

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



WORKERS, UNITED, WILL WIN

- » **Unite, spread, accelerate strikes**
- » **Fight for NHS and benefits, as well as wages**
- » **Kick the Tories out**

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A class battle on several fronts



The Tory government is hinting that it may start to think it must concede a bit to the strikes. If the strikes are accelerated, spread, and united, we will win, and we can win on issues beyond wages.

The strikes, and the ferment around the semi-collapse of the NHS, union rights, and the energy price squeeze especially on households with pre-payment meters, are a class battle with several fronts.

Top bosses (CEOs) of the biggest companies (FTSE 100) have had an average [39% pay rise](#) between January 2022 and January 2023, while

middle-ranking workers have had only about 6%.

Inflation from November 2021 to November 2022 was 9.3% on the Consumer Price Index and 14% on the Retail Price Index. Inflation is worse than average for lower-paid workers, because more of their budgets go on energy and food, where prices have gone up most.

Public-sector workers, facing the government, have done worse than private-sector workers facing bosses seeing labour shortages and anxious to scoop gains from rising prices. Low-paid public sector workers are suffering so that the well-off can thrive.

Even assuming that inflation drops fast from now, and unless we win and push up wages seriously, both the worst-off and middle-range workers must expect declining real wages

through to early 2024, according to the Resolution Foundation [think-tank](#). The think-tank, though, estimates that the top 5% households will have *rising* real incomes because higher interest rates will give them a larger return on their savings and investments.

To improve NHS and other wages will take a squeeze on the rich. Not an impossible one, not even one so big that it will take revolutionary levels of mobilisation to achieve, just a squeeze.

To pay a 19% pay rise across the public sector will cost the government about £19 billion, if we take into account that a chunk of the “gross” pay rise will come back to the government in increased taxes. The Tax Justice Network explains that a 1% annual wealth tax on net assets over £10m, plus other wealth-type taxes, could raise £37 billion a year.

Maybe £1,200 billion total accrues as income each year for the rich and their well-off hangers-on.

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 £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.

Which priorities prevail? The decision which depend on whether the working class, or the capitalist class, proves more solid, united, and determined. □

Solidarity in Sheffield

By a Sheffield AWL member

Sheffield Trades Council has set up a strike solidarity committee, on a proposal from a Department of Work and Pensions PCS branch. Its meetings are open, but designed for trade-unionists from unions in dispute, to discuss cooperation and mutual aid.

Its last meeting on Wednesday 4 January drew 15 people, the range covering most of the unions with major disputes. (Not CWU this time, but there have been CWU people at-

tending before). The next meeting is 25 January, and each meeting fixes the next one ad hoc. The major practical decision from 4 January was on plans for fund-raising (bucket collections and online) to help union hardship funds.

Meanwhile Sheffield Workers' Liberty have been inviting reps from striking unions to our local group meetings, to brief us on their disputes and explore other possibilities for solidarity. So far we've had a rail (RMT) rep and an ambulance (Unison) rep. □

Why poverty remains in a rich society



Socialism vs capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Over 90 years ago, the economist John Maynard Keynes [wrote](#) that the grandchildren of his readers would have to work only 15 hours a week to assure a good living standard for all.

Now, even at a time of relatively low unemployment, millions are going short of basics like food and heating. Many thousands are homeless on the streets, and many more crammed into substandard or overcrowded accommodation.

Poverty still blights lives. And in recent years the average working week, after decades of gradually getting

shorter, has been getting longer again.

Keynes was not wrong about labour productivity increasing. In fact for much of those 90 years it increased faster than it did in his day.

Probably most poor people today have fridges and TVs and phones, which even well-off people in Keynes's time didn't have. They end up unable to take part as equals in society – unable to ask a friend round to their house, or to meet that friend in a café or bar, for example – and even short of the basics, because of capitalism, and in particular because of the endemic insecurity of working-class life under capitalism.

Squeeze

Capital needs a constant “reserve army of labour”, a pool of people desperate to get wage-work at the lowest-rate. It works constantly to reduce its “labour costs”, by replacing workers by ma-

chines and squeezing more labour out of working hours.

Thus, as Marx explained in *Capital*, many even in what he called “the aristocracy of labour” can be thrown into poverty from one year to the next.

They lose their job (or one of their jobs, for those many these days working two or three jobs). They have domestic crises which force them to pay to set up a new household. If they receive state benefits, they fall into difficulties and end up with “sanctions”, deduction from the benefits which reduce them below subsistence level.

Capitalism is an ever-rolling machine to produce wealth for the rich and produce insecurity and poverty at the other pole.

Socialism means “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. No more ultra-rich, and no-one going short of the basics. □



NHS crisis kills thousands

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine has estimated that deaths were running at an excess of 500 per week over long-term averages as far back as last [August](#).

With winter, and even with the relatively mild weather of recent weeks, it must be worse now.

Ambulance workers tell us of such things as managers telling them to leave patients in Accident and Emergency departments even if they can find no medical staff available to take them in – just to give the patient a note with medical information and hope some member of staff will pick up on it.

NHS Trust websites have been advertising treatments available quicker via their own [private divisions](#), as waiting lists for NHS treatment reach 7.2 million.

Medical services are under strain all over Europe with the backlog from Covid surges, high rates of flu, and Covid rates continuing fairly brisk too. Britain is worse because of the cumulative effects of government spending shortfalls and creeping privatisation since 2010.

While expanding and supporting the strikes, activists will also push for the labour movement to campaign for restoration of the NHS and against new anti-strike laws, and to demand clear pledges on those from the Labour Party leadership. □

Workers, united, will win

By Ollie Moore

Public sector unions with live strike mandates look likely to call a coordinated strike in early February. They may be joined by unions in privatised former public services such as post and rail, and more. It will be the nearest thing to a full general strike we've seen for decades.

It must be used as a launchpad for further action, rather than a one-off set piece. To see it as the unsurpassable final weapon, rather than a next step in an ongoing and escalating struggle, will be demobilising and disempowering.

If that strike takes place, it must be bolstered by strike solidarity rallies in as many towns and cities as possible. Those rallies are also opportunities to turn the strikes towards politics in a conscious and active way, explicitly raising the political demands which lie behind the strikes without being official strike demands, such as increased benefits and minimum wage, and the rebuilding and renationalisation of public services, especially the NHS.

Alongside strike solidarity activity, specific campaigning, including demonstrations and protests, against

the threat of new anti-strike laws is also needed. The mooted laws will not be implemented soon enough to cut off the strike wave in the next weeks or months, but any complacency, including assumptions that the laws will be unworkable or ineffective in practice, would be radically misplaced.

So, too, would fake-militant posturing that dismisses the need for political campaigning against the laws in advance by counterposing mass defiance after they are imposed. Such defiance will undoubtedly be necessary to confront and defeat the laws if they are passed, but to prepare it and boost it to the level of winning repeal of the laws, we need specific, active campaigning to denounce those which starts now, without waiting.

School workers and fire fighters are concluding industrial action ballots in the coming weeks, and junior doctors launching one on 9 January.

Ambulance workers, nurses, civil servants in various departments, school teachers in Scotland, Abellio bus drivers in London, and others also have strikes planned in January, and some indefinite strikes continue from last year. RMT reps on London Underground met on 9 January, but delayed a decision on further action in their dispute over jobs, pension, and conditions. The British Medical Association, which represents doctors, has already said junior doctors will begin with a 72-hour strike in March should ballot thresholds be met.

RMT intensified its action on national rail in December and January, escalating what had been sporadic 24 or 48-

(Prospect, TSSA, RMT) strike

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

18-19 Jan: Nurses in many areas (RCN) strike

23 Jan: Ambulance workers in London, Yorkshire, the North West, North East and South West strike (Unison)

25 Jan: Workers at Amazon's BHX4 facility in Coventry (GMB) strike

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

March, date tbc: 72-hour strike by junior doctors (BMA), pending outcome of ballot

Ballots

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

Until 23 Jan: Firefighters (FBU) ballot for action over pay

AWL conference 29-30 April

Workers' Liberty conference will be 29-30 April. □

Strikes

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

Since 9 Dec: Arrow XL workers (Unite) on indefinite strike

From 13 Dec, various dates through Dec and Jan: Rolling action by Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and Rural Payments Agency workers (PCS)

10, 12, 16, 20 Jan: Hackney library workers strike (Unison)

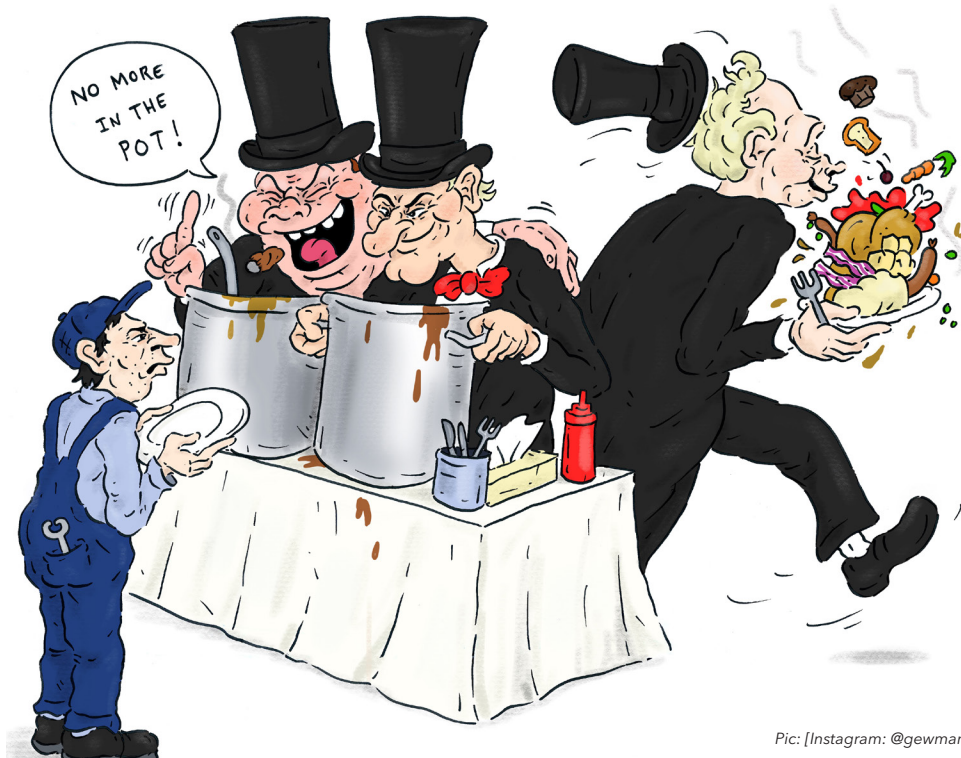
10, 12, 16, 19, 25, 26 Jan: Abellio bus drivers in west and southwest London (Unite) strike

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

10-11 Jan: School teachers in Scotland strike (EIS, SSTA, and NASUWT, each union with different details)

11 Jan: Ambulance workers in many Trusts strike (Unison, GMB)

12 Jan: Rail for London Infrastructure (Elizabeth line infrastructure) workers



Pic: [Instagram: @gewman]

hour strikes into whole weeks of action, in two 48-hour blocks. With no sign of movement from the employer, the union will need to step up action again to get results. In the CWU's dispute with Royal Mail, there was escalation in December, but momentum is now at risk: the union will call no further strikes until at least 20 January. This is the second time the union has held back to allow for "intensive negotiations". The first time produced no good results, and there is no reason to believe this time will be different: negotiations go better when the bosses are under pressure.

On 25 January, workers at Amazon's BHX4 warehouse in Coventry will strike

to demand better pay. The strike will be the first official industrial action by Amazon workers in Britain, although there were multiple unofficial walkouts and sit-ins at several sites during the summer. US socialist Kim Moody's 2017 book *On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of Class War* argued the large logistics networks operated by companies like Amazon are increasingly central to capitalism – and to rebuilding working-class power. The Amazon strike, although currently limited to only one warehouse, therefore has significance beyond its immediate location. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 18 January, 4pm: Democracy under Socialism, Institute of Education cafe, Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL

Wednesday 18 January, 7:45pm: Workers' unions fighting back, New Unionism 1888-1892, New Cross Learning, 283 -285 New Cross Road, London, SE14 6AS

Friday 20 January, 6:30pm: James Connolly: Socialist, Nationalist and Internationalist book launch, All Good Bookshop, 35 Turnpike Lane, London, N8 0EP

Monday 23 January, 7:30pm: Women, Life, Freedom – Solidarity with the people of Iran

Monday 30 January, 7pm: The Communist Manifesto: Workers' Liberty study group

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



Qatargate and the union movement



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

In early December, the newly-elected leader of the International Trade Union Confederation, Luca Visentini, was arrested in Brussels as part of a major police operation targeting members of the European Parliament. Visentini was released conditionally after a couple of days and temporarily stepped aside from his new job.

The scandal – quickly branded as “Qatargate” – involved large payments in cash from the Qatari government to leading figures in the European Parliament, mainly from the centre-left Socialist & Democrat (S&D) faction. The most prominent figure arrested was Eva Kaili, a Greek politician who did little to hide her support for the Qatari regime. She publicly called Qatar a “frontrunner in labour rights” after meeting with the country’s labour minister.

Though the ITUC’s Visentini denied any wrongdoing and announced his eagerness to clear his name, he admitted that he had received tens of thousands of Euros in cash from the NGO at the heart of the scandal. The money, he claimed, was used primarily to sup-

port his campaign to be elected ITUC leader, including funds to pay travel expenses for delegates who were likely to support him at the Melbourne congress. That Visentini thought this explanation would suffice is shocking.

The ITUC got barely a mention in mass media coverage of the arrests. This is because its media profile is so low that most journalists covering the story have probably never come across it before. And yet the organisation represents most of the world’s national trade union centres, including the British TUC and the American AFL-CIO.

The ITUC has been relatively weak on the subject of migrant workers’ rights in Qatar, having engaged for a long time in “quiet diplomacy” with the regime. Unlike Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and groups supporting the rights of migrant workers, the leading body of the world’s labour movement was largely silent on human rights violations in Qatar while praising “progress” being made there.

There is even a video made available by Qatar’s Labour Ministry showing the previous ITUC leader, Sharan Burrow, praising the efforts being made by the regime – and encouraging doubters to come to see this for themselves. This all pre-dates Visentini’s election.

The ITUC came under fire from several Nordic unions and others, including the German trade unionist Frank

Hoffer. Hoffer wrote a blistering attack on the organisation’s leadership which was widely circulated. The Building and Wood Workers’ International, one of the global unions which has done the most in support of migrants in the region, was swift to react: “It is always extremely serious when those with public responsibilities are charged with corruption,” they wrote. “It is even more outrageous when those who are allegedly bribed are... claiming to stand on [the] workers’ side.”

The ITUC General Council decided not to sack Visentini nor to call new elections for the post, even after he admitted to taking the cash to fund his campaign. Instead, it announced that it would suspend him for three months and that its General Council would meet again. The statement concluded by saying that “this in no way implies any presumption of guilt.”

Meanwhile, the Greek party PASOK and the European Parliament had already taken much more dramatic steps to expel those arrested by the Belgian police.

On one level, the core of the problem is that the ITUC leadership, which was well aware of large-scale, persistent human rights violations in Qatar, chose not to campaign openly nor to mobilise its millions of members. Instead, it met behind the scenes with Qatar’s rulers, securing some concessions on paper.

But at another level, the problem with the ITUC is structural. It is a confederation of national trade union centres. That means that while on paper, it claims to represent hundreds of millions of workers, the reality is that only very few of those workers have heard of the organisation.

Its decision-making process is opaque. Compared with how the ITUC has handled this scandal, the European Parliament has been open and transparent – words I never thought I would write.

The leaders of the ITUC’s affiliated national trade union centres, including the British TUC, should be demanding a full accounting not only regarding the bags of cash that Visentini admits taking but also of its long-standing policy of engagement with the Qatari regime. We should be demanding complete openness and transparency from the ITUC, starting with live video-streaming of its next General Council meeting.

The migrant workers in Qatar, many of whom died in the years leading up to the FIFA World Cup, should have been able to count on the full support of the world’s unions. Instead, they were betrayed by some who we entrusted with leading our movement. Shame on them. □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal opinion column

Keep up the fight for free movement

By Ben Tausz

On 19 December, the High Court ruled that the government’s plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda is lawful. This did not close the matter – appeals are planned, and a European Court of Human Rights injunction prohibits deportations while the legal process is ongoing – but it should remind us that we cannot rely solely on a legal strategy and must prepare to resist removals via direct action and worker action.

On the same day as the judgement, asylum seekers housed at a Haringey hotel were sent letters saying they were to be moved to be held in the notoriously poor conditions at Napier Barracks. When an enforcement van arrived at the hotel, an emergency callout drew protesters who blocked the removal. In a positive development, local Labour council leader Peray

Ahmet addressed the demonstration and pledged that Haringey would oppose removal of anyone who wished to stay in the borough.

The local labour movement should hold the council to that promise. It should exert pressure to ensure that the council does not limit itself to writing sternly-worded letters to ministers, but continues to support active community protest. And the entire labour movement should mobilise to support the kind of mass direct action that prevented this and other removals.

The Tories’ plan is that some proportion of the people seeking asylum after arriving irregularly in the UK, will instead be removed to Rwanda and told they can apply for sanctuary there. The UK will refuse all responsibility for these refugees. Supposedly, this will deter people from travelling to the UK by dangerous irreg-

ular routes – never mind that for almost all refugees, no safe, legal routes are allowed. As *Solidarity* has argued previously, it is the harsh border regime itself that pushes people to travel by dangerous and irregular routes.

Assessing the court judgement, immigration lawyer Colin Yeo highlighted the judges’ questionable level of faith that the authoritarian, violently dissent-averse Rwandan government would respect the rights of refugees transported there. Yeo also flagged the judges’ worrying ruling that the asylum seekers disputing their potential removal did not need to be provided with legal representation. Despite these and other issues, based on the record of the current Supreme Court, Yeo predicts that in the event of an appeal the Court is more likely to defer to the government and uphold this ruling.

It was very welcome that the PCS union, representing Home Office workers, joined refugee rights organisations and prospective deportees in pursuing the legal case against the government. But concerningly, the judges also ruled that PCS and two of those rights organisations had no standing in the case, i.e. no legitimate right to contest the policy in court.

I do not have the legal expertise to say to what extent this could set a restrictive precedent obstructing unions’ legal challenges to other government policies. But this, and Yeo’s prediction that the government has a strong chance of winning at the appeal stage, underscore the importance of workers getting organised in our unions for concrete action to resist government policies in the streets and in our workplaces, alongside any legal action by union leaders.

More broadly, we must not

allow the barbarity of the Rwanda plan to make existing immigration policy appear tolerable by comparison. The Labour leadership condemns the government’s lack of compassion over Rwanda, yet it otherwise continues to pander to xenophobia. Starmer’s team promises to substantively maintain Britain’s brutal, racist and anti-worker immigration controls, pitching themselves merely as an alternative, more “competent” and “cost-effective”, overseer.

With allies in the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and the wider migrants’ rights movement, we continue our efforts to convince and equip the labour movement with perspectives and demands that instead uphold internationalism, anti-racism and working-class solidarity. And so equipped, to mount a genuine challenge to the anti-migrant regime. □

Tate thrives on outrage



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Isogynist influencer Andrew Tate has been remanded in custody in Romania until the end of January, after being arrested by anti-organised crime police as part of a rape and human trafficking investigation. He was arrested alongside his brother Tristan.

Romanian police said in late December 2022 that they'd identified six people who were allegedly "sexually exploited" by an "organised criminal group" that "recruited" victims via false displays of affection (known as the so-called "loverboy method"), forcing women to perform pornographic content via "physical violence and mental coercion".

Tate had been accused of similar cases of emotional abuse and sexual assault, including rape, in the UK. Several women filed criminal complaints

with Hertfordshire Police in 2015. Delays in the investigation meant the case was not sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) until July 2019. The CPS declined to prosecute. The CPS was criticised in that period, with rape prosecutions in 2019-2020 plummeting 70% from 2016-17, to their lowest levels on record.

Whilst complaints were under investigation by Hertfordshire Police, Tate appeared as a contestant on reality TV show Big Brother in 2016. Producers were informed by police of the ongoing investigation but kept him on the show for five days before removing him. This combined with his social media use helped him build a global brand. In October 2022 he said he had converted to Islam. That may win him some new outreach, but may not have dented him with his old far-right constituency.

Suspects in the Tate case allegedly used the "loverboy" method of trafficking, which involves a man luring a victim into a relationship in order to sexually exploit them later.

On his website, Tate described an approach outlining his method in recruiting to his webcam business. "Over 50% of my employees were actually my girlfriend at the time and, of all my girlfriends, *none* were in the adult entertainment industry before they met me... My job was to meet a girl, go on a few dates, sleep with her, test if she's quality. Get her to fall in love with me to where she'd do anything I say, and then get her on webcam so we could become rich together." Those sections have since been deleted.

Tate's deep-seated contempt for women and far-right sympathy have been common knowledge for some time. His online brand is enormous and is part of a worrying trend of far-right web reach.

Unlike "regular" celebrities, those with primarily online careers can be more resilient to and even boosted by bad press. Algorithms are weak at distinguishing re-posting something in agreement or outrage. Every time you stitch, share and repost to highlight something you hate, it boosts the

profile of whoever created the content. This is amplified by traditional press running clickbait news stories about either the original content or public reaction.

Tate was banned from Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. He was suspended from Twitter but his official account has now been reactivated, after the Musk Twitter takeover. Recently social media platforms have taken the decision to ban or suspend some far-right users to maintain mainstream advertising revenue and avoid calls for state regulation. This has fuelled the growth of explicitly right-wing libertarian sites like Gab, Parler, Gettr and Truth. Twitter may join as a connecting piece between traditional web 2.0 sites and libertarian new wave platforms.

The rise of alt right sites shows that bans are no adequate solution. The left needs to engage with and offer alternative politics to those who might be won over to right-wing ideas. This arrest may or may not be the end of Andrew Tate, but he's simply the tip of the iceberg of the violent sexist right. □

Chaos at the Capitol again

By Tom Harrison

Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene has gone on record saying the 6 January 2021 attack on Congress would have succeeded with her in charge, because she'd have made sure the pro-Trump crowd all had guns. For an elected politician in any other purportedly democratic country to come out with such remarks would be career suicide. However, Greene now exercises considerable influence in the House of Representatives as part of the far-right faction wringing concessions from Speaker Kevin McCarthy. (She did it while voting McCarthy from the start, while others refused him a majority until he conceded.)

There are now 34 members of Congress who took an active role in the attempted coup. Their activities ranged from plans to overthrow the popular vote in their state to pushing for Trump to declare martial law.

Open association with fascists has also become de rigueur in Trumpist circles.

There was that notorious lunch at Mar-a-Lago, with Trump playing host to rabidly antisemitic Kanye West and his Nazi buddy Nick Fuentes. Not to be outdone by his father, Don Jr has hobnobbed with Peter Brimelow, another promoter of antisemitic conspiracy tosh and virulent opposition to Hispanic immigration.

The Republican Party didn't make hoped for gains in the mid-term elections and looks less likely to nominate Donald Trump as Presidential candidate in 2024. But whether or not any GOP big fish will face legal reckoning for their role in the attempted coup of 6 January 2021 remains to be seen.

Close to a thousand people have been charged with crimes linked to the Capitol attack, yet they're all small fry. As another year passes, it's really make or break time for those tasked with bringing the leading plotters and enablers to account. The liberal leaning US media continue to put their faith in Special Counsel Jack Smith to indict Trump and his circle, but this may be another

false dawn – joining the Mueller Report and the two impeachments in failing to bring about any meaningful retribution.

January 6 has inevitably been compared to the recent bizarre antics of the Reichsburgers, whose attempt at organising a coup was swiftly crushed by the German state well before the hatching stage. The roundup of various neo-Nazis, monarchists and assorted conspiracist fruitcakes there emphasised their total lack of support in the German population at large.

In contrast, recent polls show 20% of Americans now saying they approve of the J6 attack. Another attempt at overthrowing election results remains a distinct possibility, especially if the Justice Department fails to bring criminal charges against Trump and his circle for their role in the coup.

Trump's personal position appears to have taken a downward turn. There is now talk of him failing to get the Republican nomination and being a third-party candidate. The mul-

multiple attempts to block McCarthy getting elected as Speaker show divisions in the GOP, though the far-right tail now wags the Republican majority dog in Congress.

The far right got McCarthy (who is already himself very right-wing) to concede that henceforth it will only take a single member of the House to challenge his position, making his tenure under threat on a daily basis over the next two years. This autocrat-loving group "Freedom Caucus" will also do its damndest to help Putin by cutting future aid to Ukraine.

Creating chaos in the legislature and making government there appear unworkable is straight out of Steve Bannon's fascist playbook as a precondition for advancing an authoritarian regime.

But it looks like more Republicans want Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as their 2024 candidate, seeing him as a sanitised version of Trump.

Florida is the state with the largest number of people arrested over 6 January. DeSan-

tis has issued a couple of mealy mouthed condemnations of it, but generally avoids talking about the issue. He's also been reticent about Trump's "stolen election" claims. Nevertheless, his electoral gerrymandering and voter suppression in Florida and his use of the state police there for political purposes casts him in an authoritarian mould. More intelligent than Trump, he is more capable of carrying out a successful authoritarian coup that could be successful next time.

American politics has not returned to "normalcy" and neither the Democrat Party or the various agencies of the state – some of them containing a substantial number of Trump followers – cannot be relied upon to defend democratic rights. Socialists in America have recognised this and are advancing the need for working-class self-defence. Actively building a mass movement based in unions, workplaces and social movements is the only meaningful way to combat the continued threat posed by American fascism. □

Getting out 100,000 on 21 April?



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

After four years of a strategy of forcing change by filling the world's jails with climate activists, Extinction Rebellion have "quit" that scheme.

In a New Year's message they declare a temporary "shift away from public disruption as a primary tactic... to prioritise attendance over arrest and relationships over roadblocks." They hope that the shift to non-confrontational tactics will help them put 100,000 people on the streets for their next demonstration on 21 April.

XR's strategy of seeking mass arrests never really made much sense. If XR activists are now rethinking then this is a positive development.

XR was founded by academics and environmental activists inspired by a book called *Why Civil Resistance Works* by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, about non-violent civil diso-

bedience on the Gandhi model. They made two claims. First, "no regime in the 20th century managed to stand against an uprising which had the active participation of up to 3.5% of the population." Second, "[political] violence destroys democracy and the relationships with opponents which are vital to creating peaceful outcomes to social conflict...it almost always leads to fascism and authoritarianism. The alternative, then, is non-violence."

So, mobilise 3.5% of the population in non-violent civil disobedience – that's two million people in the UK – and we'll get a rapid change in wealth distribution and power structures (whatever the other 96.5% do).

XR has probably exhausted the pool of people who are convinced by this argument. The historical evidence doesn't fit. Gandhi's (big) movement failed to remove the British from India for nearly four decades and then only gained its objective at the cost of Partition and a bloodbath that displaced 15 million and cost over one million. Hostility between India and Pakistan still

poses a threat of nuclear apocalypse.

Most late-20th century revolutions resulted in authoritarian government not because revolutionaries took up arms, but because they were led by bourgeois, small-bourgeois, Stalinist, or clerical cliques, not by the organised working class.

XR indicted: "A financial system prioritising profits over life, a media failing to inform the public and hold power to account, and... politicians, addicted to greed and bloated on profits." The endless pursuit of profit is indeed the root cause of the climate and ecological emergency. But it is not simply the financial system that prioritises profits over life. The whole capitalist economy does. Capitalism isn't a moral failing of the ruling class "addicted to greed": it is a form of social organisation.

To stop accelerating ecocide requires not simply "regime change" but a whole new way of organising economic life. In the first instance, the industrial sectors that underpin all production and are the main drivers of ecological destruction – energy, mining, agricul-

ture, water, forestry – need to be taken into public ownership and organised on an ecologically sustainable basis. We cannot stop accelerating ecological crises if the industrial sectors that cause most ecological harm are constantly expanding and accelerating their ecocidal work in the pursuit of ever greater profits.

There are now sophisticated technical plans for how key industrial sectors should be organised so we might avoid escalating ecocide and civilisational collapse. What is lacking is a form of social and political organisation able to enact these plans.

The mass workers' movement, which shows signs of revival from four decades of decline, is the only social force with the interest and potential power to overthrow the rule of profit and reorganise work according for human and ecological ends.

21 April could provide an opportunity for the trade union movement to join forces with environmental activists and begin building the movement we so desperately need. □

Putin digs a hole with more repression

By Michael Baker

On 29 December Mikhail Lobanov, professor of mathematics at Moscow State University, socialist and grassroots political activist, was beaten and arrested by Russian police at his flat in Moscow and given a short jail sentence.

Lobanov has been involved in multiple popular municipal election campaigns in Moscow; he founded the website Prodvizhenie in 2022 to focus and organise support for the left in local elections across Russia; and he has worked for many years on the Russian left more generally, both within the Russian Socialist Movement (RSD) and a more recent push for a grassroots socialist revival in the Communist Part of the Russian Federation (which expelled him last year). He is due to be released on 13 January, but another sentence may follow almost immediately. In a statement released while under arrest, he said:

"With its repressions the regime is digging itself into a hole. These repressions, however, are also dangerous to our society. Not only because they

destroy lives, but also because they create a thirst for vengeance, which could distract us at the very moment of our radical break with the past."

Lobanov is the latest in a long list of activists and trade unionists currently facing unjust or fabricated arrest charges. The Courier Trade Union carried out a strike in December 2022, during which they called for the release of their leader Kirill Ukraintsev, still awaiting trial. Two activists from the medical workers' trade union Deistvie ("Action"), Vladimir Baranov and Anton Orlov, have been arrested on false charges and are awaiting trial. In a period of uncertainty fuelled by the war in Ukraine, the Russian state is clearly attempting to clamp down even tighter than usual on the labour movement and the left.

Activists in the RSD have called for 19 January to be a day of solidarity with Russian political prisoners. In 2009, 19 January was the day when antifascist activists Stanislas (Stas) Markelov and Anastasia (Nastya) Baburova were murdered at gunpoint by an unidentified assailant. Every year in their

honour, the Russian left has organised a commemoration of some sort: formerly marches, more recently (due to Covid and now tightened laws on public protest) other forms of non-street protest and events. Ilya Budraitskis has published an article, republished by [Workers' Liberty](#), calling for international actions of solidarity.

Pressures

After recent pressures on its Ukrainian counterpart over collaboration with the Russian state, the Russian Orthodox Church tried to show itself as a bringer of peace in the new year. Patriarch Kirill made a public statement calling for a 36-hour ceasefire from 6-7 January to mark Orthodox Christmas, a call that Putin brought into effect immediately. As reported by the BBC, the president's speech announcing the ceasefire noted the "large numbers of Orthodox believers [who] reside in areas where hostilities are taking place" who would wish to celebrate the holiday – a barbed comment reaffirming the supposed support in the

occupied territories for Russian control.

On New Year's Eve, hundreds of migrants were reportedly arrested and interrogated in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Police cited "precautionary measures", and the arrests (a minimum of 350 in Moscow alone) were coupled with documentation checks on migrants in other regions. A vegetable processing plant in Tula checked 120 workers and deported one, following a similar raid at the warehouses of the companies Ozon.ru and Wildberries on 28-29 Dec, and a further 12 migrants were arrested (and two deported) in the city on the 30th.

Representatives of various national anti-war projects in the Russian Federation have declared 2023 to be the "year of Russia's decolonisation". The video statement calls for independent statehood and borders for many of the country's republics: "let each of our republics achieve sovereignty and freedom from the Kremlin. We want the life of every person in the republics to have meaning and be treated as worthy!"

Regardless of the feasibility or practicality of dissolving the Russian state itself (I am swayed by Kevork Oskanian's [arguments](#) against the idea), it is undeniable that regional and ethnic repression and exploitation is a cornerstone of the Russian Federation, and that some form of devolved power away from the Kremlin and into the hands of Russia's ethnic minority populations is a necessary part of countering and accounting for the damage and ongoing danger of Russian imperialism.

On 5 December, Putin finally signed into law a total ban on all "LGBT propaganda". The law, first discussed in *Solidarity* [638](#), went through various parliamentary hoops (including at one point being voted out and brought back in an almost unchanged wording), but now bans in essence all public mention of LGBTQ people, including any mention in books, films, TV or music. Sale of imported foreign media that makes reference to LGBTQ people is also forbidden, though it would be hard to tell with so little imported now. □

Why we won't march with Stop the War on 25 Feb

By Dan Katz

The risible pseudo-pacifist Stop the War Campaign, run by Stalinists and peaceniks, and despised by the left and trade unions in Ukraine, has called a demonstration to mark the first anniversary of the Russian invasion (25 February, London).

The demands of these marchers are: "Stop sending arms [to Ukraine]; immediate ceasefire and peace negotiations."

Conspicuously, the marchers will not be demanding that Russian forces get out of Ukraine.

The StW call to end arms shipments to Ukraine, if carried through by the West, would lead to a Russian victory, the subordination of Ukraine to Russian political power, a regime of terror imposed across Ukraine and the smashing of Ukraine's socialist organisations and trade unions.

If such a terrible event were to happen there would not be peace but a long-running guerrilla war as Ukrainians rightly resist Russian occupation.

An "immediate ceasefire" is something Putin would like to use to regroup and rearm after recent military defeats. It is a pro-Putin demand from a group which is run by people who are largely (but quietly) pro-Putin, at least in the sense that they view this war as a conflict between NATO and Russia, and in

that conflict want the defeat of NATO.

Putin currently has no intention of halting his relentless, grinding war and, according to plausible military assessments, is planning a new mobilisation of conscripts and a new offensive this Spring. Calls for ceasefire in this situation mean Ukrainian defeat, surrender and obliteration.

Why should the Ukrainians "compromise" with Putin, leaving 20% of their territory under Russian occupation? Since when has the left argued like this? Did we say to colonial, British-occupied India: we think a reasonable compromise would be that India should accept, to avoid any unnecessary nastiness, that Britain should continue to run Punjab and Bengal?

Only an idiot would argue like that. And yet that's what the StW position amounts to, at best: put up with partial occupation (so we in north London don't have to suffer high gas prices and the disruption of our economy).

An immediate ceasefire would leave the Ukrainians of Melitopol, occupied Kherson and Luhansk oblasts to suffer under Russian occupation. And why should they live under Russian rule? We should remember what that means: mass arrests, torture, rape, vast looting, the destruction of all opposition and all elected authorities, and the imposition of a foreign police state regime.

Remember that 1,200 civilian corpses

were found after the Russian withdrawal from north of Kyiv in April. Ukrainian investigators have opened files on over 50,000 apparent war crimes.

The Ukrainians have the right to self-determination. They are right to fight and have a right to demand weapons and financial aid from the West – in exactly the same way that the Vietnamese took help from China and Russia when they fought to push the US out of their country.

The Stalinists of StW, plus Socialist Worker, and the useful idiots that help them, make no sense when they argue that NATO caused this war. Putin caused this war by invading Ukraine to grab more territory beyond the areas he took in 2014. Putin is an imperialist aggressor, a kleptocrat and authoritarian.

There is no symmetry between NATO and Russia. NATO has no forces fighting. Some Western countries are helping a small power from being overrun by a brutal, aggressive Russian imperialism. The blame for the invasion and the consequences of the invasion lies with Putin, and his state.

The StW "left" argue that the US/NATO provoked this war in order to crush Russia. Their "analysis" ignores the facts. The main EU states, Germany and France, have been very seriously affected by this war, which scares them. In the past, in 2015, they strong-armed

Ukraine to sign the pro-Russia Minsk Agreements in order to stop the threat of war and continue trade with Russia.

The US has no interest in a war with Russia. Why would it need one? War has been bad for business, creating instability and economic disruption.

The West did not want this war.

The West has carefully controlled the weapon supply to Ukraine, denying main battle tanks and advanced aircraft to Ukraine. If the US wanted to it could provide enough weaponry to Ukraine to beat Russia. But it has not donated all the weapons Ukraine needs. So far they have given just enough to stop Ukraine losing.

And you will not read about Putin's crimes on the StW website, nor will you find solidarity with the brave anti-war protesters now in Russian prisons or with the tens of thousands of Russian refugees who have fled to avoid fighting Putin's colonial war.

Workers' Liberty wants peace, too. But we want a just peace. The only democratic, stable peace will come after a Ukrainian victory.

That is why we will not march with Stop the War. Instead we will be helping Ukrainians march on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion. Those marches will demand Arms to Ukraine, Russian troops out of Ukraine and support for Ukraine's fight for self-determination. □

Why I joined the AWL



Joining the AWL

By Tam Charles

My first experience in activism was the student rent strikes of 2020-21, which saw a burst of student radical student organisation against mistreatment by university management. As quickly as that movement came onto the scene, it collapsed under the pressures of organising under Covid and of petty factionalism.

Some of that came from the behaviour of the local

Marxsoc, who abandoned the occupation of the Arts Tower before it had even begun. That left me with a bad impression of "Marxist" politics.

I encountered Workers' Liberty through Sheffield Solidarity Group and participated in supporting the Just Eat couriers' strike. The enthusiasm and tenacity of AWL members in helping to organise the couriers was awe-inspiring. It showed me that a well organised group can intervene to move workers into direct conflict with capitalism. It also taught the importance of winning respect from the

people you are trying to do politics with.

The UCU strikes gave me the opposite example. While there was energetic support by students on picket lines and in university occupations, this energy was not matched by the union. The feisty evening couriers' pickets and the drip of UCU strike action were worlds apart. This showed me why it was so important to transform the workers' movement into one that could fight back and win.

Interacting with the wider left sealed the decision to Workers' Liberty. Wide-

spread disorganisation in the name of anti-hierarchy led to cliques and hundreds of WhatsApp groups, and was often combined with an anti-educational perspective that only saw practical activity as useful, particularly direct action.

Agitation, education, and organisation were left to the wind. I felt that if I was serious about socialism there were no alternatives to joining an organised group. I joined Workers' Liberty because I agree with the group's politics and its structured approach to making them happen. □

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Fusion energy: moonshine or sunshine?



By Les Hearn

Since the formation of the first stars, fusion of hydrogen into helium has provided abundant energy, with nearly all our energy coming to us as sunshine. Further fusion reactions in exploding stars have produced all the naturally occurring elements making up the planets. Some of the Earth's internal energy comes from the natural nuclear fission of unstable radioactive elements in the core. Despite Ernest Rutherford's dismissive comment in 1933, "Anyone who expects a source of power from the transformation of the atom is talking moonshine," humans have used nuclear fission, first in immensely destructive atomic bombs, and then generating electricity in nuclear power stations. However, harnessing nuclear fusion has proved elusive (apart from H-bombs).

The problem is that, while fission reactions occur spontaneously once a critical mass of uranium-235 has been assembled, fusion reactions require temperatures and pressures like those in the centre of the Sun. This has only been achieved in hydrogen bombs using an atomic bomb trigger to compress and heat the fuel, a mixture of deuterium (D) and tritium (T). (Deuterium – heavy hydrogen; fairly common – and tritium – heavier still but radioactive; extremely rare – are easier to get to fuse than ordinary hydrogen).

For safe fusion rather than bombs, a way needs to be found of confining the fuel long enough to reach the required temperature and pressure. The problem is that, at such a temperature, the fuel becomes a hot gas of ions (plasma) which tends to escape. There are two approaches to this problem, the tokamak and inertial confinement (IC). In tokamaks, a toroidal (doughnut-shaped) vacuum chamber, permeated by an enormous magnetic field, contains a plasma of fast-moving D and T ions heated to 150 million °C, hot enough for fusion to occur. With inertial confinement, a tiny sphere containing D and T is blasted with lasers, compressing and heating the fuel.

Success requires a greater output of energy than that put in. The ratio of output to input energy (Q) therefore has to exceed 1 by a large amount for

a commercially viable reactor. So far, the Joint European Torus has achieved $Q = 0.67$, with power for 5 seconds at a lower Q. The larger International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) is projected to produce sustained power at Q greater than 1 from 2035. Meanwhile, the National Ignition Facility (NIF) in California, using inertial confinement, had achieved a Q of 0.7 in 2021 for a short time.

Last month, in a first, the NIF achieved $Q = 1.5$, the first gain in energy in a fusion experiment and a first step on the road to commercial use. However, the details show there is far to go. A peppercorn-sized glass sphere containing D and T inside a gold capsule was blasted with 192 lasers, the hot gold emitting X-rays causing the fuel pellet

to implode, heating and pressurising the fuel. Inertia meant that there was a tiny fraction of a second for fusion to occur before everything flew apart.

Commercial IC reactors would require a fast throughput of expensive fuel pellets for useful energy production; gold isn't cheap but tritium costs about 500 times more. The NIF experiment produced about 1 megajoule of energy: at 10 a second, that would be 10 MW power, 1/100th the output of a nuclear plant. If Q and the throughput of fuel pellets could be increased, there is still the problem of harvesting the heat for electricity.

A commercial tokamak with a continuous injection of D and T into its chamber seems more plausible. ITER, "the most complicated engineering project

in human history", is planned to produce 500 MW of heat for up to 10 minutes a time. Problems include damage to the tokamak walls from high-speed particles, mostly neutrons carrying useful heat. Tritium would also need to be generated from lithium in the tokamak walls; the electromagnets would have to be immensely strong, made of superconducting wires cooled by liquid helium close to absolute zero. The temperature differential between the magnets and the hot plasma will likely be the greatest in the universe.

It is difficult to see fusion becoming a significant contributor to carbon-free energy but many of its discoveries and innovations may find applications in other areas, as with the CERN particle-collider. □

Where does fusion energy come from?

The famous $E = mc^2$ equation (Einstein, 1905) acquired a startling implication when atomic masses could be measured accurately.

Atomic masses, relative to the standard carbon-12 atom with an exact mass of 12 units (u), seemed to be whole numbers: this was logical because atomic nuclei contain whole numbers of protons and neutrons, each with a relative mass of 1. However, more precise measurements came up with puzzling discrepancies. Most astonishing was that the mass of hydrogen-1

(with just 1 proton in its nucleus) was 1.0078 u while that of helium-4 (2 protons; 2 neutrons) was not 4.0312 but 4.0026 u. Its mass was 0.0286 u or 0.7% less than it should have been ("mass defect").

The mass lost was equivalent to the energy released if a more stable He-4 nucleus was made by fusing 4 H-1 nuclei. If 1 kg of hydrogen were fused into helium, enough energy would be released to boil 200 million kettles, while burning 1 kg of hydrogen would release only enough energy to boil 200 kettles.

Conversely, for heavy atoms, mass is lost when unstable nuclei split (or fission) to form lighter atoms. For uranium-235, about 0.1% of mass is converted to energy on fission so 1 kg of U-235 could release enough energy to boil 30 million kettles.

As Francis Aston, pioneer of accurate atomic mass measurements, said 100 years ago, "if hydrogen is transformed into helium, a certain quantity of mass must be annihilated in the process. The cosmical importance of this [is] greater in fact than any suggested

before by science in the whole history of the human race."

This possibility was largely discounted at the time, notably by Ernest Rutherford, discoverer of the atomic nucleus, in his moonshine comment (see above). However, it was realised that fusion of hydrogen into helium in stars explained their colossal energy output, particularly after Cecilia Payne showed that stars were overwhelmingly composed of hydrogen, with helium second. So Rutherford should have been talking about sunshine. □

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The royal family row

By Mohan Sen

There is no substantially democratic, "progressive" alternative to the privilege and racism embodied by the UK royal family in the right-on brand of aristocracy promoted by Harry Windsor and Meghan Markle.

"Harry and Meghan" have become right-wing hate figures for a reason. They have shone new light on just how unpleasant and bigoted the core royal establishment is. But we want neither old-fogey monarchy nor a sort-of-woke Lord and Lady Bountiful version: we want no monarchy at all.

The woke-sounding language adorning their [self-promotion](#) ("Each of us can

change our communities. All of us can change the world" – there's reams of this stuff...) is there to promote their brand. It's the brand of multi-millionaires who live at the pinnacle of a system which exploits and grinds down the oppressed they claim to champion and who say explicitly they want to "serve the monarchy" (softening it with stuff like "charity polo"!)

Even since Charles became king, the monarchy's favourability gap has dropped from 44% (68-24) to 19% (54-35). The left should speak out loudly for a republic.

If the intra-royal rows, and what they reveal, contribute to the monarchy's disarray, that's good. □

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Revolutions, socialist and other



Eye on the left

By Selim Martin

How can the working class become politically aware, organised, cohesive and self-confident enough to become society's new ruling class, overthrowing the capitalists in favour of collective ownership with democratic self-rule?

That is the decisive question about socialist revolution. But *Socialist Worker's* explanation of "revolution" (by Isabel Ringrose, 4 December) ducks it in favour of advocating more militancy in general, plus the presence, in the wings, of a fiercely-organised "revolutionary party".

Ringrose deserves credit for posing the question of "how revolution", when the SWP generally, and most left groups, do not even try. But the revolutions she cites as models are Egypt in 2011 and Sudan in 2019: on the basis, it seems, that they involved big strikes and street protests and dislodged dictatorial regimes.

But not all revolutions are socialist, and the socialist revolution is different from others. Inspiring and instructive as they were, Egypt's and Sudan's upheavals went nowhere near workers' power. In fact they did not even successfully destroy the old military ruling circles, which quickly came back.

"Spontaneous" revolutions, without cohesive and widespread working-class organisation like the workers' councils of 1917, can lastingly overthrow old autocracies, but they cannot go beyond bourgeois limits. "To overthrow the old power is one thing", wrote Trotsky in *History of the Russian Revolution*; "to take power in one's hand is another... 'spontaneous' insurrection cannot transcend the framework of the bourgeois regime."

Add in a stronger revolutionary party? No answer unless we also say how that revolutionary party can push forward widespread and cohesive working-class organisation, and win an active majority within it for revolutionary plans.

Often the SWP just celebrates "fury", militancy, and street protest indiscriminately,

with little regard for its class character. Ringrose's article emphasises specifically working-class militancy, particularly strikes. Yes, without more militant strikes and workers' struggles we cannot even start to think of revolution.

But a strike cannot by itself create a workers' government. In their heyday, revolutionary syndicalists argued that a general strike could make the revolution by "locking out" the capitalist class (in France they made a practical attempt at that, in 1906). They based that on plans to build union organisation so strong that, come the general strike, each industrial union would directly take over its industry, leaving the political state machine helpless in mid-air. In fact under capitalism union organisation can never reach that level of perfection. Workers' organisation sufficient to rule society will emerge only amidst political as well as industrial upheaval, and through more flexible and democratic forms (like the 1917 workers' councils) supplementing unions. But the syndicalists were right that "direct action" has limited capacity without deep-rooted organisation.

Ringrose quotes Trotsky and Lenin, but does not actually discuss Russia in 1917, the one successful workers' revolution in history so far after the Paris Commune of 1871. In 1917, after the first period dominated by the bourgeois revolution of February, strikes and demonstrations played a relatively small role. Revolution is unlikely to happen by just taking a vote and waiting for power to be respectfully handed over – in October 1917, to forestall the Soviets, the unelected Provisional Government sought to suppress the Bolshevik press and move more conservative regiments to St Petersburg. Yet the famous storming of the Winter Palace was secondary to the political

battle over electing delegates to the Congress of Soviets and within the Congress. Most of the development towards a working-class seizure of power in October took place through a stream of meetings, conferences and elections. As Trotsky commented in *The History of the Russian Revolution*, the fewness of strikes, mass demonstrations, street-battles, etc, in October reflected how deep and thorough the process of working-class self-organisation and radicalisation had been. A heavily organised and self-confident working class went beyond just disrupting the powers-that-be to win some control, and elements of its own power. The political processes had also broken up the armed forces of the state (the police were dispersed, many units of the army won over from their commanders to revolution).

To win arguments, win majorities in the meetings and conferences, win elections, the revolutionary socialists had to work out what to advocate in detail – on strikes, on workplace issues, and also on issues primarily concerning other classes than the workers alone – in order to make their advocacy of the working class taking power coherent and dynamic. They needed daring, resilience, and immense energy, but also clarity. They achieved that through debate among themselves and more widely, both in 1917 and (indispensably) over decades before then. The process of political transformation of the labour movement reaches a high pitch in revolutionary times, but can't reach high pitch unless a coherent minority has educated itself and won influence or at least respect beforehand, in unrevolutionary times.

The debates and elections the Russian socialists were most interested in were in the "soviets", workers' councils. (Trotsky would later stress that we

should not fetishise exact forms. In Germany in 1923 the aborted revolution leant on factory committees, plus a left parliamentary majority in one province, a plan for a general strike, and an improvised workers' militia. In the 1871 Paris Commune workers took power through a repurposed Paris city council).

But in Germany in 1918-19, vast working-class struggles did spawn soviets taking effective control around the country, led to the Emperor abdicating (and never coming back), and threw the old military-bureaucratic ruling apparatus into disarray. Yet the anti-revolutionary, temporising Social Democrats won a big majority in those workers' councils. Eventually the military-bureaucratic apparatus reconsolidated. That outcome could have been changed only by the revolutionaries winning battles to transform the workers' councils politically.

In Britain, all that lies the other side of a rebirth of workers' strike and street militancy way beyond today's in which we all learn much: political education does not come through lectures alone. But when the time comes, probably the workers' councils or whatever analogue arises will first be dominated by Labour MPs and trade union leaders. The SWP's approach does not even begin to consider how the revolutionaries will deal with those *political* questions.

The SWP tends just to advocate "more struggle" (in general, while being quite conservative in unions where they reckon to be on good terms with the union leaders) in place of a programme of demands and ideas to develop and transform the workers' movement. The revolutionary party appears in their scheme as a *deus-ex-machina*, a grouping of the most militant put together outside the political processes of transforming the mass labour movement. □

Brazil: workers' organisation needed against the fascists

By Mohan Sen

On 8 January, in an eerily close re-enactment of the invasion of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, thousands of far-right activists stormed Brazil's Congress, presidential palace and Supreme Court.

Many right-wing protesters are less bothered about restoring former president Jair Bolsonaro as such and more keen on a military coup. For many weeks before the attack there were protest camps outside army bases demanding a coup.

Brazil's military police allowed the assault to take

place, effectively cooperating with it. A Supreme Court judge has suspended the capital Brasilia's right-wing governor for 90 days in response to his inaction in the face of the attack.

For now, the decisive top military and state officials have stuck with the elected government. But for how long? Last week the new national defence minister appointed by leftish president Luiz Inácio da Silva (Lula) visited the far-right encampments and praised them as "demonstrations of democracy". On 9 January, shortly before the attack began, in the midst of

rising agitation and blatant preparations, he described the situation as "calm".

Since returning to office, Lula has constructed a government far "broader" than even previous Workers' Party (PT)-led ones, with ministers from sections of the nationalist right who see Bolsonaro as a counter-productive maverick. Yet the left-wing socialist party PSOL has also joined it, with indigenous congressional deputy Sônia Guajajara becoming Minister of Indigenous Peoples (understandable, but a mistake).

Other governments, including right-wing ones, do

not favour a military coup in Brazil or the return of Bolsonaro, and so condemned the uprising. But again, will that hold in a new crisis?

Led by the left, tens of thousands demonstrated against the coup attempt and for democracy across Brazil on 9 January. But to defend democracy against further assaults, let alone change the direction of Brazilian society, the labour movement needs to build its organisation capable of repelling the fascists, not rely on the unelected state hierarchy. □



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A Continental Revolution



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

James Connolly started World War One as a partisan of the socialist movement's Basle Manifesto of 1912, against war and against all the rival imperialisms. He then switched to backing Germany. This is one of the most eloquent of his "Basle" articles.

The outbreak of war on the continent of Europe makes it impossible this week to write to *Forward* upon any other question. I have no doubt that to most of my readers Ireland has ere now ceased to be, in colloquial phraseology, the most important place on the map, and that their thoughts are turning gravely to a consideration of the position of the European socialist movement in the face of this crisis.

Judging by developments up to the time of writing, such considerations must fall far short of affording satisfying reflections to the socialist thinker. For, what is the position of the socialist movement in Europe to-day? Summed up briefly it is as follows:

For a generation at least the socialist movement in all the countries now involved has progressed by leaps and bounds, and more satisfactory still, by steady and continuous increase and development.

The number of votes recorded for socialist candidates has increased at a phenomenally rapid rate, the number of socialist representatives in all legislative chambers has become more and more of a disturbing factor in the calculations of governments. Newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and literature of all kinds teaching socialist ideas have been and are daily distributed by the million amongst the masses; every army and navy in Europe has seen a constantly increasing proportion of socialists amongst its soldiers and sailors, and the industrial organisations of the working class have more and more perfected their grasp over the economic machinery of society, and more and more moved responsive to the socialist conception of their duties. Along with this, hatred of militarism has spread through every rank of society, making everywhere its recruits, and raising an aversion to war even amongst those who in other things accepted the capitalist order of things. Anti-militarist societies and anti-militarist campaigns of socialist societies and parties, and anti-militarist resolutions of socialist and international trade union conferences have become part of the order of the

day and are no longer phenomena to be wondered at. The whole working class movement stands committed to war upon war – stands so committed at the very height of its strength and influence.

And now, like the proverbial bolt from the blue, war is upon us, and war between the most important, because the most socialist, nations of the earth. And we are helpless!

What then becomes of all our resolutions; all our protests of fraternisation; all our threats of general strikes; all our carefully-built machinery of internationalism; all our hopes for the future? Were they all as sound and fury, signifying nothing? When the German artilleryman, a socialist serving in the German army of invasion, sends a shell into the ranks of the French army, blowing off their heads; tearing out their bowels, and mangling the limbs of dozens of socialist comrades in that force, will the fact that he, before leaving for the front "demonstrated" against the war be of any value to the widows and orphans made by the shell he sent upon its mission of murder? Or, when the French rifleman pours his murderous rifle fire into the ranks of the German line of attack, will he be able to derive any comfort from the probability that his bullets are murdering or maiming comrades who last year joined in thundering "hochs" and cheers of greeting to the eloquent Jaurès, when in Berlin he pleaded for international solidarity? When the socialist pressed into the army of the Austrian Kaiser, sticks a long, cruel bayonet-knife into the stomach of the socialist conscript in the army of the Russian Czar, and gives it a twist so that when pulled out it will pull the entrails out along with it, will the terrible act lose any of its fiendish cruelty by the fact of their common theoretical adhesion to an anti-war propaganda in times of peace? When the socialist soldier from the Baltic provinces of Russia is sent forward into Prussian Poland to bombard towns and villages until a red trail of blood and fire covers the homes of the unwilling Polish subjects of Prussia, as he gazes upon the corpses of those he has slaughtered and the homes he has destroyed, will he in his turn be comforted by the thought that the Czar whom he serves sent other soldiers a few years ago to carry the same devastation and murder into his own home by the Baltic Sea?

But why go on? It is not as clear as the fact of life itself that no insurrection of the working class; no general strike; no general uprising of the forces of Labour in Europe, could possibly carry with it, or entail a greater slaughter of socialists, than will their participation as soldiers in the campaigns of the armies

of their respective countries? Every shell which explodes in the midst of a German battalion will slaughter some socialists; every Austrian cavalry charge will leave the gashed and hacked bodies of Serbian or Russian socialists squirming and twisting in agony upon the ground; every Russian, Austrian, or German ship sent to the bottom or blown sky-high will mean sorrow and mourning in the homes of some socialist comrades of ours. If these men must die, would it not be better to die in their own country fighting for freedom for their class, and for the abolition of war, than to go forth to strange countries and die slaughtering and slaughtered by their brothers that tyrants and profiteers might live?

Destruction

Civilisation is being destroyed before our eyes; the results of generations of propaganda and patient heroic plodding and self-sacrifice are being blown into annihilation from a hundred cannon mouths; thousands of comrades with whose souls we have lived in fraternal communion are about to be done to death; they whose one hope it was to be spared to cooperate in building the perfect society of the future are being driven to fratricidal slaughter in shambles where that hope will be buried under a sea of blood.

I am not writing in captious criticism of my continental comrades. We know too little about what is happening on the continent, and events have moved too quickly for any of us to be in a position to criticise at all. But believing as I do that any action would be justified which would put a stop to this colossal crime now being perpetrated, I feel compelled to express the hope that ere long we may read of the paralysing of the internal transport service on the continent, even should the act of paralysing necessitate the erection of socialist barricades and acts of rioting by socialist soldiers and sailors, as happened in Russia in 1905. Even an unsuccessful attempt at social revolution by force of arms, following the paralysis of the economic life of militarism, would be less disastrous to the socialist cause than the act of socialists allowing themselves to be used in the slaughter of their brothers in the cause.

A great continental uprising of the working class would stop the war; a universal protest at public meetings will not save a single life from being wantonly slaughtered.

I make no war upon patriotism; never have done. But against the patriotism of capitalism – the patriotism which makes the interest of the capitalist class the supreme test of duty and right – I place the patriotism of the working class, the patriotism which judges

every public act by its effect upon the fortunes of those who toil. That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic, but that party or movement is the most perfect embodiment of patriotism which most successfully works for the conquest by the working class of the control of the destinies of the land wherein they labour.

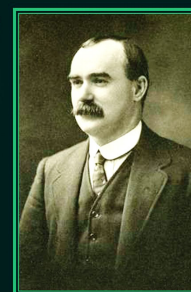
To me, therefore, the socialist of another country is a fellow-patriot, as the capitalist of my own country is a natural enemy. I regard each nation as the possessor of a definite contribution to the common stock of civilisation, and I regard the capitalist class of each nation as being the logical and natural enemy of the national culture which constitutes that definite contribution.

Therefore, the stronger I am in my affection for national tradition, literature, language, and sympathies, the more firmly rooted I am in my opposition to that capitalist class which in its soulless lust for power and gold would bray the nations as in a mortar.

Reasoning from such premises, therefore, this war appears to me as the most fearful crime of the centuries. In it the working class are to be sacrificed that a small clique of rulers and armament makers may sate their lust for power and their greed for wealth. Nations are to be obliterated, progress stopped, and international hatreds erected into deities to be worshipped. □

• *Forward*, 15 August 1914

Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist &
Internationalist

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

It traces his influences and influence through a transnational network of working-class activists, socialist agitators, and revolutionary nationalists. □

workersliberty.org/publications

Anti-union laws: scrap them all!

Adapted from **Free Our Unions**

Free Our Unions has an organising meeting via Zoom at 7pm on 17 January to discuss action against the Tories's revised plans for anti-strike laws: bit.ly/fou-z.

The 2019 Tory manifesto promised legally-mandated minimum service requirements during transport workers' strikes. Where such laws exist in other countries, they often mandate unions to agree with employers, sometimes via an arbitration body, to exempt a portion of their membership from participation in a strike, in order to ensure the minimum service. In other words, they turn unions into administrators of scabbing. The 2021 AGM of the RMT union passed a resolution committing the union to "non-complicity" in setting minimum service levels.

In 2022 senior Tories like Liz Truss and Grant Shapps published proposals for extensive new laws. A Transport Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill was announced in October 2022.

Now Rishi Sunak's government has unveiled details of plans for further restrictions. The proposals extend minimum service requirements beyond the rail industry, to health, education, fire, ambulance services, and nuclear commissioning, giving employers in those sectors the right to dismiss employees who refuse to work if designated as part of the minimum service complement during strikes.

The proposal entrenches a de facto dictatorship of the boss. It means that even workers who have voted to strike via all the procedures set by the state, to go on strike can be ordered to work

by the employer.

The best time for the labour movement to have launched an active, on-the-streets campaign of direct action against threatened new restrictions on the right to strike was in 2019, when the Tories unveiled the commitment in their manifesto. The second best time was any time since. The third best time is now.

The campaign must include meetings, in workplaces and communities, rallies, demonstrations and protests, alongside an expansion of solidarity with existing and future strikes to help them win. Although the House of Lords may knock some of the worst edges off the Tories' proposals, current parliamentary arithmetic means the new laws are likely to be passed in some form.

This means the labour movement must also prepare to defy them. We will be better placed to organise that defiance if we have spent the period prior to the imposition of the new laws actively mobilising against them.

And not just the new laws. Labour has said that it will repeal those new laws, but in doing so seems to fade out its longstanding commitment to repeal the 2016 Act. Repeated Labour conference policy is also to repeal the Thatcher laws, but that policy has not yet got into a Labour manifesto, even in 2019.

In 1997, Tony Blair boasted in an interview with the *Daily Mail* (26 March 1997) that Britain "would still have the most restrictive union laws in the Western world" if he won the general elec-

tion that year.

In fact, some East European states have [more restrictive](#) laws, but, yes, in Britain there is no legally-enshrined right to strike; unions must jump a series of bureaucratic hurdles to take action; strikes for political demands are illegal; strikes in solidarity with other workers are illegal.

13 years of Labour government from 1997-2010 left those restrictions, built up by Tory governments throughout the 1980s and early 90s, untouched. David Cameron's government tightened restrictions even further with the 2016 Trade Union Act, which imposed turnout thresholds on industrial action ballots – an arbitrary measure not applied to any other sphere of democratic life. □

Defiance is not the magic bullet

By **Martin Thomas**

One excuse for not actively campaigning against the new Tory anti-strike laws now is the claim that the unions can find ways to get round them. Another, more militant-sounding, is that political campaigning is not worth bothering with – tame stuff compared to defying the laws once imposed.

In fact, defiance is not a magic bullet.

In Australia, where an-

ti-strike laws are much fiercer than in Britain, it is almost routine for unions to break the laws and be fined. The New South Wales Teachers' Federation was fined \$60,000 in October 2022 for calling strikes. But the trend is for that sort of defiance to diminish as unions are squeezed financially.

It is also routine for strikes to break the laws without unions being fined, let alone strikers being jailed (something many governments have been canny

enough to avoid since 1972). The big [Queensland Children's Hospital strike](#) in 2012 was entirely unlawful but won. Our comrade Bob Carnegie, who led the strike, faced both civil and criminal law charges after that, but after campaigning (which included *more* unlawful walk-outs) the charges were dropped.

Defiance is better than the compliance more common from British unions (or even over-compliance, like telling strikers that the law bans more than six pick-

ets, which isn't true). But in fact there's often local defiance of the existing anti-strike laws even in Britain. *It doesn't destroy the laws.*

Governments can be canny, wearing unions down rather than locking themselves into rigid tactics. They can design anti-strike laws so they can let breaches go when it suits them tactically, and insist on the law when it suits them.

Very large-scale and escalating defiance might be a different matter, but first get your campaign. □

How to make student occupations effective

By **Sam Myerson**

The wave of occupations across campuses in support of the UCU during the industrial action in spring 2022 demonstrated a new, successful tactic: fast paced multiple-building occupations.

Students at Sheffield University occupied five buildings, taking a new target in quick succession after each old one, confusing university management and stretching them to the point of hiring in extra security staff.

At Sheffield, the university policy is to shut down a building once it is under occupation. Students hopped from one building to another. They left some occupiers to continue in each building, then

some moved on to new targets and could bring in extra support to for that. The tactic allowed for a substantial proportion of the university estate to be shut down.

In comparison, at SOAS in London for example, we saw university management lock students into a small space of admin offices for many days, deprive them of access to facilities, and call in external security who used physical force and intimidation to remove occupiers.

The Sheffield University policy assists impact, but a building closed but remaining under the control of the university is a different situation to an open occupation, under the control of the occupiers.

We should and do support

the most effective direct action and occupations, we need to understand the limitations of occupations so designed that they isolate activists from the rest of the student body.

Recently students at the University of Sussex occupied the former Park Village social centre to oppose the planned development of the site by developer Balfour Betty, which would see minimum rents of £95 per week. The students ran workshops and communicated outside of the occupation, raising demands for change in housing and financial support for students.

They brought together dozens of students, in a open space organised democratically, and acting as an activist hub with workshops, activities,

and student publications. As with occupations around the country, the university sought a possession order to remove the students, but the occupation lasted 33 days.

Agitation around arms off campus has also prompted university occupations in Leeds and Sheffield, and direct action campaigns at other campuses. They had outreach campaigns and leafleting outside the buildings to promote the demands and explain the reasons for occupation to students.

The occupiers also held a live Q&A through social media to develop links and promote the campaign ideas to more students. In Leeds that brought out supporters when the university attempted to

serve a possession order on the occupied building.

Even small occupations can have an influence beyond their size. Short occupations to raise slogans, drop banners and to build larger and broader movements can be a lever to create a wider wave of action.

We should learn lessons from the recent occupations and apply them to our activism going forward. Occupations can raise specific demands related to student struggles, whilst standing in solidarity with higher education workers, and workers elsewhere in the economy taking industrial action.

And they can be used to build in-person discussions with students who are not yet involved. □

Strike pay in the strike wave

By Ollie Moore

Unions have adopted different strike-pay policies in the current strike wave. Unite has paid striking members a fixed-rate payment of £70 per day. PCS is paying full strike pay to its members striking in the civil service, funded by a mandatory union-wide levy on top of existing membership fees.

Members of the nurses' union RCN can apply for a strike payment of £50 per day. Other unions, including RMT and CWU, have funds, administered either centrally or at branch level, to which members in particular financial hardship can apply.

Workers' Liberty activists in unions have historically supported higher levels of strike pay wherever possible, and accessible and generous procedures for applying for hardship payments. We have criticised those who oppose such payments on the basis that "striking should be a sacrifice".

Often, it is those most able to make that sacrifice – better-paid members within a union – who make that argument. Although almost every strike will involve some financial sacrifice, the sacrifice is not the point: the point is to win. If financial support, whether through strike pay or hardship payments, helps a dispute to victory, it should be available.

The Times carried an [article](#) on 29 De-

cember reporting government claims that the unions would soon have to back down because they would run out of money. In fact even the government figures cited showed the RCN, the hardest-pressed union, as able to call 100 strike days such as it had in December before having to fund-raise heavily from the public and from other unions, which surely it could.

Unite is able to guarantee a higher level of fixed strike pay because it is a large union with relatively small numbers of members in each individual dispute. RMT, a union less than one-tenth Unite's size, with over half its entire membership striking across its disputes on national rail and the London Underground, would bankrupt itself if it tried to pay fixed strike pay.

But it was right for the union to distribute £500,000 from its national dispute fund to branches involved in the current strikes to allocate to members in particular financial hardship. Such funds should be transparent, so rank-and-file union members know how much is in the fund at a given time, with agreed procedures for applying and criteria for payment.

As disputes continue, union reps and activists will need to convince and re-convince workmates of the necessity of continuing to fight, even if that means financial hardship. Some argue

that too generous a level of strike pay or hardship payment will train members to "expect" it, creating a risk that, should the dispute fund run out, members will refuse to strike, having been conditioned to only do so when they're "paid" for it. That risk is greatly minimised if reps and activists consistently make the basic case for the strike and its demands.

And, far from cutting against arguments for sacrifice, having access to some level of strike pay or hardship funds can help them: workers are more likely to be prepared to sacrifice financially if they know that, should they find themselves genuinely forced to choose between striking and feeding their children, the union will support them.

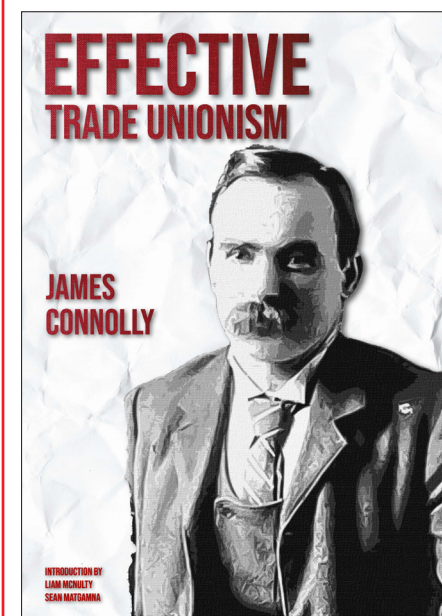
Picket lines could be followed by collective meals, provided free for strikers and their families.

We may wonder why union leaderships have not used the opportunity of many years of low strikes to top up dispute funds were kept adequately topped up. In any case, unions should step up generalised fundraising, including smaller unions appealing to bigger unions for donations, to fill dispute funds.

RMT, CWU, RCN, PCS, and others have solicited public donations for their strike funds. They should do that more vigorously and systematically. PCS's

internal approach, of a union-wide levy ring-fenced for the dispute fund, should be generalised.

The Enough is Enough campaign would serve the strike wave better by using its substantial e-list to fund-raise rather than just organise rallies (of which in any case it has advertised none since 3 December). □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. £5. □

workersliberty.org/publications

Staying solid in Royal Mail

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has written to its members to inform them of another period of "intensive negotiations" with Royal Mail, between 9 and 20 January. The union has agreed not to strike during this period. The statement says "the union's Postal Executive believe it is the right time to see if talks can succeed and for both parties to jointly try to change the dynamic of our disputes." A postal worker and CWU rep spoke to Solidar-ity about the dispute.

The strikes throughout December were solid. In any

prolonged dispute, you get handfuls of people trickling back to work, but in my workplace we're still between 85-90% in terms of people who are striking. The mood remains one of grim determination.

Part of the picture now is that our ballots are expiring, so we need to renew the mandate. We'll be balloting from 23 January to 17 February, consolidating the two separate disputes we've been running – on pay and conditions – into a single dispute with a single ballot.

We can still call action using the existing mandates, but I'm

not sure how likely it is that there'll be further strikes during the period of the re-ballot. For better or worse, people are expecting a pause, and the union has already committed not to strike between 9 and 20 January while negotiations are taking place.

However, if there is a prospect for coordinated action with other unions in early February, I think people would want to participate in that.

There's been no specific discussion at my level of the union about coordinated action, although presumably it is being discussed at executive level. There is an obvious logic to coordination. It doesn't necessarily have to mean everyone striking on the same day; a carefully-planned strategy could spread the impact by having different groups of workers striking on different days. At the same time, we don't want to drive wedges



between different groups of workers, so there is a case for unified action as well.

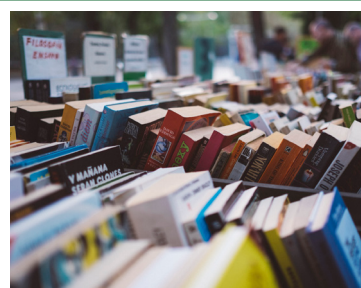
Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson's claims that Royal Mail could go bust are widely seen as scaremongering. He says one thing to one audience, and another thing to another. The company has been throwing money at shareholders whilst claiming it can't afford to meet union demands, and now Thompson says it's on the verge of collapse. It doesn't seem plausible. And the country is not exactly in a

position to allow the national postal service to collapse.

The bosses claim they are forced into making cuts due to market pressures and pressure from competitors. But their approach, of winding down services in the face of that competition, doesn't make sense. It's been the union that's been making proposals for expanding services. We also support the introduction of new technology, but in a way that benefits both workers and service users, rather than as a pretext for cutting jobs. □

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. □



Not just about pay, but the future of NHS

By Alice Hazel

The next round of NHS strikes begins on 11 January for Unison and GMB ambulance workers and 18-19 January for nursing staff in the RCN.

For the dispute to win, the strike action must grow. Key to this is escalating the numbers of workers taking action, co-ordination between the unions, nationally and locally, and increased active involvement and control by workers.

The RCN should pull out all Trusts where they have a mandate. In the strikes last month, and the ones planned for the 18th/19th, only a section of Trusts are being called out. This means that a number of big Acute Trusts, with thousands of members each, are being stood down, when the membership is keen to take action.

The health unions should also rebalot and organise effectively to win in workplaces that did not meet thresholds first time, at least the key ones. Many Trusts that failed to meet the threshold were only a few percentage points away.

Nurses, ambulance and other health workers should be striking on the same day. This is one dispute over one pay deal, Agenda for Change. Different unions organising as if they have distinct disputes limits the effectiveness of the strike and plays into the government's long-held desire to break up national

terms and conditions.

It is good that the GMB postponed their action in the ambulance sector to co-ordinate with Unison and that Unite have called their action for 23 January, the next proposed strike day for the other unions.

We need co-ordination locally. Many thousands of Unison members voted for strike action but, because of the anti-trade union thresholds for ballots, they have not so far taken action alongside the RCN. Many have since joined RCN so that they can participate in the strikes.

But so far Unison has been advising its members to cross picket lines when RCN members are on strike, telling them that if they take action they will risk disciplinary action. (In fact, workers in grades balloted by a union have legal protection when striking even if they are not members of that union.)

The left-wing-majority National Executive of Unison should challenge this advice, and back members not to cross picket lines.

The argument for one industrial health trade union is becoming clearer by the day in this dispute.

Workers' involvement and control means ensuring that those supporting the strikes, building for them in workplaces and showing great determination on the picket lines are bought into active roles in the unions. Workplace

strike committees can be a place for workers to meet across unions to organise practically to build strikes, co-ordinate picketing and emergency cover, discuss strategy and make decisions.

Picket lines have been lively places in this dispute. The provision of emergency cover from the picket lines in the ambulance strikes means that all members, not just activists, are there.

These workers shouldn't have to just get back to work and wait for the next instruction from on high.

The RCN has very little workplace organisation: unwieldy geographical branches, many without functioning branch committees, and very few reps UK-wide. A new layer of activists is emerging in this dispute, but strategic decisions are being made by a leadership and members have no way of influencing those decisions. Even if branches were in a fit state to pass motions, the Executive Council is in disarray, after the vote of no confidence a few weeks ago.

Immediate work needs to be done bringing together new and old activists in the RCN into workplace committees that can lead the strikes and supersede the broken branch system currently in place. This is a transformative moment for a historically strike-averse union, and an opportunity to build a democratic culture from the ground up.

The dispute is political. The current



NHS crisis comes from a deliberate attempt to smash up the core of the welfare state and move to a profit-based system of healthcare.

Alongside the strike we need a union-led political campaign that argues for rebuilding the NHS and against pay changes proposed within the new Integrated Care structures; and that challenges Labour to stand for a well-funded, fully public, universal NHS.

Health Workers Say No and NHS campaigning organisations are organising protests and marches in some cities to coincide with the nurses' strike on 18 January. Unison's left NEC should actively back and spread such action.

The government has said it will discuss pay for 2023-4 through the Pay Review Body (PRB), a system which replaces collective bargaining by unilateral government decision advised by the PRB. We do want our pay award due in April 2023 to be discussed now, but not through the PRB.

We want direct negotiation with the government. □

Workers' Liberty fractions discuss strike wave

By Ollie Moore

Workers' Liberty's industrial fractions – networks of our members working in a particular industry or sector to coordinate our activity there – held a joint meeting on Sunday 8 January. The meeting reviewed the ongoing strike wave, discussed campaigning against threatened anti-strike laws, and heard reports on labour movement international solidarity work with workers' and democratic struggles in Iran, Ukraine, and China (including Hong Kong and East Turkestan/Xinjiang).

Workers' Liberty trade unionists reporting from many sectors argued for escalation and intensification of action, plus greater democratic control over the demands and direction of disputes. Comrades from the civil service discussed the debate in PCS around selective versus national action. Workers' Liberty members (and others in the Independ-

ent Left network) have long argued for selective, targeted, sustained action, but always for all-out national strikes alongside.

The pressing need to argue for an industrial unionist approach came through strongly in many reports. In almost all current disputes, the involvement of several unions, sometimes overlapping each other in terms of the workers they organise, poses challenges. The meeting discussed the need to re-establish basic principles such as refusals to cross other unions' picket lines. The meeting reaffirmed our longer-term approach of advocating workers in each industry organise in a single industrial union, rather than across several unions depending on their grade and job role.

Coordinated strikes, and the establishment of cross-union rank-and-file committees in workplaces and industries wherever possible, can help develop an industrial unionist

"mindset" even where an actual industrial union structure might not yet exist.

In the discussion on campaigning against anti-strike laws, we discussed our involvement in the Free Our Unions campaign, as well as how we can act within our unions to catalyse action on the issue by unions themselves. Several comrades highlighted ways in which anti-union laws have been internalised within the labour movement. Union officials often tell members that the laws ban actions which actually aren't banned at all (e.g.

more than six on a picket line).

Comrades reporting on international solidarity work encouraged participants in the meeting to propose motions advocating solidarity and practical support for workers' struggles in their union branches, including direct dialogue with activists involved wherever possible.

Workers' Liberty organises fractions in rail, local government, schools, higher education, health, and the civil service, as well as union-wide caucuses for Unison and Unite. If you'd like to get in touch with

Workers' Liberty members active in your industry, please email office@workersliberty.org. □

Unison NEC elections 2023

Workers' Liberty members are involved in the Time For Real Change network in Unison, which won the majority on the National Executive (NEC) 18 months ago. The nomination period for new NEC elections opens on 9 January and closes 13 February. We urge *Solidarity* readers in Unison to push TFRC nominations in their January or February branch meetings. Candidates are listed at bit.ly/tfrc-e, and a guide to how branches nominate at bit.ly/tfrc-g. The NEC ballot runs from 17 April to 19 May. □

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bit.ly/calistrike

Tulsi Gabbard

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“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

Management on the back foot



Diary of a railworker

By Steve Allan

This Rail for London Infrastructure workers' dispute has increased discussion among Elizabeth line station staff about our own pay and conditions. With London Underground recruiting, management are finally waking up. All central station staff have been given a £2,000 allowance in an effort to attract more staff from the eastern and western sections. It is also an effort to stem the high turnover rate.

Meanwhile discussions continue about reforming the base roster. We are told staff numbers are due to increase by 20%, which should mean more staff on stations and a reduction in long shifts.

The staffing issue continued to hit over Christmas and the new year, with further instances of stations running below minimum numbers. Managers have been getting around this by including themselves in that number, despite being nowhere near the station! It's almost laughable but for the obvious safety implications. □

NEU plans a strong start

By David Pendleton

The schedule agreed by the National Education Union (NEU), if its ballot beats thresholds, is a one-day strike co-ordinated with other unions on 1 February followed by rolling regional strikes from 14 February to 16 March, and a two-day national strike on 15-16 March, with a national demonstration in London on the 15th. Then another two day national strike on 19-20 April, with lobby of Parliament on the 19th.

That will be a strong start, but it will need to be built upon, with a quickening pace.

The NEU strike ballot closes 13 January, with results out on 16 January from a vote of around 250,000 teachers and around 50,000 support staff. The ballot by the other big teachers' union, Nasuwt, closes on 9 January.

After a concerted campaign since September by the union to mobilise votes, there is a growing confidence that we will have reached the thresholds imposed by the anti-union laws: a 50% turnout, and 40% of the total ballot group voting yes.

The NEU's demand for the dispute, agreed by the National Executive, is for a rise in line with the Retail Price

Index (RPI) rise from Sep 2021 to Sep 2022 – which was 12.6% – and that this must be fully funded. The increase in pay should not come out of schools' existing budgets, i.e. at the cost of further cuts in schools, probably support staff losing their jobs.

School workers have suffered real-terms pay losses for over ten years, and we need to recover that ground. Going forward, we would propose a pay rise of RPI plus 5% or £10,000 flat rate, whichever is greater, fully funded.

Links

The mooted all-together strike on 1 February will be good, making clear the generalised and political nature of the current strikes. In schools the NEU should seek to strike with the other school unions if we can. But we must set the speed of our own dispute. We cannot be held back by the most timid and conservative of the union leaderships.

We are arguing for local strike committees which can discuss and direct the dispute on the ground whilst feeding back their views to the national leadership. We should also be looking to make links and coordinate with other local strikers. □

The Magdalene Sisters



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

In *Solidarity* 657 Sacha Ismail highlighted the plight of young women taken to the Magdalene Laundries in 26-Counties Ireland, where supposedly "fallen" young women, many of them teenagers, were subjected to "spiritual" correction (in other words punishment). A number of films have been made in recent years featuring their plight and that of other young women and children dispatched to orphanages, also run by the Catholic Church.

One of the most hard-hitting is *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002). The film follows the fortunes of four teenage women, one of whom, Crispina, is mentally ill. They are treated brutally by the head of the laundry, Mother Superior Sister Bridget. Eventually three of them escape, but Crispina is confined in a mental asylum, to ensure her silence regarding the sexual abuse she has been subjected to by a priest.

Philomena (Stephen Frears, 2013) follows the investigation of journalist Martin Sixsmith (played by Steve Coogan) into the disappearance of Philom-



ena's son from an Irish orphanage. It transpires he was taken to the USA and adopted by an American family but he died before Philomena (played by Judi Dench) and Sixsmith could find him. □



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£35,000 by July 2023



In order for Workers' Liberty to educate, agitate and organise to change the world we need to expand our sources of funds. We will at some point have to move offices. New books and pamphlets have helped to cover some of our shortfall but we remain well behind the target we need to consolidate a move and be assured of at least three years of rent and other costs.

We are launching a fundraising drive to raise £35,000 by Ideas for Freedom in July 2023. The first contribution received is £180 from a comrade passing on his payment from doing some extra maths tutoring.

There are many other ways you can help, including just buying books from us. Workers' Liberty has almost 50 publications available. Where we have already covered print costs, sales money can go straight into our fundraising total. □

• More: workersliberty.org/fund

Beyond the first wave



John Moloney

The first wave of selective strikes by PCS members, which is still ongoing, has been effective, but no-one is under the illusion that it'll be sufficient to win our dispute. The major strategic debate therefore in the union is about the blend between selective action and national all-out action. The selective action has been good, and we should continue with that, but it needs to be supplemented with national strikes as well.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) will meet on 11 January, and it will discuss this issue. There's a prospect of taking national strike action in coordination with other unions. That's something we should aim for wherever possible, but if coordination doesn't prove possible, we can't allow that to hold us back from calling national ac-

tion in our own dispute. We need our own plan to win the dispute in the civil service, based on assessment about what level of action will be necessary to do that.

In previous columns, I've urged union committees in groups and departments to discuss the potential for effective selective action in their area, and contact the National Disputes Committee with proposals. There's been a limited amount of that so far, but the union is yet to put out a national call for that kind of discussion and dialogue. I think we should; we need discussion at all levels of the union about what action will be most effective. Now we're into the new year, we'll be into the period where motions to our group conference and Annual General Meeting are discussed in branches and other committees. At their AGMs, branches can pass not only motions for the 2023 conference, but also for the NEC. Any motion passed in this way, has as to be dis-

cussed by the NEC, so that's another channel via which members can make proposals for action. Our NEC on 11 January will also hopefully discuss the leaked emails which show the government considered proposals for an outright ban on trade union membership in some sectors, including some organised by PCS. It seems civil servants presented that as an option, but warned against it, understanding how provocative it would be.

Levy

Despite its majority I don't believe this government has anything like the political capital to impose that kind of ban. However, senior civil servants normally have a fairly shrewd sense of the ideological parameters within which they can present proposals for enacting the government's political priorities, so even though they recommended against pursuing that option, the fact that something as severe as that is even in the air shows how much

the hard right is making the ideological running in the Tory party.

Members participating in our ongoing selective action will continue to receive full strike pay. If and when we hold national strikes, there won't be strike pay for that, but we've taken the view that, for those we're calling out on selective action for sustained periods, that should be supported by the union. We've chosen to fund that with a mandatory levy on top of regular monthly union membership fees. We need to follow that up with an active organising campaign within the union – not just a communication strategy, but an on-the-ground campaign based on talking to members and persuading them – to explain the need for the levy, emphasising the collective nature of the fight we're in and promoting basic principles of solidarity. □

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

UCU: no confidence Solidarity in Nottinghamshire

By Camila Bassi

On 4 January UCU members at Sheffield Hallam University voted in an emergency branch for no confidence in the industrial strategy of General Secretary Jo Grady.

Members expressed anger at the General Secretary undermining the democratic processes of the union and doing so publicly. It was judged that Grady has effectively derailed and de-escalated the industrial dispute and is now offering a strategy that – as evidenced over the past four years – fails to deliver.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, members know that two days here and three



days there will not win, but neither can we move to indefinite action from a stationary position. Much rank-and-file hard work and sacrifice in pay has been given by our members, and we feel let down by a populist leader who obsesses more with their social media profile than actual industrial strategy. □

By Ralph Peters

On 5 January, 16 people turned up at a local pub in Beeston, Notts, for a planning meeting for an Enough is Enough group. Five whom I didn't know before came directly from two stalls we ran in December when we were putting together the group.

All or almost all those attending are or have been in the Labour Party, though some have left or been expelled and most don't attend meetings. Nine had been in the Momentum group which we used to have here.

A couple of local Labour Party office-holders have

been involved, though neither was at the 5 January meeting. The constituency party has sent small delegations to some picket lines, but Labour members who were at our

meeting didn't know of them!

The meeting was primarily about supporting health-workers. We agreed to back all picket lines. One young woman said that she had intended to go on some picket lines but was unsure what to do if she did. We agreed to go together as a delegation to the NHS pickets in their next strikes.

Eight volunteered to staff a stall on 14 January.

Enough is Enough has a website and an e-petition against anti-strike laws, and organised big rallies in September-November, but I've heard of no other active local groups. The potential is there. □

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Train drivers offered pay cut

Abridged from Off The Rails

The train drivers' union Aslef sent a text out late afternoon on Friday 6 January to its members at Train Operating Companies TOCs involved in the current pay dispute, informing them that the union was yet to be sent a pay offer.

So it seems the Rail Delivery Group (RDG, the employers' consortium) chose to open negotiations with a union via the press rather than directly. You might think it was merely a prop-

aganda move to provide ammunition to accuse the union of knocking back a so-called "reasonable" offer and refusing to negotiate. Maybe. But the non-inclusion of Driver Only Operation suggest they may be edging towards a deal. Only edging... the offer consists of derisory 4% pay awards for 2022 and 2023, along with a ridiculous list of productivity items they want drivers to agree in return.

Aslef has fresh strike mandates on most TOCs that are as strong or stronger than the ones they had six

months prior and no reason to believe they won't achieve similar results on the remaining TOCs. It is highly unlikely that it will put this offer to members.

Some of the productivity items the RDG proposal asks for would result in a less safe railway, for example the shortening of training times. Others would weaken of the union's industrial power by making it quicker and easier to replace drivers through training new ones or allowing managers to drive trains during "disruption". For now, we need more action. □

Covid surge and worker revolt in China

By Chan Ying

Covid is spreading very rapidly in China, creating widespread alarm and anger against the government.

On 7 January, workers in a medical equipment factory in Chongqing, Southwest China rebelled against recruitment agencies and factory management after workers were laid off (on some reports, up to 10,000).

Workers clashed with armed police who came to suppress the revolt. Footage posted on Chinese social media shows workers beating up agency recruiters, destroying hoards of medical stock, burning cars, and throwing objects at the police. The company, Zybion Inc., produces PCR testing kits, machines for centralised testing facilities, and other Covid-related equipment.

Since Xi Jinping's U-turn in December, domestic demand for test equipment has dropped. The factory decided to lay off workers without compensation shortly before Chinese New Year 22 Jan (this year). The most recent recruits had yet to work a full month at the factory and will not receive a bonus promised by the recruiters (as is common during labour shortages, and also seen at Foxconn Zhengzhou).

Living conditions for the workers have been terrible, and they have to wear protective suits (to protect the products, not themselves) on the production line.

The factory first came up with an emergency settlement plan in an attempt to appease the workers, but on the morning of 8 Jan backtracked.

Each Chinese New Year is a high time for migrant workers across China to protest, petition or riot for wages arrears before travelling back home for the Spring Festival. But the scale and militancy of this Chongqing protest makes it stand out. Two major factory protests within two months signal a deepening of social contradictions within China.

All this first started in late October as workers revolted in Foxconn's iPhone factory in Zhengzhou. On 24 Nov, a fire in an apartment in Urumqi, Xinjiang, killed at least ten, who were trapped in their homes due to a Covid ultra-lockdown. This sparked national outcry and protests soon spread across many cities.

Up to the 20th Party Congress, Xi Jinping had faced down all those querying his ultra-lockdown policy. Now the major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and highly urbanised coastal provinces see high infections and deaths. Soon after 7 Dec – the official end to zero Covid – reports from village hospitals indicated that cases were rapidly

spreading to rural China, which has lower levels of prior immunity and health provision. The Chinese New Year mass migration will speed spread.

Very little reliable data is being published, or even collected. On 12 Dec, the government's main Covid health code App was taken offline. The National Health Commission has stopped publishing daily Covid website briefings. The official figures that are now published are absurdly low: 4,128 new infections on 24 December, and fewer than five deaths per day since the policy U-turn. Overwhelmed hospitals and morgues are reported from Beijing and other cities, and an unusually high number of published obituaries of academics, scientists and celebrities.

The government has narrowed the definition of Covid deaths to those who die directly and solely from respiratory failure, excluding all those with pre-existing conditions. Doctors have often come under pressure not to certify Covid as the cause of death.

Boasted

The CCP had boasted for two years that its "dynamic zero-Covid" policy proved the superiority of Chinese "socialism". In fact the ultra-lockdowns, not possible for states with less fierce surveillance and police machinery, did give the regime time to devise an appropriate exit strategy – stocking up on medical resources, boosting immunisation, training up more health workers, upgrading hospital facilities, avoiding winter when choosing lockdown-exit time. None of that was done. Chinese citizens have suddenly discovered that "the emperor has no clothes".

According to China's labour law, workers who contracted Covid are entitled to paid sick leave and cannot be fired for missing work from Covid or Covid prevention measures. In reality, both white and blue collar workers are extremely vulnerable to abuses and the state never fulfils its promises to protect them. To achieve a nominally low infection number in cities, people who tested positive or were deemed potential transmitters (close contacts) have often been forced to go back to their places of origin. The positive cases were physically removed from the geographical regions where the statistics mattered, to places where they didn't so much. Discrimination against people who had once contracted Covid (but since recovered) has been rampant. Jobs have been cut. Those who worked from home have faced lower pay, extended hours and company surveillance. Factory workers and urban service workers have constantly been forced to work when sick,

often locked into their factories and adjacent dormitories for weeks on end.

Now, since the policy U-turn on 7 December, many companies have responded by banning employees from taking Covid tests and from going to hospitals when sick, or threatening to fire them if they miss work due to Covid.

In particular, health workers are forced back to work before fully recovering, and hospitals have to call on retired doctors and nurses back to work to deal with overloading patients. Health workers have been called from the provinces – which face the worst healthcare crises – into Beijing because offloading public health pressures in the capital is a political priority.

On 14 December, the death of a 23-year-old graduate student in West China Hospital, Sichuan University, the biggest stand-alone hospital in the world and affiliated to one of the top Chinese medical schools, sparked a national outcry.

The "Standardised Training Scheme" he was working under mandates that all medical workers go through a three-year in-hospital training period before qualifying. Graduate students under this scheme face chronic overwork and receive very little pay (usually £24-£120 per month, a tenth of the normal pay rate).

Since 10 December, at least ten medical schools across China have seen sizable student protests demanding equal pay with non-student trainees and other medical workers, and against inhumane working conditions during the pandemic.

The government says its reckless re-opening measures will "minimise the pandemic's impact", but the real reason was to head off protests against endless ultra-lockdown and to revive the economy. The ongoing healthcare crisis, combined with the government's focus on reopening the economy, will further shift the balance of power away from workers. There is no rule of law, no effective union, and very little recourse for workers caught in labour disputes. Labour rights lawyers and activists face heavy state repression.

All such efforts as unionising or petitioning local governments will be met with heavy-handed repression. The government is set on economic recovery at the cost of workers' lives.

The most vulnerable people are left to look after themselves. Shijiazhuang government has told its residents that "everyone is the 'first person responsible' for their own health", and many local governments have followed.

On 27 December, the government announced it would ease travel restrictions into and out of China from 8 January.

Immediately there was a flood of Chinese citizens seeking to book trips overseas.

India and Japan instituted pre-travel test requirements for people arriving from China, followed by many other countries including the UK. French and Italian airports reported very high Covid-infection rates (one-third to over half) among passengers from China tested ad hoc in the days before the requirements were introduced. Morocco has banned all visitors from the People's Republic unless they have already been out of China for seven days.

The pre-travel tests (and even subtler measures such as the testing of plane wastewater, mooted in the US) are incoherent without at least some reintroduction of wide testing and limited precautions (stay-home-if-sick mandates, masks). However, they are based on a real problem, a desire to slow (they can't stop) the spread of a fierce new variant more likely to arise amidst a huge infection wave in a big country where health-care is overwhelmed. A second wave of anti-Asian racism in the West is possible; socialists must be ready to explain that the fault lies not with the Chinese people but the government. We argue for solidarity with Chinese workers, especially with the nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers who are forced to work under high risk to their health.

We also argue for the best vaccines to be freely available to everyone in all countries. Moderna and Pfizer have refused to offer their know-how for China to copy their vaccines; China has refused to buy them, or even to accept EU and US offers of free batches of those vaccines. The balance of evidence is that the Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines used in China give less protection, and for a shorter period, than the Moderna and Pfizer mRNA jabs.

We demand governments cooperate to requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how. Medical researchers should be free to communicate and collaborate with their counterparts worldwide. We demand the Chinese regime release from detention all whistleblowers, journalists and medical workers and compensate them for their loss. All arrested street demonstrators and protesting factory workers should likewise be freed.

The country's health service (which is still often for-payment rather than free) should be brought under the control of health workers and a wider democracy.

The battles over Covid are, in the last analysis, part of the greater battle for democracy and workers' rights in China. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

ANTI-STRIKE LAW FIGHT MUST START NOW

By Ollie Moore

Newly "elected" TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak (he was the sole candidate in an election in which the electorate consists only of members of the TUC General Council) has responded to the threat of harsh new anti-strike laws by saying that the TUC will "challenge them legally", and make the Tories "pay a high political price". The exact nature of the price, and how payment will be exacted, is not specified. Nowak has also said he doesn't want to "go back to the 1980s", implying he opposes the full repeal of all the anti-strike and anti-union laws, despite TUC congress having repeatedly voted for this position.

Elsewhere, Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, has said "if they put more hurdles in our way, we will jump over them."

This attitude, presumably intended to portray a confident lack of worry, is dan-

gerous. The Tories are telling unions to jump, and some of our movement's leaders are almost literally saying "how high?", as if being able to clear ever-tougher (and arbitrarily undemocratic) thresholds is somehow a form of resistance. And whatever the outcome the TUC's legal challenge has, it will presumably take a significant amount of time to make its way through the courts, and is no mechanism for stopping or defying new laws.

What is needed instead is an active campaign of resistance, including meetings, rallies, protests, and other direct actions, to highlight undemocratic, even proto-authoritarian, nature of the proposals for new restrictions or bans on strikes. That campaign must be organised by unions themselves, using their own resources and directly mobilising their own memberships. It must also indict and oppose not only proposed new laws, but all existing restrictions on the right to organise and



strike, in line with the policy of almost every union, the TUC, and Labour Party conference. Grassroots campaigns like Free Our Unions can help catalyse those efforts.

Given the Tories' parliamentary majority, it is likely new legislation will pass. But the stronger and more assertive the campaign has been, the better chance we will stand of organising to defy the legislation once it is imposed. The dismissive attitudes displayed by Nowak and Graham, no matter how much combative rhetoric they are cloaked in, amount to little more than a shrug. □

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