

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

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SOLIDARITY TO SAVE THE NHS

Strike wave rises in December

Rail, mail, civil service, action in NHS, and more

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Solidarity to save the NHS!



The pay battle now opening in the National Health Service is central for two reasons.

It involves many workers. The NHS, with [1.6 million](#) workers, is by far the largest employer in the UK, and one of the largest in the world.

The pay battle is inseparable from the battle to rescue and restore the NHS as a public service freely available to all.

Cuts in real pay, increasing job stress, and almost three years of extra stress from Covid, have left the NHS with [130,000](#) jobs unfilled in England alone. It is [12% short](#) of nurses, 7% short of doctors.

Those shortages have combined with similar but worse shortfalls in social care (165,000 workers short) and underinvestment in buildings and equipment to create ballooning waiting lists for everything considered non-emergency.

Long waits are now routine even for emergency care: ambulances park outside hospitals waiting to get patients admitted, and are often unavailable to go to emergencies.

The call for decent pay for NHS and care workers, for repair of NHS budgets, and for reversing privatisation within the NHS, concerns not only NHS workers but the whole working class.

The government says there are no resources to pay NHS workers more. But top bosses' pay has gone up 23% in 2022. The "luxury goods" market (ultra-expensive watches, jewellery, clothes, etc.) expanded about 20% in the first half of 2022.

Next year the government will spend £100 billion (almost as much as the total NHS England budget) on debt service for big capitalist operators who hold government bonds (IOUs). It is spending £6.5 billion on bailing out the failed energy retailer Bulb, and £60 billion to April 2023 in a form of household energy-bill relief weak in helping the worst-off but which secures vast profits (maybe £170 billion next year) for the varied hundreds of firms in the energy industry.

The government refuses to tax wealth, or to tax capital gains at the same rate as wage income.

There are plenty of resources. The question is, who will get them?

This whole wave of strikes is a class battle. In the backwash from the Covid lockdowns, will the profiteer class be

able further to squeeze and stretch the working class, and pauperise public services? Or will the working class be able to forge a new solidarity, sustaining the worse-off, defending and

levelling up job conditions, restoring public services, remaking ourselves as a power capable of pushing back the profiteers? □

Beat the freeze

As the weather gets colder, higher energy bills are biting. Maybe [10,000](#) households across Britain are being added to the 4.3 million already on pre-payment meters.

Pre-payment means that you get no electricity or gas if you run out of cash one week, while with direct debit you incur debt but will not be cut off. It is more expensive, and loads the cost onto colder months rather than spreading it over the year. Energy firms can switch households on smart meters to pre-payment remotely, without having to send out an engineer.

People on pre-payment meters are dependent on vouchers to get government relief payments, while households on direct debit get the money deducted directly from their bills. Over a quarter of vouchers issued for October and November have not been cashed in: many have probably gone astray.

The labour movement should back fuel campaigners' call for an immediate stop to switches to pre-payment.

In France there are [no pre-payment meters](#). Households with large debts are instead throttled back to a minimum (an inadequate one) of energy supply.

Public ownership of the whole energy industry, allowing energy supply at average cost rather than "marginal cost" (set by the most expensive generators, i.e. imported gas), plus an adequate free basic minimum of energy per household (the New Economics Foundation has sketched a [scheme](#)), would stop the suffering without counterproductive subsidies to fossil-fuel consumption. Or, it would as long as combined with an effective drive for at least £20 extra on Universal Credit, general increases in wages and benefits, and an end to benefit cut-offs under "conditionality". □

Solidarity versus squandering



By Martin Thomas

Karl Marx wrote of capitalism "enforcing economy in each individual business", while "on the other hand, [it] begets, by its anarchical system of competition, the most outrageous squandering of labour-power and of the social means of production, not to

mention the creation of a vast number of employments, at present indispensable, but in themselves superfluous".

He further wrote of its "shameful squandering of human labour-power for the most despicable purposes", notably through overdriving workers by bullying us, atomising us, and setting us to compete against each other.

Capitalism promotes technology. It has made us able to produce what we need, and enough to fulfill new needs too

(books, phones, computers for the majority who in previous modes of production would not have been literate) with less labour, and less heavy, dirty, dangerous labour. In that respect it lays the foundation for socialism, for "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need".

In Marx's day much human labour-power was "squandered" in people being domestic servants (more numerous, Marx reckoned, than factory workers). Today much

is squandered on the "luxury goods" industries and in marketing and sales (about a million jobs in the UK) – i.e. effort directed to get people to buy this variant rather than that, and sometimes to buy what they scarcely need at all. Each year [50 billion](#) items of clothing (six for each person on the planet) are thrown away within a year of being made.

Capitalist production also "squanders" nature. It proceeds with little regard to the despoiling effect of its pro-

cesses and waste by-products on nature. Marx didn't know about climate change, but he was alert to the "squandering" of the soil in capitalist agriculture.

Capitalism squanders nature and human labour-power for frenzied profiteering and ultra-consumption. Socialism means democratic regulation of the directions of investment and production, guided by social estimates of need, coupled with workers' control of how production is done. □

Developing the logic of the strike struggle now

By Martin Thomas

There is talk of a "general strike" on 1 February: simultaneous strikes by many groups of workers in dispute.

That will be a step forward, especially if combined with demonstrations, rallies, and visits of different groups of workers to each others' picket lines.

But... but two things. Why not that "general strike" in December, when many groups of workers will strike on

different days? There is a big day on 15 December, but mostly unions are still not coordinating even within, let alone across, industries.

And why the assumption that current disputes will jog along, a few strike days here, a few there, to February, and longer? History suggests that strikes are most likely to win when sharp, intense, and escalating, and therefore short.

Accelerate, unite, spread the strikes! Among strike supporters more than

inside the unions, some call for "a general strike". This means, presumably, an indefinite general strike, not just a one-day action (a good protest gambit, but commonplace in many countries).

Yet there is no push yet within the unions even for all-out indefinite action in individual disputes. As of yet, the call for a full general strike is essentially a call for *someone else* (the TUC?) to leapfrog workers over our difficulties. And a demagogic one. As

we said of demagogic "general strike" calls by some in 1992, if the TUC were tomorrow, by some sudden change of mind, to call a general strike, then low workers' confidence in the TUC would mean the call would probably not be followed.

That was different in 1926, or in the 1970s or early and mid 1980s. Today what Trotsky called the "logic of class struggle" passes through accelerating, uniting, and spreading the strikes. □

December will be full of strikes

By Ollie Moore

Almost every day in the month of December will see workers somewhere in Britain on strike. Many of those days will see widespread action across several sectors. Some days will see rail workers, postal workers, nurses, civil servants, bus drivers, and others striking at the same time.

There are increasing opportunities to begin uniting the strikes in a meaningful way, calling joint rallies and, most importantly, building cross-union strike committees, linked to local Trades Councils, to provide forums for ongoing rank-and-file discussion and coordination.

Trades Councils in Southwark, Lambeth, and Islington in London have taken steps in this direction, organising meetings with rank-and-file speak-

ers from various strikes to discuss the disputes. In Southwark and Lambeth, local "Solidarity Groups" have also emerged, backed by the Trades Councils, which coordinate mobilisation to support picket lines. Building ongoing organisation out of local rallies is vital. Although ad hoc committees and solidarity groups cannot take decisions that will immediately affect the direction of any strike, they can be spaces where workers discuss and develop strategies that they can then take up and fight for within the democratic structures of their respective unions.

The strike wave continues to spread into private sector workplaces, and draw in outsourced (privatised) workers in the current and former public sector. December will see strikes by privatised refuse workers in Wirral, food factory workers in Rochdale, outsourced clean-

ers and security guards on the railways, Arrow XL delivery drivers, Greene King brewery workers, and others. For many years, the public sector (education, local government, civil service, health) and privatised, formerly public services (post, rail, BT) have been justifiably considered the bastions of trade unionism. Now private sector workers are deciding that they, too, can take action.

Some other recent developments in the strike wave signal dangers. The leadership of the Communication Workers Union is urging its members in BT, who have struck several times, to accept a £1,500 flat-rate pay increase for 2022-23. This is exactly the same amount as BT imposed for 2021-22, triggering the CWU's dispute. Although many BT workers had informally pushed 10 percent as a minimum pay demand, the dispute had no official, concrete demand around pay. The lack of a specific demand gives union officials too much leeway to determine when strikes should be suspended and offers recommended.

On ScotRail, RMT members have accepted a below-inflation pay offer tied to changes to terms and conditions. Even the vague, non-specific demand RMT normally makes in pay disputes – for a "substantial above-inflation pay rise" has not been met. But RMT leaders are now trumpeting the deal as an example of what is possible when employers "behave reasonably".

Although the immediate changes ScotRail wants to make are less drastic than those proposed by Network Rail and the other Train Operating Companies against whom RMT is fighting its national dispute, tying a pay increase to any worsening of terms and conditions sets a troubling precedent.

As disputes continue and negotiations drag on, union officials come under material pressure to see the talks themselves as the terrain on which the dispute will be settled, with strikes seen only as a bargaining chip for negotia-

tors to play. To counter that pressure, rank-and-file activists must fight for negotiations to be opened up as much as possible.

The practice of "open bargaining", relatively common in the US labour movement but almost unheard of in Britain, provides one model for ensuring the voice of the strike itself is heard at the negotiating table. Failing this, we can seek to replicate the action taken by striking UCU members on 30 November, who marched to the building where negotiations were taking place and demonstrated outside – apparently in defiance of the wishes of some national officials.

Contrary to the conservative orthodoxy of some sections of the labour movement, negotiations can and should take place whilst strikes are happening: action does not have to be suspended "to allow talks to take place". It is direct action by workers that is the mechanism for winning change. Negotiations are the process by which elected union representatives can convey the demands of that action to employers, with the voices of the rank and file strikers – figuratively, and, wherever possible, literally – at their backs. □

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

5-9 Dec: Greene King brewery workers (Unite) strike

5-10 Dec: Wirral council refuse workers (Unite) strike

5-10 Dec: Mizkan Euro food factory workers (Unite) strike

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

7-8 Dec: Secondary school teachers in Scotland (SSTA and NASUWT) strike

8 Dec: Arrow XL delivery drivers (Unite) strike

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

8-10 Dec: Teachers at Truro and Penwith College (UCU and NEU) 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

12 Dec: Northern Ireland health workers strike

12-16 Dec: Mizkan Euro food factory workers in Rochdale (Unite) strike

From 13 Dec, various dates through Dec and Jan: Rolling action by Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and Rural Payments Agency workers (PCS) – details bit.ly/pcs-firstwave

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

13-14 Dec: Workers at Avanti West Coast (TSSA) strike

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

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

15 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike

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

16-17 Dec: Bus drivers strike at 6 Abellio garages in S/W London (Unite)

16-17 Dec: Workers at various mainline TOCs (RMT) strike

16-17 Dec: Workers at Avanti West Coast (TSSA) strike

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

16 and 18 Dec: Eurostar security guards (RMT) strike

17 Dec: Rail workers at Network Rail and several TOCs (TSSA) strike

20 Dec: Nurses (RCN) strike

21 Dec: Ambulance workers and some hospital workers (Liverpool) strike (GMB, Unite, Unison)

22-23 Dec: Eurostar security guards (RMT) strike

22-23 Dec: Rail cleaners (RMT) strike

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

24-27 Dec: Network rail strike (RMT)

28 Dec: Ambulance workers strike (GMB)

31 Dec: Rail cleaners (RMT) strike

3-4 Jan: Workers at various mainline TOCs (RMT) strike

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

6-7 Jan: Workers at various mainline TOCs (RMT) strike

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

10-12 Jan: Teachers at Truro and Penwith College (UCU and NEU) strike

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

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

Ballots

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

Until 16 Dec: Amazon warehouse workers in Coventry ballot (GMB)

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 □



Upcoming meetings

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

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

Saturday 10 December, 1pm: Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong demonstration in support of Foxconn workers in China. Apple store, 235 Regent Street, London W1B 2EL

2pm: London Protest for human rights, democracy and freedom in China, Chinese embassy, 49 Portland Pl, W1B 1JL

Thursday 15 December, 7.30pm: North London Workers' Liberty: Strike waves in British history. Menard Hall, Galway St, EC1V 3SW

Sunday 8 January, 11.am: 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 □



Morning Star on China protests



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In the wake of ten deaths in a fire in Xinjiang province – deaths, it is widely believed, that could have been avoided if Covid ultra-lockdown had not prevented escape or rescue – Chinese people took to the streets across the country, especially over the weekend of 26-27 November.

Some protesters borrowed the words of a lone man who hung a banner over a bridge in Beijing just before the Chinese Communist Party's recent congress: "Democracy not dictators; citizens not slaves". Many held up blank pieces of paper – a wordless, silent protest.

Most media gave these events large and rapid coverage. But the *Morning Star* stayed silent until Tuesday 29 November. Then, an editorial urged readers to "look at the bigger picture"

(i.e. China's low covid death rate) and warned that "Western reportage is misleading." [*]

Particular ire was directed at the BBC for allegedly implying that the protests were "on a far larger scale than is actually the case: just as in 2019 when riots in Hong Kong received blanket coverage while far more serious police violence against the Yellow Jackets in France was downplayed."

This is a quite extraordinary and outrageous claim: whatever view one takes of the Yellow Jackets (and plenty of leftists did not share the *Morning Star's* uncritical enthusiasm at the time) they were not risking death and lengthy prison terms like the Hong Kong protesters, let alone Chinese protesters facing fascist-level repression.

In a level of desperation that must mark a new low, even for the *Morning Star*, the editorial attempts to deny the social media, photographic and film evidence that at least some protesters were raising broader political demands than just opposition to lockdown, claiming that slogans had been mis-translated: "'jiefeng' (lift the lockdown)

has been rendered 'jiefang' (liberate)".

In a further near-obscenity the editorial goes on to claim that "calls to loosen Covid restrictions in Xingjiang have been portrayed as calls to 'free Xingjiang' to reinforce Western claims of Chinese oppression in the region" (the paper has a long history of denying or justifying the well-documented persecution of the Uyghurs in that region).

In a final, desperate bid, to defend the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese ruling class, the editorial declares "the fact remains that by comparison with Britain or any other Western country, China's [zero-Covid] strategy has saved millions of lives." In fact, most "western" media have frequently and repeatedly compared China's death toll favourably with that of (in particular) the United States – even though the official Chinese statistics are almost certainly a gross underestimate of the actual death rate.

The *Morning Star* will not acknowledge that the development of effective vaccines in the west and the emergence of Omicron and other variants

have rendered "zero-Covid" obsolete and unworkable. It is maintained apparently only to protect the authority of Xi Jinping. Other countries able to shut their borders almost completely (New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan...) recognised that long ago and moved to reopen on the basis of wide and effective vaccination. (The *Morning Star* recommended "zero Covid" for Britain, where it was not operable because of more porous borders and smaller state surveillance and policing capacities.)

The "zero-Covid" policy is now economically ruinous for China. It is increasingly unpopular and has left the population (the elderly especially) vulnerable to new waves of infection. But the *Morning Star* (controlled by the Communist Party of Britain) refuses to recognise any of this and continues with its blind adulation of the authoritarian ruling class of China, with its fascist-level repression. □

[*] There is a little mystery surrounding this editorial: it seems it appeared online on Sunday 27 November, but not in the print edition until the following Tuesday.

Myanmar protest in support of movement in China

By Hein Htet Kyaw and Michael Sladnick

In Laung Lone Township, Dawei District, Myanmar, young people staged a protest on 3 December showing their support for pro-democracy protests in China.

China is one of the most significant countries for Myanmar in regional politics. Following the fall of dictatorships throughout the world in the 1980s and 1990s, China established a new type of capitalist dictatorship, which fascists all over the world are now attempting to imitate.

China has only been a detriment for Myanmar since 1989. However, efforts to create a regional democracy movement without China have fallen short. In an effort to oppose China and dictatorships supported by China imperialist camp, activists from other Asian nations attempted to establish the Milk Tea Alliance at the start of the Spring Revolution. The Milk Tea Alliance, however, received no significant support from abroad and made no progress.

The democracy movement

in China got its start with the protests this past week. Anger about the CCP's lockdown tactics was the catalyst for the protests. This in and of itself was significant because the protests showed Han Chinese sympathy for ethnic Uyghurs, an ethnic group that the CCP tries to persuade people as terrorists and not to sympathise with. Such solidarity be-

tween different ethnic groups was the spark that started the protests.

But the most crucial factor is not the reason why the protests started. A young generation has risen up in opposition to the CCP. Their autonomous political action has only begun. The CCP will no longer be the only thing on the world's mind when considering China; the

opposition in the nation will also be taken into account.

There were demonstrations in dozens of cities as well as many more institutions. The young people may be seen voicing democratic demands in every place where footage of the protests is available. From Shanghai to Beijing's most prestigious university campuses, as well as in interior cities like Chengdu, several radical statements against the CCP were displayed.

Due to Myanmar's leadership in the regional fight for democracy, this development is particularly significant for Myanmar. The Chinese democratic movement requires the Spring Revolution, and the Spring Revolution depends on the Chinese democracy movement for its greatest chance of receiving outside support.

Even though China is a neighbouring country of Myanmar, few Chinese citizens are aware of the Spring Revolution as a result of government suppression.

By organising protests in support of China, it is hoped that information would spread on Chinese social media and at least some young Chinese people will see it. The CCP's international strategy towards Myanmar is highly nuanced. Due to their knowledge of the Tatmadaw's detrimental economic impacts and the years they have spent establishing their influence with some Ethnic Armed Organisations, they even partially oppose it. If Myanmar supports China's democracy movement, the CCP will step up its attempts to put an end to the Spring Revolution. □



Our audio

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

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

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

Second hand books

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



China: the workers and the regime

By Ralph Peters

We do not know whether other factories in China have seen confrontations similar to Foxconn in Zhengzhou, where Apple iPhones are assembled. The western media has not given the workers' actions much coverage, and while some western capitalist governments find it advantageous to highlight Chinese state, the Tory Foreign Secretary, for example, went no further than to call on the CCP government to "take notice" of the protests.

The Tory and other western governments more worried about radical workers' action spreading across China and the impact on western capitalist profits in China. The economic crisis in China will lead to battles over who pays – the billionaire capitalists or the workers.

The only legal trade unions are those of the All-China Confederation of Trade Unions – a state union compliant to CCP and state interests.

In the lead up to workers breaking out of in their thousands at the Foxconn complex in Zhengzhou at the end of October – where there are nearly 300,000 workers – China Labour Bulletin reports that the ACCFTU officials were completely absent. They were instead out supplementing the state's work checking residents' health codes.

Following the break out at Foxconn, new workers were recruited and strikes broke out over the conditions they worked under. It is estimated that Apple, which depends on Foxconn for 85% of its current iPhone products, was [losing](#) up to \$1 billion a week in sales. It is looking to [move](#) iPhone assembly from Zhengzhou to India, Vietnam, etc.

Despite the impression given by CCP apologists such as the *Morning Star* that Chinese workers are content, there has been considerable working class dissent for decades. It tapered off a little after 2015-6, when Xi was consolidating his rule. But Chinese workers have continually fought back.

Opposition built on street protests alone is difficult to maintain against a well-armed regime even where there are democratic liberties. When no oppositional political organisations are allowed, when dissent is met with arrest and long prison sentences, when all legal routes for maintaining and organising dissent are blocked, building revolt in and around the workplaces, where underground organisation can be sustained is crucial. That is also the lesson of the Hong Kong revolt of 2019-2020.

An open split in the apparatus, or even a change of leader, with Xi stepping down, might bring a lull in the repression and openings for sustained opposition organising. For now Xi runs his party as well as China with a rod of iron.

Socialists and trade unionists across the world will be protesting on 10 December in support of the protests in China and against western complicity with the CCP government. Many protests will target Apple stores, as in London and [in the US](#). For the first time in decades these protests will be joined by hundreds of Chinese students studying abroad.

The tasks are immense. But we are now seeing the potential power that might bring the government down and lead to a genuine workers' democratic revolution in China. □

Ex-members come out against UCKG

By Mohan Sen

On 29 November the *Guardian* [reported](#) ex-followers of the international "evangelical Christian" church UCKG speaking out against the organisation. A more detailed [podcast](#) followed on 2 December. Young people have accused the organisation of financial exploitation, psychological abuse and threats, and have organised protests.

The "United Church of

the Kingdom of God" was founded in Brazil in 1977 by Edir Macedo, still head of the church and now a billionaire capitalist as result of his church activities. It has many millions of members in many parts of the world, many thousands in the UK.

According to the *Guardian's* reporting, most of the church's UK supporters are working-class and black. Some of those it spoke to argued UCKG has got away with so much for

so long precisely because of this.

This is how the *Wikipedia* page about the UCKG summarises "controversies" about the organisation:

Cult-like

"In 2017 the UCKG faced allegations of adopting children in Portugal and taking them abroad illegally. It has also been accused of cult-like illegal activities and corruption, including money laundering,

charlatanism, and witchcraft, as well as intolerance towards other religions. There have also been accusations that the church extracts money from poor members for the benefit of its leaders. In 2000, a London-based UCKG pastor arranged an exorcism which resulted in the death of a child [Victoria Climbié] and the conviction of her guardians of murder. The UCKG has been subject to bans in several African countries."

On top of that, the UCKG leadership in Brazil actively and openly supported right-winger Jair Bolsonaro and helped him get elected president in 2018.

There is another angle particularly relevant for the organised political left and labour movement: a seeming connection between UCKG and the Labour Party in the south London borough of Lewisham.

• More: bit.ly/uckg-c

Justice for Bilkis Bano!

By Mohan Sen

Trigger warning

The north-west Indian state of Gujarat in 2002 saw anti-Muslim pogroms in [2002](#), but the prominent Hindu nationalist politicians and officials who bear responsibility for what happened – including then Gujarat chief minis-

ter Narendra Modi – largely got off scot-free. Some much smaller fry faced punishment in India's national justice system.

Bilkis Bano was 21 and five months pregnant when she was gang-raped during the Gujarat pogroms. In the attack 14 members of her family were murdered; that included her three-year old daughter, whose head smashed against a rock, and her cousin with her newborn baby. The attackers only left Bano because they thought she was dead. In 2008 eleven of Bano's attackers got life sentences. After years of campaigning, supported by her husband and surviving family, in 2019 Bano finally got substantial compensation.

But since 2002, of course, Modi has gone from an international pariah, banned from the US and UK as a result of the massacres, to twice-elected prime minister of India, feted on the world stage. And this summer prime minister Modi promoted successful efforts to have the 11 released from prison.

In the run up to state elections in Gujarat (results 8 December), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime was sending a signal to its supporters that it is doubling-down, that they can carry on. It is yet another horrifying signal to India's Muslims.

The Gujarat prisoners walked out on India's Independence Day, 15 August. It was a few hours after Modi



gave a speech calling for "respect" for women and criticising behaviour that "lowers women's dignity"...

• More: bit.ly/bilkisb



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. Left-wingers in the US and elsewhere are also organising protests that day, and LSWHK has called on activists in UK cities outside London to organise actions – anything from a few people with placards and leaflets outside an Apple shop upwards. □

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

AWL conference 29-30 April

The Workers' Liberty conference 2023 will be in London on 29-30 April. □

Climate change will force mass migration



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

"When temperature rise exceeds 1.5 degrees Celsius (which could occur by 2026), some three billion will be living in places that regularly experience conditions beyond the human habitable range...[and] we are extremely unlikely to keep below 1.5 degrees C."

Gaia Vince in her book *Nomad Century* lays out the science in stark terms: we "face a very hostile world, characterised by a belt of uninhabitability swathed across most of today's most populated regions... This is a completely new situation for our species, one in which our expanding population must deal with an ever-shrinking zone of habitability". We will have to migrate



to survive, and that migration will have to build a New North of densely populated cities above the 45 degree N parallel.

Vince is a serious science journalist. She is well aware that "it is absurd that we are talking about the mass migration of billions of people." Can we really be heading for the depopulation of the tropics? Whole nations disappearing? Cities sinking beneath the sea? It seems unthinkable, and *Nomad*

Century is the first book of its kind to consider the necessary mass migration.

About a third of humanity are already on the move, mostly as rural populations moving to cities within national borders. Many are already moving due to climate change. Until recently, the island nation of Kiribati had a "migration with dignity" policy where it invested in high quality education and entered agreements with New Zealand and Fiji to resettle its population, resigned to the fact the islands had no future.

The Indonesian government plans to replace the Earth's fastest sinking city, Jakarta, with a new capital, Nusantara. New Zealand has a Managed Retreat and Climate Adaptation Act that helps citizens relocate.

For Vince, the only question is whether this movement will be planned and achieved peacefully. 29% of the Earth's landmass is above the 45 degree N parallel, "currently home to a fraction of the world's (ageing) population", but will experience optimal average temperatures of around 13 degrees Celsius as lower latitudes burn. She argues that given the right planning and policies this great movement of people could build thriving ecologically sustainable

cities based on careful management and recycling of resources, running on nuclear and geothermal energy, with fully integrated public transport and sustainable food supplies.

Vince has the same Panglossian liberalism as much of the science establishment. In some instances, she appears to recognise the need for global government, centralised planning and wealth redistribution. Elsewhere she advocates endless GDP growth, compensating fossil capitalists for lost earnings, and generous subsidy regimes to "encourage private sector investment".

Her political strategy has a tone of cloying naivete, nothing but hope that those in power will be convinced by her rational arguments. But rational argument has not stopped the ruling class from driving the world off the climate cliff-edge. Why would they behave any more rationally when faced with mass migration?

We currently live in a world of heavily fortified borders where dead children wash up on European beaches. A large part of Vince's New North lies under the jurisdiction of Vladimir Putin's dictatorship. Historically, the drivers of climate-induced migration – drought and famine – are also the drivers for war. These problems also need to be factored in if we are to develop a political strategy that can win the future she describes.

Trotsky once said the significance of science is "to know in order to foresee". Vince's liberal politics occlude her foresight. But there is much in this book that helps us to peer into the future and develop the political strategies necessary to survive the climate upheaval. □

Class struggle in Ukraine

- "A government of millionaires against billionaires": Denys Pilash analyses Zelensky bit.ly/zelenskgovt
- Ukrainian trade unionists battle against Putin and for rights: interview with Ivanna Khrapko bit.ly/ukrainetus
- Ukrainian socialists hold conference bit.ly/confsr
- Ukrainian feminists on the front line: interviews with Kateryna Kostrova, Yana Wolf and Katya Gritseva bit.ly/ukrainefeminists
- "The right to resist": global feminist anti-war manifesto bit.ly/resistmanifesto
- Women and Roma in the war bit.ly/womenromawar
- What socialists are doing in Ukraine: interview with Denys Pilash bit.ly/ukrainesocs
- Delegation to Ukraine reports back bit.ly/ukrainereportback
- "Not exactly surprising, but awe-inspiring": interview with Yuliya Yurchenko bit.ly/yuliyay □

Canadian First Nations women under threat



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Melanie H Morin reports in *Niwhts'ide'ni Hibi'it'en* (The Ways of Our Ancestors): "In 1897, drunken miners shooting their guns, blowing tin horns and ringing the church bell broke down the doors of Gitxsan homes looking for women, though reserves were off-limits to Euro-Canadians. The federal Indian Agent – a representative of the Canadian government on First Nations reserves who enforced the racist Indian Act law from the 1830s to the

1960s – had no control over the situation and was told by Gitxsan leaders that 'protection of the law [seemed] to exist only for the Whites and not for them, and if their conduct were such, they would be bundled off to Victoria in irons...'"

In the spring of 1899, the women of Hagwilget, a Gitxsan community near Gitsegulka, were given alcohol and raped by miners, "who took their clothes, photographed them and carried their underwear around on sticks".

In the twenty first century, transient male workers in extractive industry still prove a threat to indigenous women in Canada. The Liquified Natural Gas sector may require up to 100,000 workers in construc-

tion and operations within the next decade. Workers are housed in camps of mostly male workers who build the pipeline projects. These are known locally as "man camps".

A 2017 report by the Indigenous research agency the Firelight Group and the Lake Babine Nation and Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nations found a correlation between the presence of man camps and increased rates of sexual assault and violence against Indigenous women.

The arrest of an alleged serial killer who targeted Indigenous women in Canada has brought all this to public attention again. Police in Winnipeg announced on 1 December that they had charged Jeremy Skibicki with the murder of

Morgan Beatrice Harris and Mercedes Myran, of Long Plain First Nation, months after he was accused of killing Rebecca Contois, from O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi First Nation. Skibicki was also charged in the murder of a fourth, unnamed victim who is believed to be Indigenous.

Six times

"We have much more work to do to protect the lives of Indigenous women and girls," Winnipeg Mayor Scott Gillingham said. "Right now there are far too many people experiencing homelessness, addiction and poverty and that puts them in vulnerable positions."

A report by the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls found that Indigenous

women are six times more likely to be murdered than other Canadian women.

In the USA, the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center found in 2018 that Native American and Alaska Native women face murder rates more than ten times the national average in some US counties, and more than half have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. It estimated that for 96% of those victims, sexual violence was from non-Native perpetrators.

Indigenous communities are over-policed and under-protected, and need self-organisation and self-defence are needed. The Canadian labour movement must take up women's safety. □

Yes, victory to Ukraine!



Eye on the left

By Dan Katz

Armed only with a biro and a startling amount of pomposity the leader of [Socialist Appeal](#), Alan Woods, has found a new issue to misunderstand: the war in Ukraine.

Woods' articles, and those of his co-thinkers in *Socialist Appeal*, are noteworthy for what they do not say, as well as what they do say. You will not find an answer to the question: should the Russian troops get out of Ukraine? in the pages of *Socialist Appeal*.

The war should end, it seems, but without *Socialist Appeal* being willing to tell us what the peace should look like. Should Ukraine sign away Donbas, for example?

Apparently the national question is Ukraine is "extremely complicated". So complicated, in fact, that *Socialist Appeal* are unable to say any more than that.

But the big majority of Ukrainian workers and all their trade unions which back Ukraine's war against the Russian invasion and occupation while simultaneously opposing the attacks on workers' rights by the Zelenskyy government. That's not so complicated, is it?

In *Socialist Appeal*'s pages, we can find dogmatically stated certainties

which were typical of the old Militant tradition which *Socialist Appeal* is rooted in: "Of course, the use of nuclear weapons is out of the question." I wish I could be so certain that Putin, if backed into a corner and facing defeat at home, would not resort to using chemical or nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

And here we also find bizarre accusations: "[The Ukrainian state] has waged a brutal civil war against its own people for years." Which is presumably a reference to its defensive battles against Russian forces and Russian proxies in Donbas after 2014. "The vicious oppression suffered by the Russian-speaking people of Donetsk at the hands of the Ukrainian army is not in question." Except it is "in question". The main problem the remaining people of Donetsk faced after 2014 is the gangster-run, lawless regime which Russia installed there.

And we even find in *Socialist Appeal* a defence of the new boss of the Russian army, Sergei Surovikin. "General Sergei Surovikin... has been given a bad press in the West, which portrays him as a ruthless man with a reputation for brutality and for bombing civilians in Russia's campaign in Syria."

Indeed, Surovikin has had a bad press in the West on Syria. Quite right, too.

In a comical piece of Whataboutery, and omitting reference to Daesh, they continue: "... [The Western press] conveniently forget the brutal American

bombing that reduced Mosul to a pile of smoking rubble..."

You see, we must understand that, "Surovikin's Syria campaign was also highly successful... And we must judge Surovikin, just as we would judge a professional in any other field: solely by the results he achieves."

Yes, but unfortunately the Marxist voice of Labour and Youth leaves it right there. What exactly, politically, did Surovikin achieve during his bloody campaign in Syria? He helped to keep Assad's disgusting, corrupt, homicidal regime in power on behalf of Russian imperialism. And that's not good, is it?

Socialist Appeal believes: "The [Russia-Ukraine] conflict is fundamentally a proxy war... This is a reactionary imperialist war on both sides – that of Russia, but also that of NATO."

Except that NATO is not fighting, and Russia has invaded with the intention of destroying the Ukrainian state.

"The driving force [to war] has been, on the one hand, NATO's aggressive push towards Russia's borders; on the other, the exaggerated ambitions of Vladimir Putin and his desire to enhance his personal prestige and his grip on power." The US aims to "weaken Russia militarily and economically; to bleed it dry and to inflict harm on it; to kill its soldiers and ruin its economy. It was this aim that induced them to push the Ukrainians into an entirely unnecessary conflict with Russia over NATO membership."

What a mess, Mr Woods. We oppose NATO. But Ukraine has been refused membership of NATO. The main cause of NATO expansion (Finland and Sweden have applied) and massive increases in arms spending (Germany) has been small nations' fears driven by Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

The US, France and Germany certainly did not want a war with Russia which has brought political chaos, uncertainty and disrupted trade. The US is reacting to a war it did not want, sending limited amounts of weapons to Ukraine as the least-worst option in the circumstances. The West wants the war to end and would do a deal with Putin (possibly at Ukraine's expense) if only Putin would negotiate.

Woods and co. do not care about the enormous suffering of the Ukrainian people. They have nothing to say about the brutal Russian occupation, the right of the Ukrainians to resist terror, or the right of the Ukrainians to fight for self-determination.

Woods has no suggestions for the Ukrainian working class. For Woods the Ukrainian working-class is not an actor, it has no part to play.

Finally, designating US imperialism as "the most counter-revolutionary force on the planet" is not Marxist but a recycling of the "main enemy" theory of world politics used for decades by Stalinists. In Melitopol or Kyiv it's just not true.

So yes, solidarity with Ukraine! □

US strikes spread despite Biden

By Lewis Joyes

The "pro-labour, pro-union" US President Joe Biden has ratified a deal for rail workers to break a national strike that was due to hit on the 9 December.

The deal ends a stalemate in negotiations between four out of the 12 US rail unions that have been ongoing for three years and affects 120,000 rail workers. The deal ensures pay increases of up to 24%, but spread over five years. It also fails to add a single extra paid sick day to the zero currently provided, and many workers feel it risks turning the railroad into a "revolving-door job" with long-term job cuts.

A handful of "progressives" in Congress backed by the Democratic Socialists of America sought to enhance the

number of sick days added to the contract and won a second House vote. Ratification of their proposal required separate Senate approval to the contract, and, with the Senate's make-up, never really had a chance. So by supporting the tentative agreement in order to win votes for an amendment never likely to materialise, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others voted alongside the Democratic and Republican establishment to break the rail strike.

The government imposition of the deal rules out legal strike action, but it certainly cannot rule out action between now and in three years time (when the next contract negotiations will commence). It isn't Congress that runs the railroad, but rail workers.

In recent weeks the Railroad

Workers United (RWU) network coordinated a 4300+ strong petition to Congress calling for public rail ownership and contract improvements. By building at the grassroots, networks like the RWU (though it is not yet a fully developed rank-and-file organisation) can develop the power to smash regressive clauses in their current (and future) contracts, and win basic rights, such as the right paid sick leave.

Airline

Transport strikes are also being threatened by airline workers in four of the largest US pilot unions.

During the early stages of the pandemic, airline companies sought to reduce costs by paying out for early retirement deals. This left many with too few staff to cover their

schedules which by 2021, had almost fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels. As a result, airline staff are being pressured into working longer and extra shifts.

In November, United pilots voted down a tentative agreement by 94% for enhanced pay and a rise in their overtime rates. Delta pilots won a strike ballot with 99% support on 96% turnout for pay rises.

Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) are continuing their mammoth surge over the past year, by signing up new workplaces, and pushing for a national contract. Since their first win in 2021, they now have over 250 unionised stores, and 21,000-plus members.

Given the union-busting antics of Starbucks, these wins are meteoric, and a cause for real hope across the US labor

movement. The union is organising [rallies](#) across the US over December.

In Boston there have been a number of promising pushes in recent months involving Grad workers at Boston University (BU), and teachers in Haverhill. The vote for union recognition of the BU Grad Workers Union (BUGWU) (5-7 December) would allow the union to open negotiations for their living wage and health-care coverage demands. In October, despite being fined \$200,000 for a strike deemed illegal by a County judge, the Haverhill Education Association and Massachusetts Teachers Association teachers' unions quickly won increases to pay, enhanced safety procedures, and commitments to tackle racism in their schools after a four-day strike. □

Mao's China Was

By Wang Fanxi

In this article the Chinese Trotskyist Wang Fanxi gave his assessment of the new Maoist state soon after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949. The CCP came to power on an announced programme of land redistribution and preserving capitalist relations in industry. It quickly established a totalitarian state, and moved to gain control over the economy for that state. By 1955-6 most of the remaining private capitalists were squeezed out, and the government moved to "collectivise" agriculture. A move to "People's Communes" and attempted forced-march industrialisation in 1958-9 killed tens of millions; another bureaucratic convulsion to strengthen central control, called the "Cultural Revolution", in 1966-8, was also costly. From the late 1970s the successors of Mao Zedong, who had died in 1976, started to move towards re-integration into the world market and licensing individual agriculture and private capitalist enterprise. Industry has boomed. In the year 1500, China had over four times the economic output of France and the UK combined; by 1950, after a century dominated by big wars, scarcely one-sixth; by 1998, 1.7 times as much. But inequality has continued and deepened. China now combines the plagues of Stalinistic governance and of private-capitalist profiteering.

In judging and estimating the nature of a movement, a political party, or a state, for the proletarian revolutionist there is one unchanging standard: What is its relation to the working class, that is, to the only revolutionary class in the modern world? For us there can be no more decisive standard than that, nor can there be any other point of departure.

What is the relation of the CCP, the Liberation Army led by it, and the People's Republic which it has established, to the Chinese working class? What attitude does it take toward that working class? Notwithstanding the fact that the CCP calls itself a working-class party, notwithstanding the fact that the CCP proclaims this new state to be a "people's" state led by the workers, nevertheless a variety of facts demonstrates that the political and economic position of the workers has not only failed to improve, but in certain respects has even deteriorated. The working class is the victim of this "War of Liberation." "The liberation of the working class is the function of the working class itself." Consequently, "liberators" drawn from another class cannot confer genuine liberation upon it.

And this has in fact been the case. Politically speaking, the position of the working class has not changed at all. The military governments established by the conquerors are composed entirely of a new nobility, and have no connection with the working class. Not only could workers' soviets not be formed in practice, they were not permitted to exist even as a concept. All that the workers got from their "liberators" was the designation – on paper – of "leaders" of the new society...

In Tianjin from February to April [1949] and in Shanghai during June and July [1949] there was extensive activity on the part of the workers, but after the suppression in April of the Tianjin movement by Liu Shaoqi and the promulgation in Shanghai on 19 August [1949] of Military Government regulations for the adjustment of labour-management disputes, the working class was robbed completely of its right to fight and of its fundamental right to strike. In other words, it was made the victim of exploitation at the hands of private entrepreneurs. This new slave status of the working class was finally fixed in September by governmental fiat, and the workers have been unable to win an improvement in living conditions by striking. In order to disguise this act of barbarism, the new rulers have given the working class the right of "factory control."

Trickery

But this right, as a glance at the Regulations for the Conduct of Factory Committees will indicate, is a patently worthless piece of trickery. For example:

"7. The Factory Committee shall be presided over by the Head of the Factory (or the Manager)..."

"8. If a decision passed by a majority of the Factory Committee shall be judged by the Head of the Factory (or the Manager) to be in conflict with the said Factory's best interests, or when the said decision shall be in conflict with the instructions of higher authority, the Manager or Head of the Factory is empowered to prohibit its implementation..."

Therefore we may affirm that politically the Chinese Communist regime has not improved the position of the working class, while economically it has lowered its standard of living. The Chinese Communist regime, while characterising itself the "representative of the working class" and making use of the words "people" and "nation," has in reality, like the Guomindang, in effect enslaved the Chinese working class. This view must constitute the point of

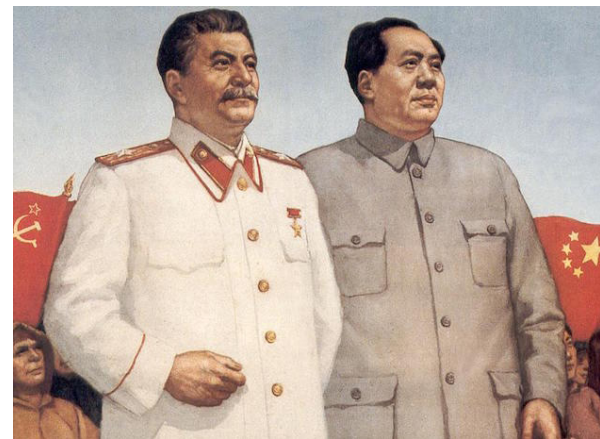
departure for our interpretation of the nature of the CCP and its government.

Any political party or state apparatus which enslaves the working class is, in this day and age, from a proletarian, socialist, revolutionary point of view, fundamentally and completely reactionary. Therefore the CCP and the state apparatus which it has set up are also reactionary. Yet at the same time we must recognise the following facts: They have overthrown the Guomindang government, which represented foreign imperialism and the native bourgeoisie and landlord class; they are wiping out the anachronistic agrarian relationships in China's farming villages; they have dealt a mighty blow to the foreign imperialist powers led by the United States. All of these actions, from the point of view of Chinese nationalism and democracy, have an undeniably progressive character...

These three phenomena, (a) the tendency of world capitalism toward statification, (b) the thoroughgoing corruption and decay of the individual capitalist, and (c) the numerical increase of the petty bourgeoisie and its rise in importance as a social and political force, may serve to explain the principal events that have taken place throughout the world during the last twenty years, particularly since the end of the war, and can explain very adequately the events that have transpired in China.

The Chinese Stalinists, taking advantage of this state of affairs, basing themselves on the overwhelming numerical strength of the impoverished and embittered peasantry, and proposing a program of reformed state capitalism (that is, the New Democracy), rallied the urban petty bourgeoisie and medium bourgeoisie, and gathered to their banner even a part of the working class. Through military might they easily transformed the rotten rule of the Chinese-style "national capitalists" and took over (but by no means abolished) the state machinery and the entire economy under its control.

The Chinese proletariat since 1927, when it suffered a staggering defeat thanks to its adherence to Stalinist policies, has not ascended the political stage. Although a year or two before the struggle with Japan and within the first year after Japan's surrender the labour movement revived for a time, nevertheless, thanks to the weakness of the proletarian parties, the Guomindang's oppression and deceit, and the degeneration of Chinese industry in the war, and under the influence of the decay and stagnation of world capitalism, the



ranks of the working class were scattered and weakened, and these movements could never acquire sufficient political and revolutionary character. The fact that the Chinese proletariat for over twenty years was unable to interfere in China's political processes to a significant extent determined the peasant aspect, the capitalist nature, and the bureaucratic-collectivist direction of Chinese Stalinism. Of course – and this is far more important – we must seek the answer to this question in the nature of the Soviet Union and the CPUSSR and the influence they exerted on the CCP.

Therefore the Soviet Union now stands in the following class relationship politically and economically: On the one hand the bureaucracy collectively holds all political and economic power in the state, and on the other the toiling masses are absolutely without rights. This sort of state is naturally not a workers' state, nor even a degenerate workers' state, because the working class is politically ruled over and economically exploited; and yet it is not a capitalist state, since there is no capitalist class in it which privately owns the means of production. In that state all the means and materials of production are concentrated in the hands of a bureaucracy comprising the party, the governmental machinery, and the army, which collectively owns all the wealth...

Stalinism

On the face of it, bureaucratic collectivism, that is, Stalinism, would appear to be a completely new thing. It is neither socialism nor capitalism. But upon closer examination it is not difficult to perceive that it belongs under a sub-heading of capitalism. One difference between it and traditional capitalism is collective ownership of the means of production as opposed to private ownership. The ownership of the means of production has not been socialised, but it has been collectivised (in the hands of the ruling class). And as for the relationship of owners to producers, ex-

no workers' state



exploitation continues to exist, and is in fact intensified. Bureaucratic collectivism has two great advantages over private capitalism and even over state capitalism (under the latter also there is large-scale private ownership): (a) it is possible to regulate capital in a more systematic fashion; (b) it is possible to exploit workers more efficiently. These two advantages are precisely what is needed to overcome the present crisis of capitalism. Seen from this point of view, Stalinism is a special kind of reformism, it is the reformism of the age in which capitalism has developed into imperialism. On the one hand it prevents the emergence and success of a genuine socialist revolution, and on the other, by means of collective exploitation, it continues the rule of capital over labour. Bureaucratic collectivism or Stalinism is essentially the transitional form which obtains during the delayed and difficult birth of socialism from the womb of capitalism. It cannot create a new historical era, but it can maintain itself for a time, and in several countries at once. In southeast Europe several such states have already been created, while the New China is being recast in the same mould.

To create a bureaucratic-collectivist state, one must first have a bureaucratic-collectivist party to carry out the action. The Chinese Communist Party has been that ever since Communism degenerated into bureaucratic collectivism. Because of a common international situation and long-standing historical ties, also because the class relationships within China after the defeat of the Great Revolution (the destruction of the proletariat, the long peasant wars, the utter corruption of the bourgeoisie, the anger and dissatisfaction of the petty bourgeoisie) were favourable to reformism and unfavourable to the growth of revolutionary socialism, the Chinese Communist Party took over entirely the bureaucratic collectivism perfected by Stalin within the Soviet Union. This ideological change was complete by the early Thirties. Now the CCP, embracing this ideology, has come to power and is organising the state around it...

Since the creature spawned by the CCP is a bureaucratic-collectivist state and must continue to enslave the workers, it is reactionary; but since such a state must reform capitalism, change property forms, and increase productive power, it cannot help adopting certain progressive measures...

The capitalism represented by the Stalinists is no longer capitalism in the original sense of the word, but bu-



reaucratic collectivism; the class they represent is not a capitalist class in the original sense, but a bureaucratic class which collectively owns the means of production. This distinction is of exceptional importance. If one points to the Bonapartism of the CCP without understanding this difference, then one will be unable to understand the events taking place before one's very eyes or to predict future developments, because, while others may expect the attitude of the CCP to become daily more conciliatory toward the bourgeoisie, what we shall in fact see is a greater solidification of collectivism and a strengthening of state capital...

When the Stalinist party, in order to advance the cause of bureaucratic collectivism, very cautiously initiates its mass movement, can the workers and poor peasants, taking advantage of this opportunity, push the struggle further,

work free of the limitations imposed upon them by the Stalinist party, and cause a bureaucratically dominated movement to turn into the Chinese socialist revolution – or can they not? In theory, we can never exclude this possibility, and we – the Chinese proletarian revolutionary party – must turn all our subjective efforts in that direction. But, in fact, if we dispassionately analyse China's present class relationships, we cannot deny that this possibility is extremely slight. The prestige of the Stalinist party among the general masses is still very great, the illusion that bureaucratic collectivism equals socialism is widespread; the Chinese proletariat and its real vanguard have yet to educate themselves and unite through the bitter experience of Stalinist rule, for only then can they initiate a mighty anti-Stalinist revolution.

Our chief task at present is patiently to interpret and reinterpret the fundamental nature of Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism. Naturally, "patient interpretation" by no means signifies passive observation. We must participate actively in these events. We must, while pointing out the internally contradictory character of the Stalinist party's present struggle, on the one hand advance and broaden in scope the fight against the landlords and rich peasants and advocate and participate in all an-

ti-capitalist struggles; and, on the other hand, oppose simultaneously the fight of the bureaucracy, oppose the enslavement of the workers under whatever guise, oppose the oppression of the poor peasantry, and, above all, consistently advocate the convocation of a Congress of workers, peasants, and soldiers, to exchange the Stalinist military agencies and the so-called "People's Government" for a genuine workers' and peasants' state. We must direct every struggle toward the formation of soviets. Our principal slogan must be for a Congress of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants...

Soviet Union

Therefore, not only can we state positively that China is not a workers' state, but we can also prove by the same token that the Soviet Union is no longer any sort of workers' state. The difference between the new China and the Soviet Union at present is one of degree, not of kind. Both are equally bureaucratic-collectivist states, except for a huge difference in degree of thoroughness. Therefore the Fourth International's traditional attitude toward the Soviet Union must be altered. It must reject the view that it is any sort of workers' state.

Similarly it must reject the view that the Stalinist parties are parties of Menshevik opportunism, because, although the Stalinist parties are at present indeed fundamentally reformist, their principal crime is not their collaboration with the bourgeoisie but their bureaucratic enslavement of the proletariat. Needless to say, it is only by viewing the Soviet Union and the Stalinist parties from the point of view of bureaucratic collectivism that one can understand their nature and their actions. The same is true of the Chinese Stalinist party and its newly established state. □

• *The Stalinist state in China, New International, March-April 1951*

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James Connolly, Ger

Some perverted battle lines



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. We saw that in the 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*.*

Nothing is more remarkable in this war than the manner in which the ruling class in the countries of the Triple Alliance have appropriated and used for their own purposes every phrase and rallying cry that their political opponents had coined against them. For years the Socialists have preached against war, and preached with such vehemence and argumentative persuasiveness that their anti-militarist campaign had profoundly influenced public opinion in Europe and raised hopes that the era of international blood-letting was past. Vain delusion!

As soon as the capitalist class of England concluded that the time was ripe for the destruction of their German competitors, so far from finding the Peace campaign of the Socialists a hindrance it proceeded to use it as a use-

ful asset in the militarist business. With perfectly fiendish and sardonic humour it took up the rallying cries of the Peace Party and used them as its very own. It called upon the Labour Parties, the Socialists, the humanitarians among the Liberals and Radicals to rally to the aid of the British army to "make war upon war," to "put an end to militarism," to "bring peace on earth and goodwill among men" at the point of British bayonets and to sweep German commerce of the seas as a preliminary to establishing brotherhood with the German peoples.

With the honourable exceptions of the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Labour Party, the organised and unorganised Labour advocates of Peace in Great Britain swallowed the bait and are now beating the war drums and hounding their brothers on to the butchery of their German comrades – and hounding them on with the cant of fraternity on their lips.

Relentless

For a generation the French Government has made war upon the secular power of the Catholic Church in France. It abolished the Concordat between Church and State, made public property of the churches, did away with religious teaching in its schools, removed all religious emblems from its courts of law and public buildings, seized and auctioned off property the Church claimed as its own, and exercised its power with such relentlessness that

many religious orders abandoned the country and removed themselves and all their belongings to Ireland, America, Belgium and other more friendly countries. Whether it was in its right or not is immaterial – the material point is that in its defence the Church through all its organs represented France as a Godless Atheistical country which God in His own good time would doubtless punish in order to avenge His persecuted faithful.

But when it became necessary to go to war with Germany, France joined England in raising a newspaper wail over the sufferings of "poor Catholic Belgium," planted machine guns in the churches at Louvain and field artillery before the Cathedral at Rheims, and when the Germans in self-defence trained their own artillery upon these sacred buildings in order to destroy the French fire the resultant damage was made the basis of an allegation that the Germans were making war upon religion which the pious French Government were nobly defending. To aid this business of representing this French Government as noble crusaders in defence of the Catholic faith hundreds of little Belgium children have been deported to Great Britain and Ireland, and are now being scattered up and down the land so that Catholics may be moved by sympathy with their suffering to go out and fight for the French Government, which a few months ago they were being taught to curse in the name of Catholicity.

Just as the peace campaign in England became a weapon in the hands of the war party, so the Catholic propaganda in Ireland and England has been made a valuable tool in the services of the freethinking rulers of France.

The small conquered nations of Europe have in a thousand ways fought to propagate the idea of nationality, to emphasise the value of small nations and their special contributions to civilisation. Part and parcel of their propaganda has of necessity been directed against those two Empires which in Europe stand alone in the unenviable position of suppressing national existences and insisting upon small nations conforming to the mould in which these empires would cast them. But as soon as these two empires, England and Russia – the only two empires in Europe, we repeat, which do not respect the formation of small empires within their borders – as soon as England and Russia go to war they, with the effrontery of a Satan, raise the slogans of small nationalities as their battle cries, and call upon the world to admire them as the deliverers of the oppressed nations.

And to crown all we see Ireland, which for centuries has whined to Europe for relief against England, now being led by its elected leader to fight for England, that the British Empire might continue to keep its navy as a sword at the throat of Europe.

The irony of it all. □

• *Irish Worker*, 26 September 1914

How England sacrificed Belgium

By James Connolly

It has often been remarked in Irish Nationalist circles that according to the current cant of the Parliamentary Party the interests of Ireland can always be best served out of Ireland. Sometimes it is on "the flure of the House" of Commons that Ireland must be fought for, sometimes it is on the platform in the United States, sometimes it is in election contests in England, and now it is on the battlefields of the Continent. It is always outside

of Ireland that blows must be struck for Ireland, if we are to believe the official "leaders of the Irish Race".

It must surely be upon some such principle of action that England is fighting for the neutrality of Belgium. According to all the British jingo Press, and still more according to the organs of the Irish Home Rule Imperialists, or Imperialist Home Rulers, Great Britain has entered into this war solely because of her burning zeal for the neutrality of Belgium. Only because of the danger to Bel-

gian neutrality was the mighty heart of England moved to action, and only because she saw this precious thing in danger did England at last reluctantly draw the sword and enter the lists against the Germans. And here in Ireland we are tearfully appealed to, to consider the awesome spectacle of the conversion of England to ways of justice and chivalry, and so considering to rush to her aid and side by side with her army battle for the neutrality of Belgium.

But when we look around us

all that we see tends to arouse the suspicion that England has simply made a catspaw of Belgium, has deliberately tempted Belgium from her neutrality, and having committed that brave little kingdom to the fight has cold-bloodedly left her towns, cities and territories to be defended by her own unaided efforts. Whilst howling long and loudly against the violation of the neutrality of Belgium England never sent as much as a corporal's guard to help to prevent it. Whilst the Belgian soldiers

were pouring out their life-blood in torrents in an effort to stem the forces of the invader, whilst the harvest in Belgian fields was trodden under foot, Belgian industries destroyed and the population of Belgium driven from home and country, the armies of England were kept carefully out of Belgium, and that country left to stew in its own juice.

England and France cried out to the world that they were modern paladins of chivalry risking their all to save Bel-

continued on page 11 →

man warmonger (2)

→ from page 10

gium whilst all the time they were coolly devoting their every energy to the work of saving their own skins. All during the first month of Belgium's martyrdom England poured her Expeditionary Troops into France leaving Belgium to her fate. Belgium asked for troops to help defend her neutrality. England replied, "We are sorry, we would like to send you some troops, but you see we have a pressing engagement elsewhere. But we will write some nice newspaper articles about you, and even if you do suffer just think how useful your sufferings will be to us in the preparation of speeches against Germany." That is all the satisfaction Belgium has got or is likely to get the satisfaction of serving England as a tortured animal under the hands of the vivisectionist serves science.

Antwerp in its last agony brings this fact out very clearly. Even the most thoughtless cannot be but struck by the manner in which the editorials of the English newspapers assure their readers that the sufferings of Antwerp will be another argument against

Germany. They dwell so much upon this aspect of the situation that it is clearly seen that in their eyes the sufferings of the Belgian people count for little – the manner in which their sufferings can be exploited to England's advantage counts for much.

The English press now admits that before the bombardment commenced the Belgian authorities wished to evacuate the city in order that it might be spared. But the English insisted that Antwerp must fight on although, as they now admit, they were well aware that the forts would be powerless to hold out long enough to be relieved, and that the resistance would mean the destruction of the city.

A Naval Brigade of raw, untrained units was sent into Antwerp to deceive the people with the hope of British assistance, and the Belgian people were driven on by England to the needless sacrifice of another city in order to provide another "horrible example" for the unctuous hypocrites of the British press to shed tears of ink over.

Now that Antwerp has fallen all the professional liars of the



The Irish Republican Brotherhood, through articles by Bulmer Hobson (pic) in its paper Irish Freedom, October and November 1911, had argued for backing Germany in the World War they saw looming

capitalist press assure us that it is of no importance to the Germans. By such a statement they only further prove the truth of what I have just written. They illustrate the cold-blooded determination of England to sacrifice Belgium, all Belgium, to save the precious skins of the Allies. If Antwerp is of no importance to Germany, then all the greater is the crime of those who forced the Belgians to resist the bombardment when they desired to evacuate the city.

If Belgium had contented herself with protesting at the passage of German troops through her territory she would now have all her for-

tresses and cities in her own hands, her soldiers would all be alive and in a position to act with effect when the war had exhausted both sides, none of her civilian population would have lost their lives, homes or domestic treasures, or be scattered as exiles on the charity of strangers, her foreign trade would not be lost by the paralysis of her domestic industry, and her neutrality and independence would be effectually maintained.

If in the fluctuations of the war the soil of Belgium became the scene of conflict both sides would have in their own interests kept aloof from any considerable town or city in the possession of large bodies of fresh Belgian troops, and would have avoided anything calculated to make fresh enemies for their own side.

Under such circumstances any conflict that would have taken place in Belgium between the Germans and the Allies would have been fought out in the open country, or around small villages whose inhabitants could easily have been sheltered in the large towns, and all the horrors to which Belgium has been sub-

jected would have been unknown.

For all those horrors she has to thank her stupid governing class, and the wily, heartless English diplomacy that sacrifices Belgium in a quarrel not her own.

Will Ireland allow her sons to be sacrificed by the same unscrupulous power that English capitalism may rise by garrotting the civilisation and commerce of Europe? No, a thousand times no!

Mr Redmond's Volunteers – the unpaid soldiers of England, scabbing on the British Army, doing for nothing what British soldiers require pay for doing – they may go though we doubt it, but no man to whom Ireland and Ireland's interests are dear will ever draw a sword or fire a shot in any quarrel of England's making until such time as such quarrel finds its venue in Ireland, is fought out on Ireland's own soil.

And when that day comes the swords will be drawn and the shots fired by Irishmen for Ireland, and for Freedom for all who work and live in Ireland. □

• *Irish Worker*, 17 October 1914

Focus on rejoin and free movement



Letter

Mohan Sen's article ([Solidarity 654](#)) ends by stating: "The labour movement should demand the UK rejoin the Single Market and Customs Union immediately, and launch a serious discussion about reversing Brexit".

It is wrong to propose demands for Single Market (SM) and Customs Union (CU) membership. We should focus straightforwardly on the demand to rejoin and transform the EU, and short of that, to restore and extend named, specific working-class rights we have lost or are in the process of losing – chief among them, free movement.

Workers' Liberty summarised its stance on Brexit as "Remain and Rebel". One key aspect, for us, is that the EU is not simply a "capitalist trade bloc" – it

has a degree of open political democracy, with a directly-elected parliament. In this cross-border democratic arena, struggles to defy and re-write the existing rules and limits of the EU could be politically expressed in parallel with extra-parliamentary action.

By contrast, the SM and CU have no democratic political space in which a cross-border left could contest their rules and structures and put forward alternatives, outside the EU. We rightly argued in the Brexit debates that a "soft Brexit" which retained CU and/or SM membership, while a lesser evil, would mean agreeing to their pro-capitalist strictures while giving up a key democratic channel in which a cross-border left could challenge them politically. Ironically, the Brexit advocated at one point by Corbyn's leadership – leaving the EU but retaining a customs union – was the real "capitalist trading bloc" proposal in the debate.

We also sought, and seek, to defend

and extend the working-class rights won in the EU, some of which would also be delivered by SM membership: free movement, equality legislation, workplace and environmental protections, and so on. But we should argue and fight for these things directly rather than as secondary consequences of rejoining a market bloc.

And we do believe that the integration of capitalist economies across borders is, in a general and net sense, progressive. Plus, Sen is right to say that re-entering the SM and CU would likely boost UK capitalist economic growth. However, it is not the business of a small revolutionary socialist group, nor of the labour movement, to advise the bourgeoisie on the best way to grow and manage a capitalist economy. And, although it is likely that Single Market and Customs Union membership would in practice precede full EU membership, it is not our business to devise technical plans for stepwise bourgeois

diplomacy. There are already enough think-tanks and NGOs providing such policy advice.

Rather, our tasks are independent working-class agitation, propaganda and political action: to keep working, as we did in the Brexit debates, to persuade the rest of the labour movement to join us in fighting to restore and extend free movement and re-enter the EU, as part of a wider struggle to tear down borders and transform Europe and the world.

Making agitation on the flawed half-measure of SM and CU membership may be tempting because it appears to be a step that might be winnable sooner. But this is a compromise that lowers political horizons, or at best postpones them, and diverts attention onto bourgeois deal-making rather than the specific rights and the democratic integration we are really fighting for. □

Ben Tausz, London

Stop the acceleration of matter



Letter

Zack Muddle ([Solidarity 653](#)) is of course right that the problem is capitalist work, rather than work per se, is driving the ecological crises. But capitalist work is what three billion wage workers do at the moment, and it needs to stop.

The capitalist mode of production involves a constant pressure to do more work in less time. We sense this at work through our boss's efforts to squeeze more work out of our working day. It also manifests as the replacement of human workers with ever more powerful machines.

Work is always a physical movement of matter, the creation and distribution of use-values from the materials of the Earth. The history of capitalism is therefore a physical acceleration of matter

(including human bodies) that has developed from a slow moving trickle to a hurricane-force storm. We see this on many metrics, from the tonnage of steel and cement that is produced each year to the explosion of international travel. Both in production and consumption there is creation of waste, including our most ubiquitous waste product, CO₂.

Logic

This acceleration is a scattering of the materials of the Earth with carefree disregard for the consequences. When UN general Secretary Antonio Guterres spoke of an "acceleration" towards "climate hell" he unwittingly stumbled on the real material driver of climate change and other ecological crises: a real, physical world-historic acceleration of matter manipulated by human hands but organised by the blind, unplanned automatic logic of capital accumulation.

In this sense the less work we do,

the less waste we will produce. Anything that resists the boss's pressure to produce more in less time will buy the biosphere time and delay various climate tipping points. Workers' resistance also builds workers' organisation which holds the potential for building democratic proletarian institutions as centres of rational economic planning as an alternative to market control of economic life.

Zack's contention that a day-trip might take "less travel, food, energy, or resources, than a day at work" misses this dynamic and concedes too much to the "carbon footprint" mode of thought. So long as we live under capitalism, we have to burn fossil fuels, eat carbon-intensive factory-farmed food and create waste that cannot be recycled, whether we are at work or play.

If you have an office job, then your entire existence, your means of life, and all the use values that make your office function, depend on others doing ec-

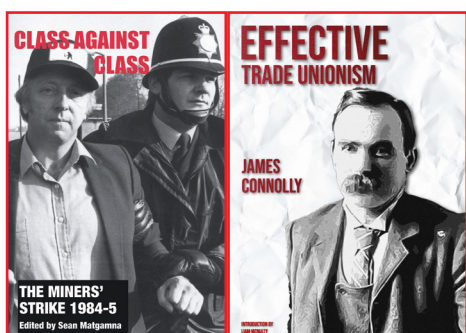
ocial work. Giving up day trips won't solve that, organising at work will.

Zack's narrow carbon footprint view misses another bigger dynamic. In our private lives, the most powerful machine most of us ever lay hands on is a car. At work, workers drill the sea bed, move mountains, split the atom. Workers' hands are needed to superintend the big machines that are fundamental to capitalist speed up.

Brake

I agree with Zack that restabilising the climate, adapting to now unavoidable consequences of global heating, and restoring ecosystems will involve some hard graft. But no one is organising this work at present. First we need our movement to discover the emergency brake. Then a renewed workers' movement can organise the work that is so necessary to avoid a descent into war and barbarism. □

Stuart Jordan, London



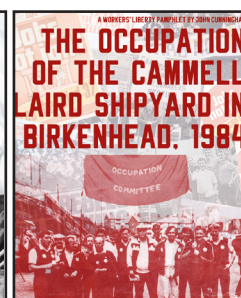
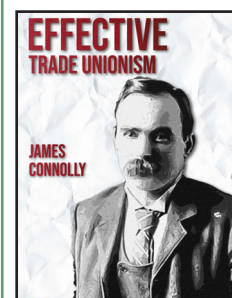
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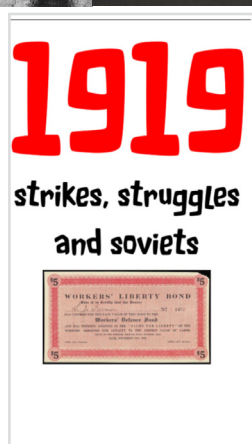
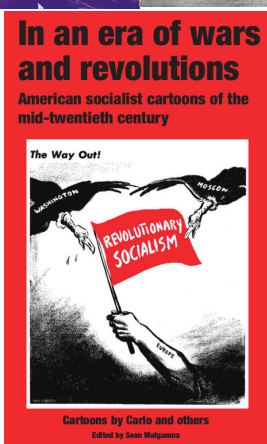
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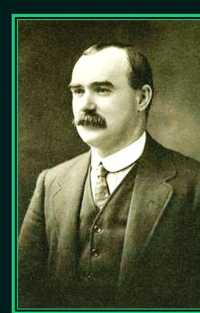
Liam McNulty's book *James Connolly: Socialist, Nationalist, and Internationalist* will be published by Merlin Press in mid-December 2022.

It discusses Connolly not just as an Irish hero, but traces how he was shaped by and responded to the international socialist and labour movement of his time.

Workers' Liberty can offer a cheap rate for a limited number of advance orders: £16 if collected by hand (at a Workers' Liberty meeting, for example), £20 with postage. For £22 we will include a copy of *Effective Trade Unionism*.

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Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist &
Internationalist

NHS pay: push for united action



By Alice Hazel

Across the country health workers have voted for strike action in unprecedented numbers. The average vote for strike among Unison members was 88%.

However, Unison got the 50% turnout threshold only in five ambulance Trusts: NW, NE, SW, London, and Yorkshire, plus three hospital Trusts, Liverpool Acute, Liverpool Heart and Chest, Liverpool Uni. Ten Trusts which got over 45% are being re-balloted; other branches can put forward case to re-ballot, and members are pushing for this in some areas.

GMB members in nine ambulance Trusts: SE Coast, SW, South Central, East Mids, West Mids, Yorkshire, NE, NW and Wales, and five other NHS Trusts met the turnout threshold. Unite also has a mandate in 3 ambulance trusts: NE, NW and West Midlands.

The report that in 200 Trusts health workers voted not to strike is not true. Workers in those Trusts voted very positively to strike. Only, Tory law meant that workers who didn't vote, for what-

ever reason – changed address, postal mishap, or other – were effectively counted as voting against.

In the Unison ballots, a decade of poor workplace organisation, a slow start ("data cleansing" wasn't really started until after the ballot commenced) and ongoing lacklustre campaigning depressed turnout.

The votes are still a massive improvement. Many Unison members are taking out dual membership or switching unions to RCN. There is a lot of talk of using the legal right of workers to strike under the RCN ballot, even if they are not RCN members: government guidance states that non-union members are legally entitled to strike as long as there has been a legally-conducted strike ballot that covers their section. We should not be limited by the anti-trade union laws, and for a start we must push at their limits.

The RCN has called strikes on 15 and 20 Dec. Despite initial talk of unity Unison has so far said it will take action between 21 and 24 Dec (i.e. specifically not in co-ordination with RCN). The strikes will be more effective if there is joint action.

Activists should build for that through cross-union strike committees at local level and demands for united action on 20 December.

The basic is that trade unionists

should not cover shifts or duties of striking workers and not cross picket lines of other health (or other) unions.

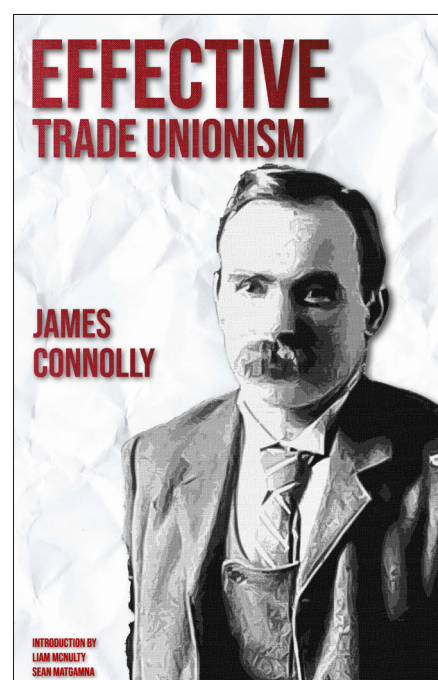
Pushing for re-ballots, striking under other unions' mandates, and dual carding are all tactics we should be using now to get united action despite anti-union laws and compliant trade union leaderships.

Activists need to build confidence for these actions, explaining the law and working to build practical solidarity.

The leadership of Time For Real Change (TFRC, the Unison left) in health, notably Karen Reissman of the SWP, are saying we should build public protests of non-striking workers to show support for the strikes and have already started talking about next year's ballots. Yes, but we can and should be more aggressive.

TFRC have the majority on Unison's National Executive. They should put out a principled position of backing other unions strikes and explain the law about not crossing picket lines. They should commit the union to publicly stating it will defend members who strike under other unions' ballots.

Health workers will face a backlash for withdrawing their labour from the very people who have decimated the NHS. Unison must launch a massive campaign to rebuild the NHS, alongside the strikes, to counter that. □



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

workersliberty.org/publications

When other workers struck to back NHS

By Sacha Ismail

In the 1980s large numbers of other workers went on strike directly in support of NHS workers' demands. In 1982 there was solidarity action on a scale comparable to the 1972 strikes that freed the Pentonville Five or even the 1926 General Strike.

During the 1982 NHS pay strike, the biggest in the health

service's history, many hundreds of thousands of other workers struck in support. On a national day of action in September, over two million workers took part in one way or another (there were about a million NHS workers). A hundred thousand demonstrated in London and thousands in cities around the country.

"Secondary picketing", picketing others' workplaces, had

been banned in 1980, but secondary industrial action in support of others was still legal. The 22 September day of action was supported by the TUC, and in many cases solidarity strikes were promoted by national union leaderships. I've spoken to workers who took part in officially called national solidarity action and were still scathing of the weak lead from their unions – but some unions did at least call some members out for some time. Radical rank-and-file activists pushed for more.

On 22 September a majority of mines and docks were closed. Fleet Street workers stopped the publication of national newspapers, and local journalists struck. Many schools were closed, and council services impacted in many areas. Post workers struck, as did car Ford and Vauxhall car workers.

Solidarity was not limited to that one day. In August, for instance, in response to action by NHS ancillary work-

ers in Edinburgh, over 2,000 firefighters in Strathclyde brigade refused to carry out station duties for a week. In June, when 30,000 health workers in Wales struck for a day, almost as many miners at 33 South Wales pits struck in support.

In the 1988 NHS pay dispute, despite the decisive defeats the labour movement had experienced since 1982, there was smaller but still very significant solidarity action. Given the nature of the issue of NHS funding, both sets were also in a sense political strikes (from the end of 1982 strictly political strikes were illegal).

In both disputes solidarity strikes must have been an important factor in the health workers winning important improvements.

In 1990 the triumphant Tories banned secondary action completely. Solidarity action has not totally disappeared, but become small, scattered, unclear...

Three decades on, even demands to repeal the ban on

it have faded away. Of the circumstances in which large-scale agitation to defy and repeal the ban could conceivably take root, sizeable strikes in the NHS rank high.

We can start on 15 December with large-scale, vigorous solidarity on picket lines and street demonstrations. □

Solidarity in 1982

"Until 1989 I worked for British Steel at its works in Ilkeston, near Nottingham. During the 1982 NHS strike we held a meeting at the plant, with about a hundred of our three hundred-strong workforce. Everyone agreed we should strike – and the next day we did.

"Then that night we had a Nottingham Labour left meeting, and an NHS worker there said her husband worked at

Cotgrave pit and they really shouldn't be working. So we got into three or four cars and went down to picket the pit and maybe a third turned away, just because of that. They'd not had a lead from their union but our picket and the fact we had a health worker there made a real difference. If we'd been able to hold a meeting with the miners we might have done even better." □

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

UCU: don't wind it down!

By a UCU member

After three days of strikes (24-25-30 Nov) and a demonstration in London, members of the University and College Union are now working to contract in "action short of strike" (ASOS). The last strike day, 30 November, coincided with the first pay negotiations since the last round in Spring 2022 concluded with an offer of just 3%. Pay talks would not usually start until March 2023, and the fact that employers are prepared to talk now shows they are worried.

The five Higher Education unions (UCU, Unison, Unite, GMB, and EIS) have agreed to urgent negotiations be-

tween now and 31 January in an effort to get a deal. There are signs that the employers will move, not least because pay rates have fallen so far behind the private sector and international standards that they are struggling to recruit in certain grades. Some have already paid bonuses on top of last year's pay rise.

The talks timescale, however, has serious problems. According to Unison (UCU statements have been vague) the unions have agreed "not to escalate" during talks. In many institutions, however, January is a key time for marking and assessment. That means grades will be submitted as normal while the talks continue. The risk is that employ-

ers hold on until they have a good percentage of this year's marks in the bag, then make an offer that's still below inflation.

In the separate pensions dispute, affecting higher grade staff in the old pre-92 universities, there is as yet no news, but with revised financial forecasts showing scheme finances have substantially recovered since the pandemic, there is also clear room for employers to move there. We need to argue for keeping up the pressure, for branches organising to make ASOS bite, and for locally targetted action, so we're not winding down the dispute for two months and losing the momentum of November. □

Return to meeting in person!

By Luke Hardy

Since lockdown in 2020, nearly all my regular labour movement meetings have stayed as wholly online affairs: Labour Party meetings, union branch meetings, union left caucuses, even many Workers' Liberty meetings.

Finally, after many false starts and technological troubles, my Labour Party has moved to hybrid meetings. I have focused on getting there in person. It has been a revelation about what we had been missing by not meeting in person.

The last three years have seen a long series of defeats for the left in the Labour Party, and locally we have had dwindling attendance of zoom meetings. The local Labour Party was reduced to the hardcore of the right and

left factions, and you could predict almost every vote before the debate. Debate was fraught and rote, dominated by the same people and the same arguments.

The move to hybrid is refreshing. There are new people there, and people whose name I might have seen on a Zoom call but whom I never got to talk with. Some of them seem to be on the left and are surely much more willing to engage. Debate is better.

At the end, in-person, we can talk, have a drink with comrades, help organise things like motions.

Some lefties on the verge of quitting felt much heartened by the experience.

We should push for hybrid meetings as much as possible. The technical hitches can be fixed, allowing people online to participate too. We ourselves

should go in-person: the left gains by the direct interaction and opportunity for discussion before and after meetings what we lost in online meetings. □



Action on Covid-19

France has seen an upturn in Covid cases and hospitalisations since mid-November, but low response to a booster jab drive (the government reckons only 21% of over-80s and 37% of those aged 60-79 are "adequately protected" by recent vaccination or mild infection). Covid death counts there remain low so far, and in Britain and many other countries as much concern focuses on Strep A, scarlet fever, flu, RSV, etc., infectious diseases especially hitting young children for which immunity may have declined due to lockdowns. But an ill-managed exit from ultra-lockdowns in China could create a huge spike there, possibly incubating a new variant which could spread dangerously world-wide. We need measures including:

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

Chantal Ackerman and "the greatest film"



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Every ten years the great and good around the film magazine *Sight and Sound* come together to list the one hundred greatest films ever made. Personally, I find this sort of exercise rather pointless. I mention it only because the number one slot has just gone to Chantal Ackerman for her film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce 1080, Bruxelles*, made in 1975.

Previous winners have all been men. Ackerman, who died in 2015, was a Belgian daughter of Holocaust survivors. She was a feminist whose work never embraced the mainstream, and was influenced early in her career by Jean-Luc Godard. In addition to her feature and short fiction films she



made sixteen documentaries. *Jeanne Dielman...* is a three-hours-plus film in which, to be blunt, not very much happens. In one twenty-minute scene Jeanne makes a meat loaf in her kitchen. Yet, I hasten to add, it is compelling viewing.

Jeanne is, in essence, an "ordinary housewife". The film questions precisely what this means, while revealing that Jeanne earns (or supplements) her living by working as a prostitute. □

Civil service strikes start 13 Dec



John Moloney

The union has announced strikes involving our members in the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), DWP and the Highways Agency. The strikes will begin on 13 December and continue until mid January. The strikes in DVSA are rolling, regional strikes, the others all-out action.

All are designed in such a way as to keep up continual pressure on the employer over a sustained period. The idea is to cause as much disruption as possible to the operation of the civil service. Every worker involved in these strikes will be paid full strike pay.

The National Disputes Committee meets now weekly, and we want to ensure there's a two-way dialogue between the committee and the grass-

roots of the union. The committee will be developing ideas about how to spread the action, and approaching reps in particular groups or departments with those ideas, but we also want union bodies to put forward their own proposals.

I want to reopen the debate about all-out, national action as early as possible in the new year. The strike wave is spreading, and in early January we'll know the outcomes of ballots by the NEU, NASUWT, and FBU, so more groups of workers could be moving into action. I'm hopeful that will galvanise our membership and give them the confidence to go for national action. I believe a combination of all-out strikes and selective action will be necessary to win the dispute.

We have a series of specific demands for this dispute; the headline demand on pay is for a 10% increase. That demand was the outcome of discussion and votes within the union, including

at national conferences. Without clear, concrete demands, you don't have a compass to guide your dispute and you don't have something concrete to measure progress towards your aims. It's a clear way of "keeping score" in a dispute.

Part of my role is to oversee and co-ordinate PCS's international work, and in that capacity I've been working on exploring ways the union can support the struggles of workers and women in Iran. I recently co-organised a meeting for PCS activists that was addressed by Iranian and Kurdish socialist-feminists, and on 28 November I attended a meeting in Parliament, chaired by John McDonnell MP, with various Iranian activists to discuss establishing a solidarity committee.

Internationalism is sometimes reduced to a buzzword in the labour movement – or, worse, distorted into apologism for authoritarian regimes because of their alleged "anti-im-



perialism". By mobilising in practical solidarity with democratic struggles in Iran, we can reaffirm a consistent, working-class internationalism. □

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

Shelter dispute key for non-profits

By Ann Field

Over 600 Unite members in the national housing charity Shelter started a fortnight's strike on 5 December.

In February Shelter offered – and started to impose – a pay rise of 3%, followed up by a succession of unconsolidated one-off payments, dependent on budget targets being met.

But Unite's pay claim was for RPI inflation (around 11%) plus a further 3%, in recognition of below-inflation pay rises in previous years.

Only after Unite members voted in favour of strike action by 86% in November did Shelter agree to enter into pay talks with Unite, mediated by at ACAS. The talks took place on 28 November

and 1 December. But on Thursday 1 Dec the talks collapsed after Shelter offered an even worse deal – no movement on this year's pay claim, and a pay rise of slightly over 4% for next year, i.e. a pay offer of two years of pay rises chronically below the rate of inflation.

This is the first national strike in the Not for Profit Sector during the current cost-of-living crisis. It could set the tone for workers (and employers) in other Not for Profit Sector organisations.

Picketing is important in any strike. But in post-Covid Shelter many staff are mainly or exclusively now home-based. Picketing empty buildings for four hours a day (Shelter's "core hours") will not be enough to win the dispute.

This is part of the much bigger question of what strategy Unite (and other

unions) have for winning pay claims at least equal to the rate of inflation in the Not for Profit Sector.

Rather than raking in a profit, Not for Profit Sector organisations are chronically underfunded. None pay out dividends. And Chief Executives in smaller Not for Profit Sector organisations are often paid less than Unite full-timers.

A war of attrition will not be enough to win this dispute and other future Not for Profit Sector disputes, and nor will tactics used by Unite in profit-making private firms with high-paid bosses. Shelter clearly calculates that it can ride out a conflict which is limited to periodic strikes by sections of its workforce.

What is needed is a war of manoeuvre, which combines traditional tactics of industrial struggle with out-

ward-looking political campaigning and community mobilisations.

Unite claims that its "Unite for a Workers Economy" campaign is designed for precisely that purpose. The Shelter strike is an opportunity for Unite to put that into practice. □

Network Rail offer should be binned



Off The Rails

With Network Rail's offer still miles away from union demands, rail union RMT has rightly named more strikes, calling action from 24-27 December. It's also put the offer, which entails below-inflation pay rises for 2022 and 2023, tied to acceptance of job cuts and restructures, to a referendum of members, with a recommendation to reject.

Presumably the thinking is that the

strong rejection that will very likely follow will send a message to Network Rail bosses... but we've already got strikes to do that. It seems superfluous to put the offer to referendum when the NEC has already summarily rejected a similarly dismal offer from the Rail Delivery Group on the TOCs side of the dispute.

But at least RMT recognises the offer is unacceptable and is calling on members to reject it, unlike the small union TSSA, which has suspended its strikes on Network Rail and is encouraging members to accept! TSSA members who see sense should join the RMT's strikes. □

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Iran: women's equality and a secular republic!

By Dan Katz

On Saturday 3 December Iran's attorney general Mohammad Jafar Montazeri claimed that, "both parliament and the judiciary are working [on the issue of the mandatory headscarf law for women]", to discuss if the law needs any changes.

A review team met on Wednesday 30 November with the "Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution", "and we will see the results in a week or two," the attorney general added.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi also claimed on Saturday that Iran's "Islamic foundations" were constitutionally entrenched, but went on to say, "there are methods of implementing the constitution that can be flexible".

According to the *Guardian*, the Union of Islamic Iran Peoples Party of former "reformist" president Mohammad Khatami has also demanded that the regime "prepare the legal elements paving the way for the cancellation of the mandatory hijab law." The party also demanded the state "officially announce the end of the activities of the morality police" and "allow peaceful demonstrations".

Opinion polls show that only a small minority of Iranians support the legal obligation for women to wear the headscarf. And even the state's own recent polling shows that 51% of Iranians believe that the hijab should be optional. The headscarf law was brought in by Iran's clerical-fascist regime in 1983. Women are discriminated against in every area of Iranian social life.

The key decision making structures in Iran are controlled by hard-line, right-wing Islamists. And Raisi is an ultra-conservative who as recently as July said, "all state institutions [should mobilise] to enforce the headscarf law",

The pedalling-back on that law shows the sustained opposition the regime is facing from the widespread women-led protests that followed the



murder of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, by the Iranian "morality police".

Mahsa Amini was arrested and beaten up by the police in the capital, Tehran, on 16 September.

Protests have taken place in 150 cities and 140 universities across Iran, and in every one of the country's 31 provinces. The main slogans of the protesters have been "Death to the Dictator!" and "Women, Life, Freedom!". Demonstrators are also motivated by the

regime's spending on interventions in Syria and Lebanon, and the endemic poverty and repression in Iran.

The Iran Human Rights group believes that at least 448 people have been killed by security forces during the protests. The UNHCR's Volker Turk has stated that 14,000 people, including many children, have been arrested. Education International believes that 700 teenagers have been arrested so far, and 50 killed.

In October the teachers' union called a two-day strike in defence of students' right to protest and in opposition to state repression.

Those arrested by the regime include prominent celebrities and sports stars.

The footballer Ehsan Hajsafi, who plays for AEK Athens, spoke out before Iran's World Cup game with England, saying: "the conditions in our country are not right and our people are not happy... They should know that we are with them. And we support them."

A number of individuals appear to have been sentenced to death on charges of "enmity against God", although Amnesty International is unsure of the exact numbers or many of the names of those who have received death sentences. Repression has been particularly severe in the Kurdish north west and in Baloch cities in the south east.

On 29 October, the Kurdish rapper Saman Yasin was sentenced to death at the 15th branch of Islamic Revolutionary Court without family or any lawyers present. His crime appears to have been support for the protests on social media.

A second Kurdish rap star, Toomaj Salehi, has also been arrested. His lyrics include: "Someone's crime was that her hair was flowing in the wind. Someone's crime was that he or she was brave and were outspoken." On 3 December left-wing Iranian activists and members of Workers' Liberty held up placards in Trafalgar Square, London, demanding the release of Toomaj Salehi.

Workers

Three Iranian workers' organisations, led by the Haft Tappeh Workers' Union, have issued a joint statement condemning the repression of people in the Kurdish towns. They demand the immediate withdrawal of all armed forces from Kurdistan and the unconditional release of all prisoners and detainees.

Alongside the street demonstrations for women's rights there appears to be an uptick in shopkeepers' strikes and workers' strikes.

A truck drivers' strike appears to be widespread, growing, and causing disruption in many other sectors. The government has responded by threatening the workers and also offering free diesel and tyres to try to buy the workers and owners off.

On 26 November 4,000 workers at the Isfahan Steel Company struck for better wages. A car factory in Karaj, near Tehran, struck on 27 November; a number of factories in the auto sector have struck for better wages recently. Factory workers in Qazvin also struck and were seen on social media chanting, "Workers, shout, shout for your rights."

Central democratic demands here include:

- Full equality for women and LGBT people in Iran
- Release all those detained during the recent protests and all political prisoners
- Free speech and association, workers' right to organise in unions and to strike
- Kurdish self-determination
- Free elections to a constituent assembly. □

Postal workers rally on 9 December

By Ollie Moore

Postal workers will demonstrate in central London on 9 December. Communication Workers Union (CWU) branches from elsewhere in the country are being encouraged to organise transport to the demonstration, with a rally in Parliament Square.

The CWU has called strikes through December, on 9, 11, 14, 15, 23 and 24. The period immediately before Christmas is seen as Royal Mail's "peak profit" period, giving postal workers additional leverage.

Although postal workers are fighting for an above-inflation pay increase, for many the dispute is felt more as a defensive battle against changes to terms and conditions which Royal Mail wants to impose. The CWU says Royal Mail's plans for the company will see it move towards a "gig economy"-style model, with increasing numbers of postal workers facing working conditions more like those on platforms like Uber than salaried employees.

CWU General Secretary Dave Ward recently

told a strike rally that workers need to "sustain the dispute, not just through this Christmas, but right through to next Christmas if necessary." Ward is right to express a sense of determination and resolve, but this can't blur the need to escalate action to a level sufficient to force concessions from employers.

Royal Mail has, in effect, already begun to impose its changes, as it has told CWU it will be hiring new starters on worse terms and conditions than existing employees. The union may be running out of time to push the company back. Picket lines, and gate meetings between strike days, must be used to discuss plans for escalation if the December strikes fail to force concessions.

The obvious next steps are either striking for a week or more at a time, or an indefinite, all-out strike. That would involve significant sacrifice by postal workers, and would require effective use of hardship funds to mitigate the financial impact. But given the stakes in the dispute, that level of action must at least be considered. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

CHINA ERUPTS: THE WORKERS ARE KEY

By Ralph Peters

The last four weeks have seen the biggest working-class revolt in China in 33 years. There have been illegal street protests and occasionally pitched battles with security police in major cities – Nanjing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Beijing, Wuhan, etc.

Shaken by the street protests from Ürümqi, capital of Xinjiang, in the west to Shanghai in the east, the Chinese government announced a climbdown, lifting the ultra-lockdowns under which workers were locked in their apartments or, as in the huge Foxconn factory complex in Zhengzhou, in their workplaces, for weeks at a time.

The ultra-lockdowns were allegedly motivated by the Chinese government's desire for "Zero Covid". Ultra-lockdowns are also useful in suppressing dissent and in maintaining production in workplaces during Covid spikes.

They also seemed a convenient way to contain Covid (though not at "zero") without

investment in vaccines and health facilities for the Chinese people. The Chinese Sinovac's [51% efficacy](#) only just exceeds the World Health Organisation's 50% efficacy threshold for Covid vaccines.

And rollout has been particularly poor for the elderly who are no longer in work. It seemed more convenient for the Chinese regime to deprive workers of free movement and social life than invest in health-care.

China is no longer a poverty-stricken country with no means of creating a health service. It has bragged that it will soon overtake the GDP of the USA. Despite a 36% decline in their wealth last year, 535 Chinese were billionaires in 2021, the top 100 with average [assets](#) of over \$9 billion each!

Many of the protests were by students and in university areas, and not just about the ultra-lockdowns. Solidarity with the Uyghurs was often expressed; demands made for Xi



Southwest Jiaotong University students mourn the victims of the fire in Ürümqi

Jinping to step down; the Internationale sung.

The state responded with mass arrests. Especially in the cities, Chinese people probably experience the most invasive surveillance done by any state on the planet. In the days that followed the protests, police went in to seek out participants and make arrests.

In Guangzhou, police dressed in white hazmat-suits went through the narrow-streeted residential working class areas with shields over their heads to make arrests. They were met with rocks and projectiles and residents pushing back fences against them. Those confrontations mirrored the workers' revolt in Zhengzhou at the Foxconn plants. □

• More inside: the workers and the regime, page 5; also pages 4, 8-9

