and no one had to radio us, we get home and realise we didn't speak at all.

Combine that with anti-social hours and changing shifts, and you understand why some of us value the chance

to chat in the mess room or at picking-up points.

Some, of course, would rather be left alone, or be allowed to sleep, watch TV, perhaps read.

Over the last week management have started releasing their plans to change the way we work. There are no firm proposals, but in summary they want us to drive for longer, have less time to pick up, and where possible look at cross-line working. No driver can look at the outline and think it will make our job better, certainly not safer. It is added motivation to return our ballot and get back on the picket line. □



Stop the Public Order Bill!

By Mohan Sen

The enactment of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act in April was a serious blow against the right to protest. The Tories' new Public Order Bill, reviving the worst elements removed from the Police Act by the House of Lords, is more serious still.

There were some lively protests against the original law – but so far very little against the new one, which has already made its way through the House of Commons to the Lords. The left should speak up, advocating protest and looking for ways to mobilise it.

The introduction to briefings from

Justice, a campaign "for a fair, accessible, and equal justice system", [explains](#): "the Public Order Bill... would enhance an already problematic range of restrictions which can be imposed on individuals who take part in protests and raise concerns pursuant to the PCSC Act... the Bill would serve to give the police carte blanche to target protesters – similar laws can be found in Russia and Belarus."

Such comparisons are useful. At the same time, we should not spread the idea that protest is becoming impossible.

A new briefing on the Police Act from

Green and Black Cross and the Activist Court Aid Brigade [says](#) that the Act's effects are serious but it "does not, as many have claimed, make 'all protest illegal' nor does it mean you'll be imprisoned for 10 years for using a megaphone on a march or sharing a social media post. The main thing is to not panic..."

The briefing summarises what the PCSC does and does not say, and how activists can stay safe and minimise the impact of the law.

A big factor in the shortage of agitation about the Public Order Bill is that the Labour Party is staying silent. As part of seeking to mobilise the labour movement against the Bill, we should demand Labour speaks out, and makes a clear commitment to repeal all these laws. □



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

A football film? Not an easy choice: As a critic once put it, you either have footballers who can't act or actors who can't play football. The end-product is fairly predictable.

A good illustration is the ludicrous *Escape to Victory* (directed by John Huston, 1981) where a scratch team of World War 2 POWs (which for some inexplicable reason includes Pelé) take on a crack German team and force a draw while managing to escape their captors in the post-match chaos. It's

good for a laugh – and not much else – but was partly inspired by a much better Hungarian film *Two Half Times in Hell* (1961) directed by Zoltán Fábri, which was in turn inspired by a real life match between Ukrainian POWs and a Luftwaffe team in Kyiv on 9 August 1942.

The Ukrainians, calling themselves Start, beat the Nazis 5-3. It was actually a replay of an earlier game which the Ukrainians, most of them former players for Dynamo Kyiv and Lokomotiv, also won. Unfortunately, Fábri's film is hard to locate and has no English subtitles. Instead, have a look at Andy Dougan's excellent book, *Dynamo: Triumph and Tragedy in Nazi Occupied Kiev*. □

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Send ideas to the NDC!



**John Moloney, PCS
AGS (p.c.)**

Our union, PCS, is planning a series of selective strikes across several departments, including the Department for Transport, the Home Office, and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The aim here is to bring out sections of the membership that have particular industrial leverage for a sustained period.

We hope any day now to send in the strike notices, as we are legally bound to, under the anti-trade union laws. The National Executive Committee (NEC) meets on 7-8 December and may discuss the next phases of the strike programme.

The National Disputes Committee (NDC), a sub-committee of the NEC, now meets weekly. Any branch or group committee can submit proposals on strike strategy to this committee. We need the widest debate on what action to take so I'd encourage branches or groups to discuss the kind of strategy they want, including making the case that they should be called out on strike, and send it to the NDC.

The NEC has already agreed in principle that we will be increasing union dues, with the increase ring-fenced for the strike fund. Our policy is to pay full strike pay, so no members taking selective action should lose any money.

I'm pleased the union has agreed to utilise selective action, something others and I (when I was a lay member) in the Independent Left argued for. However, we argued, and I still believe, that such action must be in conjunction with as much all-out action as can be delivered.

Therefore I hope that the NEC will agree all-out strikes. Given the votes on the NEC, that will probably only happen in the New Year.

Alongside the national dispute, local and departmental disputes are continuing. Workers in the court service will strike in December against the imposition of the "Common Platform" system, a new piece of workplace software which the employer is using as a pretext for job cuts, even though the system increases workload rather than reducing it. And at BEIS, outsourced workers employed by Aramark and ISS have won an 11% pay increase following the threat of strikes. It's important the union continues to empower these local disputes as the national fight continues. □

Nurses to strike 15 and 20 December

By Kelly Rogers

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has called its first strike dates, on 15 and 20 December, kicking off what will hopefully be a string of NHS strikes.

176 Trusts across the UK crossed the threshold in the strike ballot and have a legal mandate for action. Of those that got over the line in England, less than half will be taken out on strike in December. The union is in the process of establishing strike committees which will, among other things, determine derogations: the members that will be exempt from action and asked to keep a minimum service running. This is a very important decision – derogating too many staff will undermine the efficacy of the strike. But some are concerned that derogating too few, or even matching day-to-day (and often unsafe) rosters, will give Trusts ammunition down the line to keep wards spread too thin. The committees will have RCN staff, local reps and lay members sitting on them, and they – not

RCN HQ – will make decisions about the running of the strikes. This is good, but it only comes after the decision of which Trusts will see strikes has already been made centrally; taking that crucial decision out of members' hands.

Fears about RCN staff capacity have led to it "focusing resources"; it will bring only a portion of the 176 Trusts out on strike. Thousands of nursing staff being told that they're not needed in this round of strikes, after the significant battle to get yes votes in their ballots, risks demobilising and demoralising members that have very recently been moved to action.

The RCN is also concerned about its image in these strikes. It has told its members that it wants to maintain a "sombre" aspect on the picket line; that the impression members should give is that they're "sad" that the strikes are happening at all.

While it's reasonable to expect members to be respectful when sick or injured members of the public are going past in emergencies, a funeral party

doesn't seem like the right mood to strike either.

Striking can and should be an empowering experience, and having a crotchety picket supervisor take away any Father Christmas hats on show, will likely be quite jarring for members who have built themselves up for two days on the picket lines with their colleagues.

Fortunately, that's exactly the kind of thing that can't be policed – and the picket lines, at least, will be where the strike is in control of the members. □

• Unison, a bigger NHS union, ended its pay-action ballot for NHS staff on 25 Nov, but we don't know the results yet. Action ballots for GMB ambulance workers in 11 Trusts close on 29 Nov, and for Unite ambulance workers 30 Nov. Unite is currently balloting a "second wave" of NHS workers, with results due late December, and says it will ballot further "waves". More on union responses in Scotland and N Ireland at bit.ly/u-coord

ScotRail deal accepted



Off The Rails

RMT members on ScotRail have voted by a 67.7% majority to accept a new settlement on terms and conditions. The deal comprises a five percent pay increase, plus an additional payment of £750. The minimum rate of pay has been increased to £10.50 per hour, and ScotRail has extended a no compulsory redundancies guarantee from five to six years.

The 32% of RMT members who voted to reject the deal and return to strikes were right to do so. This pay increase is still well below inflation, meaning ScotRail workers' pay will fall significantly behind rising living costs. More worryingly, as we reported previously:

"... the deal comes with unacceptable strings. This includes unconditional acceptance of new technology ScotRail wants to introduce, including making the company mobile device and apps a mandatory part of working equipment. There's a worrying lack of clarity around what this would mean in practice, but it's likely to lead to mobile booking on and off, and potentially to the company tracking staff movements via GPS. It

could also expedite ticket office closures and job cuts, as the company could argue one 'roaming' person with an iPad can now replace several people in a staffed ticket office.

"The company's offer also contains no guarantees on potential ticket office closures, which, following trends in the rest of the industry, ScotRail is sure to launch once the pay dispute is settled. Plus, the deal talks about workers needing to accept 'flexibility of rostering arrangements', language which is never good news for work/life balance."

RMT recommended that members accept the deal. Following acceptance, Mick Lynch and other union officials are highlighting the deal as an example of what could be achieved if employers "behaved reasonably", suggesting it could be a model for a settlement in the national dispute. This is a dangerous approach; unions should not readily accept offers that tie pay increases to acceptance of worse terms and conditions. □

More online from Off the Rails:

- Rail for London workers vote to strike bit.ly/rfl-strike
- RMT plans national strike as cleaners vote for action bit.ly/clean-bal

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

CWU presses Royal Mail harder

By Ollie Moore

Royal Mail postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) struck again on 24 and 25 November, with further strikes set for 30 November and 1, 9 and 11 December.

Despite some frustration with perceived recent missteps by the union, that led to a series of previously planned strikes being called off, the action has remained solid and impactful, and the dates called in December represent an attempt to use postal workers' industrial leverage at a crucial time of the year. Royal Mail attempted to use private couriers from the Ryde app to help break the strike, but a number of Ryde couriers refused to cross CWU picket lines.

The CWU's fight consists of two disputes being fought in parallel, one over pay, and another over terms and conditions. The union ran two separate ballots. Royal Mail are determined to link any pay rise to acceptance of changes to terms and conditions, which include massive job cuts and a move towards what the union has called a "gig economy" model, which Royal Mail believes is necessary to compete with app-based courier companies. Many postal workers say the fight over terms and conditions is of greater immediate significance than the fight over pay.

The union has insisted it is not opposed to all potential change within Royal Mail. A recent letter from CWU leader Dave Ward to Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson stated that the union had "put forward an alternative plan" for the future of the company in negotiations at conciliation service Acas. The letter says the union will be sending its plan directly to the other members of the Royal Mail board.

CWU activists say the union's counter-proposals have been read out to members at gate meetings and are posted on union notice boards. Some are straightforward, such as a demand for no compulsory redundancies. Others, like the call for an "alternative vision and strategy" for Royal Mail are vaguer.

Any such plan should be the result of democratic discussion and decisions at the rank-and-file level of the union, rather than something into which only full-time officials or the Executive have had input. And negotiating officials should not

make or agree specific proposals for changes to working conditions that rank-and-file members have not scrutinised and approved.

The CWU regularly poses the dispute in terms of postal workers needing to "stand by their union", figuring the union as something external to the workers, and whose efforts on their behalf they need to support. As strikes continue through December, socialists and other rank-and-file radicals in the CWU need to fight for a different conception, one in which rank-and-file workers themselves determine the direction, demands, and strategy for the dispute. □

"Strings attached to pay offer are unacceptable"

A postal worker and CWU activist spoke to Solidarity

The strikes remain solid at my workplace. Of around 550, only around 30 went in [on 24/25 Nov]. There is frustration around the lack of progress in the dispute, but that is translating into an ongoing resolve to keep fighting.

We've now had proposals for a local realignment of duties, which would lead to 66 jobs going. We discussed this at a gate meeting today (29 Nov). Previously, we'd been negotiating around proposals for a restructure that would have actually increased the headcount. But it's clear Royal Mail management wants to impose cuts.

The union's position is communicated to members via gate meetings. CWU's demands include a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, a joint review of the sick pay policy rather than imposed changes, and the removal of Royal Mail's proposals for annualised hours. Overall we want an understanding that any changes will be negotiated rather than imposed. The union has also said we want an "alternative vision and strategy" for the company.

Of course we want an above-inflation pay increase too, but many workers feel more strongly about the terms and conditions element of the dispute. Royal Mail says their pay offer equates to nine percent; that's not really the case, but even if it was a real nine percent, the strings attached to it, in terms of job cuts and changes to our working conditions, are simply unacceptable. □

Iran: from uprising to revolution?

By Ruth Cashman

Atatollah Khomeini, Iran's first supreme leader, once said: "If the Islamic revolution is to have no other result than the veiling of women, then that is enough..."

The concept of female modesty, whether motivated by women as tempters, or as requiring protection, is inseparable from the segregation and subordination of women.

The compulsory hijab is a visible sign of the oppression of women in Iran but not its totality. There are no legal protections against domestic violence, sexual harassment, unequal pay, or discrimination in work. Women are banned from riding bikes, or singing or dancing in public. 30% of Iranian murders are so-called "honour killings" of women and girls.

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

Iran has seen an uprising that may yet become a revolution. But the Islamic Republic meets resistance with enormous violence, Hundreds of people, including children, have been killed in government crackdowns, thousands arrested. To continue to protest despite the enormous risks is profoundly brave.

But in London, as in many European cities, the protests in solidarity have been dominated by monarchists wanting return to the rule of a Shah. We owe to our Iranian, sisters, brothers and comrades not just our solidarity but our politics. Protests need demands on top of "down with the regime".

These may include:

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

Free assembly, free press and freedom for trade unions;

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

The right of Kurdish self-determination.

Fight for a secular republic. Republic, to distinguish us from those who want to replace one type of undemocratic rule by another. Secular because religion must be a personal matter.

I know the comrades in Hekmatist parties favour the slogan all power to the councils. Were

there workers' councils with local power across Iran, they would indeed be a truer, a more organic, democracy than any parliament, but there are no councils of that sort, and the starting point of socialist politics is telling the truth.

Strikes were instrumental in 1978-9. Iran has a tradition of unions. In Kurdistan province, where Mahsa Amini came from, the bazaars have had some of the biggest strikes in that region's history, with shopkeepers closing their stores several times over the past two months.

But workers in the crucial oil, gas and petrochemical sectors and other big industry have yet to strike in significant number. More than 200,000 people work in the oil sector alone. We have seen some strikes, but the hoped-for wave has not yet appeared. It is hard to imagine workers' councils emerging, ready for power, without that rise in workers' organisations also being expressed in mass strikes.

So maybe the political demands now are for a constituent assembly and for building working-class organisation. We need Independent working-class representation in politics.

Iranian authorities, as part of an effort to silence dissent, have increased wages, boosting the pay of civil servants, soldiers and pensioners by up to 20%. State-affiliated charity organisations have increased the monthly allowance they give to poor families by 30 per cent. Public sector workers had already receive pay rises of around 60% this year, above inflation of over 40%. These are attempts to buy loyalty to the regime. Bosses reportedly paid out delayed wages just one day before sugar-cane workers were to begin their strikes.

The regime knows that if workers' economic demands unite with political demands on the streets, that could make the movement even more powerful.

Democracy would enable Iran's wealth to be used to provide free healthcare and education.

One in three Iranians live below the official poverty line of \$200 per month. Workers need a guarantee of employment and a minimum wage.

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

• Abridged from a speech at All The Rage, our socialist feminist conference on 26 November.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

OPEN THE BORDERS!

By Ben Tausz

After weeks of outrage and [protests](#), the detention camp at Manston, Kent was emptied on 22 November. Thousands of asylum seekers had been imprisoned in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, many for far longer than the legal limit. One detainee died. The camp now resumes as a short-term processing centre. But the situation could easily reverse.

Manston was just one head of a hydra: the racist system of brutality and exploitation against migrants. We [learned](#) on 27 November that the Home Office put asylum-seeking children at risk by classing them as adults contrary to their identity documents. And that one year ago, French and UK authorities left 27 people to drown while arguing over which country's waters they were in.

Suella Braverman promises even more repressive measures against irregular Channel crossings. I wrote in *Solidarity* [653](#) that the ever-escalating crack-down simply pushes desperate people toward riskier routes and drives up profits for smugglers. It also serves to stir a far-right core for whom no amount of racist violence can suffice.

New statistics, showing net immigration of 504,000 in a year, will surely further incense those racists. Though this peak



*Labour Campaign
for Free Movement*

is a blip due to loosening pandemic travel restrictions and a return to in-person study (the biggest group of arrivals were students), we can be glad the Tories again failed their promise to repress migration to five-figure levels.

Yet, after the end of (limited) free movement rights, even more of those arrivals are subject to visa conditions that empower employers, landlords and abusers.

Capitalists at the CBI conference expressed frustration with the government's excessive restrictions. But their demand is for more work visas. These condition working-class people's right to move on being useful to capitalists, and put their right to stay at the mercy of particular employers or industries.

Nor can we sympathise with university bosses who object to curbs on international students because they cut off a lucrative cash cow – we demand universal free education.

Against a government consolidating its base via murderous "vice signalling", and capitalists wanting to tweak anti-migrant

policies to improve profits, our answers are freedom and solidarity. We say, open the borders: restore and extend free movement, and create safe routes for people fleeing persecution and violence.

Yet, at this crucial, dangerous time, the Labour leadership doubles down on its amoral, cowardly, futile strategy of pandering to xenophobia. Starmer refuses even the pro-business path of backing employers' demands, let alone to uphold the free movement policies voted through by party conference and pledged by him in his leadership bid.

Instead, his rhetoric falsely pits workers against each other. Rather than attack the government's barbarity, his deputies Reeves and Cooper mainly complain that it should implement its barbarity more competently.

Affiliated unions have barely protested this fundamental betrayal. The union bureaucracies' own histories on this are mixed at best. The tasks fall to the grassroots of the labour movement: to organise solidarity directly; to patiently persuade others in our workplaces and communities; and to fight to transform the policies of our unions and our party. □

• Ben Tausz is a member of the [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#), writing here in a personal capacity