



For social ownership of the banks and industry

[illegible]

» Coordinate pay action



Restore NHS

See inside

» Defeat anti-union laws

More crises to come in China

Covid deaths undercounted, health care overwhelmed, more

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Tax the rich to repair wages and NHS!



Nadim Zahawi, chair of the Tory party, last year Chancellor of the Exchequer, famously claimed public money to warm his stables. The same entrepreneurial spirit inspired him to try to avoid paying tax on £20 million he made selling shares – at a time when many, forced onto pre-payment meters, literally cannot afford to heat their homes in the freezing cold.

Zahawi should resign, and corruption and tax avoidance should be rooted out. But the much bigger issue is the spiralling wealth of the rich per se.

That spiralling, and the bad situation huge swathes of the population find ourselves in – even in the UK, and more so in poorer countries – are two sides of the same coin, both cause and both effect.

As billionaires and their hangers-on met in the Alpine resort of Davos for the World Economic Forum (16-20 Jan), the charity Oxfam revealed dramatic figures about the growth of global wealth inequality.

Almost two-thirds of new wealth in two years up to the end of 2021 went to the richest 1%. For each £1 gained by people in the bottom 90%, each billionaire gained £1.7 million. The wealth

of billionaires has grown by over £2 billion a day.

Meanwhile what even Oxfam calls “extreme poverty” is increasing for the first time in 25 years and “close to a billion people are going hungry”. This while food and energy corporations more than doubled their profits in 2022.

Billionaires are twice as likely to invest in polluting industries as the average investor – and emit a million times more carbon than the average human being...

Oxfam is calling for heavier taxes on the rich. That it falls to a liberal charity to make that call is sad comment on the lack of vigour of the labour movement.

Attacking Zahawi, Labour Party spokespeople have said nothing about growing inequality, about the rich piling up wealth at the majority's expense. Starmer, Reeves and co. continue to suggest that a Labour government will have no resources to pursue significantly different policies from the Tories, for instance on public sector pay.

After Universal Credit goes up 10% in April, it will be still be lower – in absolute, let alone real terms – than before the Tories cut it in 2021. Labour's leaders do not even advocate reversing the cut.

For them, the super-rich and their blood-sucking are not only an unchallengeable fact of life, but one that should not even be mentioned.



Despite the growing strikes, our unions do little to put forward different economic policies. Nodding to “socialism” at left-wing meetings is one thing; fighting for serious changes to reverse capital's assault on the working class, it seems, more difficult.

Capitalism in all its forms and modes is a system of redistributing wealth, produced by workers, upwards to employers and the rich. Socialists advocate the abolition of that process through removal of the exploiting class from power and ownership. More immediately, we advocate aggressive measures – strikes, community struggles and political campaigns – to claw back wealth for the class that creates it and for society's needs.

The Oxfam report adds to the great piles of evidence, reinforcing lived reality, that the labour movement could mobilise in a vibrant campaign like that.

Demanding clear policies to defend and boost living standards for the majority, we should advocate higher taxes on the incomes of the rich, on capital gains (sales of assets and shares), and on corporate profits – and the introduction of a new tax on wealth. We should advocate public ownership and democratic control of key profit-making assets – including the banking and financial system, transforming it from an engine of crisis and inequality into a public service and lever of democratic control. □

Capitalism and freedom



By Martin Thomas

In his *Communist Manifesto* Marx defined the communist aim as freedom: “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”.

Elsewhere he wrote: “the association of free and equal producers”. Yet he also declared: “the abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois

independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at”.

The German word translated as “abolition” (*Aufhebung*) can also be translated “supersession”. But the gist is this. In the marketplace rule “Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham [i.e. atomised self-seeking]”. But if we look beyond the marketplace into the workplace, it is not so free and equal.

The capitalist now appears “with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business”; the worker, “like one who is

bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but – a hiding”.

The element in bourgeois market freedom which means wage-workers can move jobs, and can associate outside work-hours via meetings, reading and distributing socialist and other critical literature, etc., gives the wage-working class greater revolutionary capacities than serfs or slaves. Struggle can importantly extend that bourgeois freedom (within bourgeois limits) to legal rights to strike or to vote

But that is all conditioned by

(market-regulated) capitalist despotism in the workplace, which drains our best energies to make profits, often so much so that we cannot use the formal freedoms well.

There will still be some drudgery under socialism. “Labour cannot become play”, as Marx wrote in criticising the older socialist Charles Fourier. But it will be regulated by democratic (and eco-minded) cooperation: “the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of

being ruled by it... and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable...” “Beyond [that] begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite”.

After decades of slow shortening of the average working week, in British and US capitalism it is now being lengthened and intensified. □

From 1 February to 15 March and more!

By Ollie Moore

The 1 February strike will not, technically, be a “general strike”, declared as such by an individual body or coalition. But its form – mass strike action on a common date, across multiple sectors and industries, involving multiple different unions – is the nearest thing to a general strike we’ve seen in Britain for a long time.

The aim of socialists involved in the strike wave must be to ensure 1 February is used as a springboard for further, sustained coordinated action. We must also use the opportunities the day creates for local cross-union coordination to build ongoing forums, such as strike committees linked to Trades Councils, in towns and cities. Without such forums, there is a risk of the strike wave remaining a mostly “top-down” affair, in the sense of each strike’s demands and strategy being determined by union executives and transmitted downwards as directions for dutiful members to carry out. Instead, we need to develop a conception of ourselves as conscious organisers of our own strikes; local committees, based on the structures of the local labour movement, can help this.

The 1 February strike will involve

fewer workers than the last analogous event in British labour movement history, the 30 November 2011 strike against cuts to public sector pensions (500,000 compared to two million). And, unlike 2011, the 1 February strike will not involve NHS workers. However, 1 February will see train drivers strike, massively impacting passenger travel on the railways. Transport workers were absent from the 2011 strikes, and the involvement of workers in this industry, vital to the functioning of the wider capitalist economy, is part of what makes the current wave so significant.

NHS

With NHS workers striking again later in February and in March, and with little sign of an immediate settlement to that dispute, there is surely potential for involving health workers in future coordinated strikes, for example on 15-16 March, when NEU will strike and PCS is likely to.

The main lessons of 2011 to draw on now are negative – examples of what not to do. Throughout the 2011 public sector pensions dispute, socialists rightly argued for coordinated strikes. But this was sometimes posed in a mechanical way, with coordinated action seen as a final big push that would

bring victory, or as an artefact the declaration of which would skip the dispute over its challenges and difficulties (as in the Socialist Party’s demand for the TUC to “call a 24-hour general strike”). At the other end of the spectrum, the Socialist Workers Party’s headline slogan on Wednesday 30 November – “all out, stay out” – was an abstract call for mass illegal action that had no grip whatsoever. The SWP’s own workplace activists made no attempt to persuade their workmates to stay out forever, or even for Thursday. It was a branding exercise designed more to badge the SWP as the most radical people than to move the dispute forward.

In the absence of any organised rank-and-file counterweight that could articulate a different strategy, the mass coordinated strike became a dampener rather than an accelerant. Having had a coordinated 24-hour strike on 30 November, some union leaders quailed at the challenge of doing anything bigger, and rushed to settle for what sops they could. Others resisted pressure from within their own unions to call further action by insisting it was necessary to wait for other unions to be ready to strike together again. The dispute fizzled out. A mass strike, bigger than the 1926 general strike, ended up being a one-off, token set-piece.

Avoiding a repeat of those experiences requires rank-and-file union activists fighting within their own unions for ongoing and escalating programmes of action in each dispute, seeking the maximum coordination with other activists and other unions wherever possible, but not making the development of a strategy for winning each dispute dependent on what other unions do.

The trend of the strike wave is still upwards. New groups of workers will soon join the wave, with firefighters likely to gain a strike mandate in their ballot closing 30 January. Junior doctors in the HCSA voted by a 97% majority to strike, and junior doctors in the much larger British Medical Association are also currently voting in an industrial action ballot, expected to return a majority for action.

That the three major disputes involving well-unionised workforces with great economic power, in the national



Protests for trans rights have swept the UK against the Tories’ veto of Scottish reforms to reduce the extremely high hurdles to trans people obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate. Protests so far in London, Edinburgh, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham, Orkney, Bristol, York, and elsewhere. Photo from York. □

rail, London Underground, and Royal Mail, are joining 1 Feb only through Aslef drivers on mainline rail is a danger sign. Success or failure in these disputes, as well as being important on its own terms, could also have a major ripple effect for the rest of the strike wave.

If these strongly-placed workers are defeated, that will dent other workers’ confidence. Conversely, victory for these workers will help others. But the stubbornness of all three groups of employers shows that to win we need significant escalation, possibly up to indefinite action.

As well as developing strategies for escalation, activists must seek opportunities to push forward the political issues which lie behind all the strikes: will capitalism get through its difficulties by squeezing workers and social provision, or will we be able to claw back resources from the profiteers and the rich? The national demonstration for the NHS, called by a coalition of NHS campaign groups for 11 March, can be part of that effort. The demo has support for NHS workers’ strikes as part of its focus.

A proliferation of similar protests around the country, along with equivalent actions on other issues (rail and post renationalisation, free education, restoration of benefits) can help explicitly link striking workers’ demands to a wider push for social redress. □

Strikes

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

16 Jan-6 Feb: Teachers in Scotland (EIS) strike on a region-by-region basis (see schedule here)

18-31 Jan: Parking wardens in Brent, north west London (Unite) strike

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

25 and 26 Jan: Abellio bus drivers in west and southwest London (Unite) strike

26 Jan: NHS physiotherapists (CSP) strike

26, 28, and 31 Jan: Rathlin Island (County Antrim) ferry workers (Unite) strike

1 Feb: Civil servants (PCS); teachers in England and Wales (NEU); university staff (UCU); train drivers at some TOCs (Aslef); and outsourced security staff at University College London (IWGB) strike

3 Feb: Train drivers at some TOCs (Aslef) strike again

6 Feb: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

6-7 Feb: Nurses (RCN) strike

9 Feb: NHS physiotherapists (CSP) strike

9-10, 14-16, 21-23, 27-28 Feb; 1-2, 16-17, 20-22 Mar: UCU strikes at 150 universities

14 Feb: Teachers and support staff in Wales (NEU) strike

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

20 Feb: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

28 Feb: Teachers in the Northern, North West, and Yorkshire and Humber regions (NEU) strike

Feb and Mar, including national all-out strikes on 28 Feb and 1 Mar: Teachers in Scotland (EIS) have 22 strike days

1 Mar: Teachers in the East Midlands, West Midlands, and Eastern regions (NEU) strike

2 Mar: Teachers in London, South East, and South West regions (NEU) strike

6 Mar: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

13 Mar-20 April: 20 further days of rolling strikes by teachers in Scotland (EIS)

15-16 Mar: Teachers in England and Wales and support staff in Wales (NEU) strike

20 Mar: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

Mar, date TBC: 72-hour strike by junior doctors (BMA)

Until 3 Apr: Discontinuous strikes by workers at drinks manufacturer Diageo’s plant in Leven, Scotland (Unite)

Ballots

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

23 Jan-16 Feb: Royal Mail postal workers (CWU) re-ballot for action over pay and conditions

Until 27 Feb: HMRC workers (PCS) re-ballot for action □



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](#).

Mondays until 27 February 7pm: *The Communist Manifesto* study group continues

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



Morning Star and the red-brown in Germany



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The editor of the *Morning Star*, Ben Chacko, has been at a "Rosa Luxemburg Conference" in Berlin and hob-nobbing with the Die Linke ("The Left") Bundestag member Sevim Dagdelen, whom he interviewed for the paper's 20 Jan edition.

Dagdelen rages against sanctions on Russia and claims that "The US wants to destroy the Russian-German relationship for good". She adds that delivery of "more powerful" weapons (but she clearly means any weapons) to Ukraine must stop and warns of a "third world war" if Putin is not conciliated. She complains about Die Linke not opposing Leopard 2 tanks for Ukraine (it eventually did, after the interview).

Chacko describes Dagdelen as a "close ally" of Sahra Wagenknecht, still technically in Die Linke though (according to Chacko) "so fed up with Die Linke's failure to challenge state policy on Ukraine and stand up for anti-imperialist (sic) and anti-militarist politics that they [Wagenknecht and Dagdelen] are planning a new political party".

Chacko does not mention that

Wagenknecht, as well as (at least) favouring concessions to Putin over Ukraine, is also virulently anti-immigrant and has criticised the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)... for being too soft on immigration!

Unsurprisingly, Wagenknecht is much admired on the German far right: crowds at the Monday demonstrations (bringing together Putin supporters, anti-vaxxers and anti-immigration people) chant her name; she was on the cover of the December issue of the far right magazine *Compact*, which praised her as being capable of blowing up "the blockade with which the regime has walled in every discussion about Islam and asylum, gender and Transen [a derogatory term for trans people], Covid and Russia".

Diatribes

She has been on tour promoting her book *The Self Righteous* and making Youtube videos on such subjects as Covid policy (you can guess ...), energy costs, and supposed US-Nato aggression against Russia. Her book is a diatribe against what she calls "identity politics" and "left liberalism" and promotes a set of "traditional" values that she has previously called "volks-gemeinschaft" – a term from the Nazi era meaning "community of the people".

The new outfit that Wagenknecht and Dagdelen seem likely to form will be on an anti-EU, pro-Russian and anti-immigrant platform of a type known in Germany as "Querfront" ("cross-front", an alliance of the left and right, usually on the basis of nationalism and anti-liberalism).

Forgiving people might be inclined to explain away Chacko's enthusiasm for these red-brown reactionaries by suggesting this was a momentary lapse or he doesn't really understand who this pair are and what they represent. But the next day's paper carried a lengthy article, by Dagdelen herself, translated from the *Berliner Zeitung*, in which she again calls for conciliation with Russia, blames the US for the war, and opposes arming Ukraine.

Wagenknecht has long been a particular favourite of prominent CPBer Nick Wright, who in the *MS* of 18 November 2021 wrote, approvingly, of how she "has challenged liberal responses to the rise of the far right to make the point that in challenging racism it is necessary to name those responsible for the flight of refugees and migrant workers..."

Wright then went on to claim that "she [Wagenknecht] had calumny heaped upon her for suggesting that in a factual and democratic debate about migration that there are many people

who oppose racism and xenophobia and at the same time consider the regulation of migration to be essential."

If that's not apologism, I don't know what is.

The *Morning Star* and the Communist Party of Britain know full well the nature of the forces in Germany that they are supporting. No such red-brown current of any significance yet exists in the UK, but there can now be little doubt that were such a movement to arise here, the *Morning Star* and CPB would be enthusiastic supporters. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

The Tories and Lord Palmerston's ghost



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Nearly 170 years ago, Britain was at war with Russia and Karl Marx was convinced that the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, was colluding secretly with the enemy.

During his research in the British Museum Marx examined hundreds of British diplomatic documents. His conclusion, according to his biographer Boris Nicolaevsky, was that the documents "revealed a secret connivance between the cabinets in London and St Petersburg dating from the time of Peter the Great." In other words, for more than a century.

Marx went even further than this. Palmerston, he told Friedrich Engels in a letter, had "for several decades... been in the pay of Russia."

I am reminded of Marx's views on Palmerston in the wake of the recent revelations about the "Conservative Friends of Russia."

This week, it was revealed that a former BBC journalist and Tory party activist named Sergei Cristo has lodged a formal complaint alleging that MI5 refused to investigate an attempt by a Russian spy to infiltrate the highest levels of the Conservative Party.

The spy is Sergey Nalobin and the story goes back to 2010. At that time, Cristo claims he was approached by Nalobin, then the political first secretary at the Russian Embassy, in a meeting at the Carlton Club. That's a private club in St James, London, where the Conservative Party was founded in 1832. Lord Palmerston may well have dined there with colleagues.

Nalobin had learned that Cristo had connections to the treasurers' department of his party and he made a sug-

gestion to the Tory politician. Maybe he could make introductions to allow Russian businesses to donate to the Tories.

Cristo understood that this could not be right (or legal) and reported the approach to the police, who did nothing. He shared it with a *Guardian* journalist, who went public with the story. As a result of the subsequent scandal, Conservative Friends of Russia... changed its name. It became the Westminster Russia Forum. Alas, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine a year ago, it had to dissolve completely – for now.

KGB

Nalobin's connection to the Russian intelligence services is now beyond doubt. His father is a former KGB general and according to Marina Litvinenko, the general was her husband Alexander's boss in the 1990s when he was an FSB agent.

As Tory blogger Paul Staines described Nalobin in *The Spectator*: "His Facebook

photos showed him at a fancy dress party dressed in a Russian military uniform with 'KGB' written on his hat – handgun in one hand." Nalobin's "sense of humour" was also evident on Twitter where he described himself as a "brutal agent of the Putin dictatorship". Which, it turns out, he apparently was.

The Home Office eventually withdrew his permission to remain in the UK. And last year, the Estonians did the same.

The Russian intelligence services had an ongoing operation to cosy up to the Tories. They were keen for Putin's United Russia party and the Tories to work closely together as sister parties. And they wanted to make certain that the Tories' criticism of the Russian regime were muted. They threw lavish parties to which Tory politicians were invited, Boris Johnson being one of them.

I doubt we've seen the last of collaboration between the Tories and Putin's Russia. Boris Johnson and others were

happy to be wined and dined by the likes of Sergey Nalobin at a time when the Russian state was killing off its opponents on the streets of London. Nalobin had access to top Tory politicians even when Putin's forces invaded Georgia. Growing human rights violations in Russia itself had no effect on those Tories who were accepting free travel to visit Moscow.

Some of Marx's biographers thought that he may have exaggerated a bit in his view of Palmerston. And maybe it would be too much today to speak of "collusion" between senior figures in the Tory party with the Russian state.

Still, I think that Labour MP Ben Bradshaw may be on to something when he speaks about the "Conservative party's Russia problem," which he called an ongoing threat to Britain's national security. It is also a moral disgrace. □

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

Women's Marches across the USA



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Thousands turned out for protests across the United States on 22 January, the 50th anniversary of the Roe v Wade supreme court decision that made abortion a constitutional right in 1973, but which was struck down last year. There were more than two hundred Women's March events in 46 states.

This is an issue that affects many women. Approximately one in four American women will have an abortion at some point in the course of their reproductive lives. Since the Supreme Court ruling on 24 June 2022, abortion has been banned or severely restricted in 14 states. This poses a serious health risk to women or will lead to countless unwanted pregnancies with all the social problems that arise from that. Even before the ruling, there was inadequate

abortion provision in many areas.

The demonstrations follow the annual anti-abortion March for Life demonstration, which took place on Friday 20 January in Washington DC, where thousands of anti-abortion activists turned up to celebrate the movement's success. Every year since the 1973 decision, anti-choice activists have come to the US capital to demonstrate against abortion rights. This year they plan to push forward from their Supreme Court win for greater restriction on state level.

With Republicans controlling the House of Representatives, there is little hope of immediate federal legislation to protect abortion rights. Democrats are seeking to channel anger at the Roe decision into votes and donations with expectation of future legislative change. In the 50 years since Roe vs Wade, there have been ten years, including 2021 and 2022, when Democrats had control of the House, Senate, and the presidency. There have been an additional 16 years when Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress and could have used that power to



pass legislation codifying Roe.

A national organiser of the Women's March, Rachel O'Leary Carmona, said their emphasis on widespread local action was because: "The fight at the federal level just has nowhere left to go... The theatre of the battle has shifted from national protections, which are

gutted. All of the fights for the years to come will be at the state level."

The cards are stacked against women. The US right needs to be smashed by a mass movement and a new society built which consolidates our rights so that no supreme court judge could ever get rid of them. □

Huge strike in France on pensions

By Rhodri Evans

On 19 January, France's trade unions reported over two million demonstrators – people demonstrating, not just striking – across the country against President Macron's plan to change the standard pension age from 62 to 64.

Even the police put the figure at 1.12 million. The turnout was bigger than on 5 December 2019, at the start

of the previous big movement against cutting pension rights, and comparable to the bigger movement in 1995.

In France strikes are rarely 100%, but this time the strike (called jointly by all the sizeable union confederations) was 100% at the Total oil refineries, more than 50% in France's big nationalised energy company EDF, almost 50% in rail and 75% among drivers, 70% in schools.

In France, the right to strike

is a constitutional principle, not as in Britain an implication of limited "immunities" from legal jeopardy for breach of contract.

The next day of action has been called for 31 January.

Revolutionary socialists in France are calling for "general assemblies" to prepare for that day and for "renewable" strikes (continuation decided by a mass meeting each day) from then on. □



Sri Lanka: politics of collapse



Letter

Dan Katz (*Solidarity* 659) shows us that the collapse of the strong Trotskyist movement in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in the early 1960s was no marginal quirk.

The world context may be part of it. By the late 1950s the orthodox Trotskyists, those who had stuck to it despite the adversities of the previous dec-

ade, had taught themselves to subsist on a perspective that "the world revolution" was despite everything advancing, in a deformed way. Its manifestation was Stalinist and nationalist revolts against US and West European imperialism. They interpreted "permanent revolution" to mean that intense nationalist revolts could not but be socialistic.

Minorities

If long-oppressed peoples then in their turn oppressed minorities in their own midst,

that could only be secondary detail. The orthodox Trotskyists were quiet about the Algerian FLN's intolerance of Berber difference and disdain for winning over even a small minority of the European-origin population. They accepted the Maoist conquest of Tibet (1959) as an "extension of the revolution".

The SLFP in Sri Lanka expropriated oil multinationals, built up state industry, shifted from alignment with the USA to the "Non-Aligned Movement". It was "making the revolution" if

the Algerians were. Its anti-Tamil stance must be secondary. In Sri Lanka, uniquely, the orthodox Trotskyists had the chance to "avoid sectarianism towards a living revolution" by entering electoral alliances and governments, not just by approval from afar. But direct participation was more destructive than the apparently-second-best approval from afar.

That is probably not all there was to it, but maybe part. □

Martin Thomas,
north London



**Activist
Agenda**

Free Our Unions is supporting a rally and planning meeting for activity against anti-strike laws called by the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom on 24 January, 6pm at the National Education Union HQ in central London.

With twelve top-table speakers currently billed, the event seems to be more rally than planning meeting. FOU hopes that a substantial amount of time in the meeting will be reserved for discussion and planning, but in any case is itself meeting more often to discuss and plan, and will be present with leaflets and sign-up sheets on the big 1 February protests. □

• FOU: freeourunions.org. Texts for motions on many issues, and details of other campaigns, at workersliberty.org/agenda



The toll of fertilisers and pesticides



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

At the Davos World Economic Forum, the boss of fertiliser giant Yara accused Putin of “weaponising food”. He has a point.

Russia and Ukraine together produce 30% of the world’s wheat exports, 20% of barley exports and 75% of sunflower oil exports. But even bigger impact is the effect of the war on fertiliser and natural gas exports.

Russia is the world’s top exporter of both fertiliser (15% of global output) and the key raw material for fertiliser production, fossil gas (18% of global output). This summer fertiliser prices were three times what they were last year. A study from University of Edinburgh suggests the increase in fertiliser costs could increase food prices by 81% in 2023 compared with 2021 prices plunging an additional 100 million into chronic hunger and malnourishment. These facts should trigger a rethink in the way we produce our food.

The use of synthetic fertiliser has increased exponentially since German chemist Fritz Haber discovered how to fix nitrogen from air in 1909. The Haber-Bosch process, using fossil gas to produce ammonia, appeared to solve the problem of soil depletion theorised by 19th century soil chemist Justus von

Liebig. Liebig described British farming (the most advanced capitalist agriculture of his day) as the “robbery system”.

Most of the nutrients of primitive farming were often recycled back into the soil, but capitalist society transported these nutrients as food and fibre great distances from the farm, to end up polluting the city as waste. Drawing on Liebig’s work, Karl Marx wrote that this “produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism...” (*Capital* vol. 3).

Synthetic fertilisers provided chemical inputs to compensate for this robbery and with great success. According to Vaclav Smil “the application of nitrogenous fertilisers has enabled us to grow about 40% of the current global food supply, 50% in China”. We now produce enough food for 10 billion people, although as much as 40% is wasted and the uneven distribution means that 36% is fed to livestock while two billion people are malnourished and 795 million are chronically hungry.

Soil

But these fossil-fuel charged harvests come with an ecological cost. Long term dependence on synthetic fertilisers brings diminishing returns. On average, the application of fertiliser has increased seven-fold since the 1960s, yet yields have been stagnating.

The soil isn’t simply an inert medium for converting chemical inputs into food, but an ecosystem structured and



made fertile by its living organisms: the nematodes, fungi, protozoa, bacteria and invertebrates that feed on and recycle the ever falling rain of organic matter (dead bodies and excreta) and structure the mineral substrate (clay, silt, loam etc). For 500 million years prior to the Haber-Bosch process, nitrogen was made available to plant life, and by extension all terrestrial life forms, by the nitrogen-fixing fungi and bacteria in the soil.

Fertilisers used in combination with pesticides have killed much carboniferous life in the soils, destroying the biosphere’s own recycling capacity. Without its biota, the soil loses its structure and fertility and becomes ever more dependent on synthetic inputs. Degraded soil struggles to retain water so much of the fertiliser spread on cropland leaches from into waterways. That in turn creates algal blooms that drain rivers and oceans of oxygen and life. Such deadzones now cover 95,000 square miles. Run-off from the farms which have replaced large parts of the Amazon rainforest has created an algal bloom stretching from the Gulf of Mex-

ico to the West coast of Africa.

The European Scientific Foundation argue that fertiliser production represents “perhaps the greatest single experiment in global geoengineering.”

Capitalist farming, is not concerned about feeding the world, only maximum gain for minimal human labour-time. For this reason it adopts technology that undermines “the original sources of all wealth – the worker and the soil” (as Marx put it).

It seems likely that Putin’s war will disrupt big agriculture’s dependency on synthetic fertiliser. Yara is planning to shift at least some of its output to “green fertiliser”, replacing fossil gas inputs with solar energy and water. But more radical solutions are needed to restore our soils, bring life to the dead zones and ensure that noone goes hungry in a world of plenty.

Those solutions exist but will require taking the land into common ownership and organising food production and distribution on a rational, democratic basis. 1% of the world’s farmers currently own 70% of the world’s farmland. □

Tuck report finds NUS lacking

By Sam Myerson

The National Union of Students has failed on multiple occasions since 2005 and prior to address the concerns of Jewish students, and to implement the findings of seven reports or investigations into concerns relating to antisemitism in the organisation.

That is the finding of Rebecca Tuck KC’s [report](#), published on 12 January. It was commissioned in May 2022 after the suspension of the then President-elect.

The repeated failure, Tuck finds, has clearly impacted the culture in the organisation. The underlying reason for the poor relationship between NUS and Jewish students is given as attitudes towards Israel-Palestine, a theme that has been current for decades. The culture surrounding allegations of antisemitism being seen as

instigated “in bad faith to try and avert pro-Palestinian or anti-Israeli political advocacy” has resulted in antisemitism, and the NUS has failed to challenge this “sufficiently or robustly”.

NUS consulted the Union of Jewish Students on the terms of reference. NUS policy is (rightly) the [“McPherson principle”](#) that for deciding what to report and investigate, “a racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person”. On the other hand, given the focus on Israel-Palestine and the attacks on free speech on this issue, the report should have invited and included views from Palestinian students and advocates. (Tuck did take evidence from the British Palestinian Council, the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine, and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.)

Tuck’s investigation of specific allegations of antisemitism found all but one would fit classic definitions of antisemitism and would be regarded as such whether the [Jerusalem declaration](#) or the [IHRA definition](#) had been applied. This is important to note given that the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Jewish Voice for Labour and others have denounced the report as a smear against activists in the Palestinian solidarity movement.

Culture

Tuck also concludes that BDS (“Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions”) is not inherently antisemitic. Advocacy against the Israeli government, she says, is not inherently antisemitic, but at times can be. The report highlights many instances of antisemitism in spaces and campuses where the NUS has no authority or ability to

intervene directly, such as in halls of residence and in Student Unions. While it is right to highlight those issues, they are somewhat beyond the control of NUS as such. They are part of the broader culture for which NUS cannot be held directly responsible, although the culture within the NUS has an effect on the broader student movement, and it should be criticised for its failures.

The reforms brought into NUS under successive leaderships since 2005 have gutted the organisation, reducing the number of delegates and elected representatives while also overseeing a reduction in staff. The report highlights the challenges faced by the organisation since 2018. Financial pressures impacted the ability of the organisation to react to problems, with staff not accessing the antisemitism training that is available to them.

The Anti-Racism and Anti-Fascist (ARAF) committee will be reconstituted as an action from this report. While this is welcomed, the current action plan from the NUS doesn’t interrogate the report on this, with Tuck highlighting that ARAF’s historical role was to tackle extremism on the far-right.

NUS will also move forward with training and education programmes for officers and candidates for elected roles and those to be available to Student Unions. This should be welcomed. Work needs to be undertaken to build a culture of education and reflection in the movement. There will also be an introduction of expert facilitators to support debates on topics like Israel-Palestine within the NUS and Student Unions. □

Turkey reaches out to Assad

By Simon Nelson

Turkey is considering establishing normal relations with the Assad regime in Syria. A meeting in December orchestrated by Russia has now led to a further trilateral agreement with the Russian, Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers.

Since 2011 Turkey has supported, funded, and helped arm factions and militia hostile to Assad. The Free Syrian Army and the remnants of former Al-Qaeda affiliates and others relied on Turkish support. A shift towards Assad, whom Turkey's president Erdogan has previously called a terrorist, would change a decade-long policy.

The driver seems to be Kurdish issues, and Erdogan's worries about dwindling support in Turkey for his policy on Syrian refugees.

The Kurdish-nationalist PKK operated from Syria up to 1999. Turkey eventually threatened then to invade if Assad continued to give the group sanctuary. Assad responded by expelling the PKK, including its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, who was then jailed by Turkey.

Turkey wants to push the Kurds away from the border and to find a way to repatriate some of the four million Syrian refugees now in Turkey. The CHP, the main opposition to Erdogan's AKP, has promised to normalise relations with Syria and take a more aggressive stance towards the refugees. Erdogan wants to undercut the CHP.

Russia has applied significant pressure to get this meeting to happen. Turkey has long been threatening to launch a full-scale invasion of Rojava, the de-facto autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Syria governed by the PYD (Democratic Union Party), which has close ties to the PKK. It seemed very close to invading in November 2022.

Turkey wants to end effective Kurdish control of this area because it wants to keep a lid on the Kurdish minority within Syria and (as it sees it) to stop "terrorism" on its border. Russia does not want Turkey to invade because that would complicate Russia's efforts to have Assad regain full control over Syria. The US does not want an invasion because the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), in which the PYD is the largest force, is its ally in the region.

The SDF is credited with doing much of the work to push back and weaken Daesh in the country, and it maintains and guards the camps in which Daesh fighters and their families are being held. The US is worried that if the SDF and PYD are forced into a confrontation with Turkey, they will abandon the prison camps and allow Daesh to revive.

Turkey feels the pressure from both sides. Russia got the wheat agreement with Turkey which allows Russian and Ukrainian agricultural produce and fertilisers to be transported via the Black Sea, restoring food supply to the Middle East and Africa. Turkey has provided a small amount of assistance to Ukraine (drones), but it has yet to impose any sanctions on Russia and continues to stall Sweden's and Finland's membership of NATO.

Idlib

Russia, Syria and Turkey are in agreement that all Turkish troops should leave Syria and that Syrian units and allied militias should replace them, that would mean the regime entering the Idlib Province border areas with Turkey.

Idlib is one of the remaining hubs of the opposition to Assad, controlled by the a-Sham Liberation Authority. Opening the border will provide an opening for goods to Syria to bypass the American Caesar Act sanctions currently in place (and, since Turkey is a NATO



Ruins, Idlib, 2021

member, it would be hard for the US to do anything about that).

Turkey continues to insist it will not normalise relations with Syria without the consent of the Syrian opposition forces it funds. But it is hard to envision how Ankara and Damascus can come to an agreement without the opposition being entirely sidelined.

Biden is likely to want no change in the current situation in Syria. The US is happy for the Kurdish autonomous region to exist, giving it a local ally which it can continue to support (the Kurdish government in Rojava has made alliances with some Arab and other forces), and would be alarmed if Turkey sent in troops to crush it. Erdogan declared in 2021 he was opposed to the US continual involvement in Syria, meaning their alliance with the SDF.

The US would also be unhappy to see a diplomatic gain for Russia in the midst of the Ukraine war.

Ankara may be trying to break up the coalition between the Rojava government and its anti-Assad Arab allies within Syria. The SDF, knowing that it would have difficulty defeating Turkey, has said it will look for peaceful relations with Turkey. So far Ankara has declared SDF commander Mazlum Kobane a terrorist and put a bounty on his head, rebuffing any attempts to reach an agreement.

Even the start of Erdogan-Assad negotiations is designed to spook the Kurds into shifting their alliances: to breaking from the US, get the several

hundred US special forces in the area to leave, and to make a deal with Damascus over the oil, hydroelectric and agricultural wealth that is concentrated in Rojava, all in order to spare the Kurds from a Turkish invasion. The Kurds have been de facto on the same side as Assad against Daesh and somewhat indifferent to the other insurgencies against the Assad regime, but Damascus looks unlikely to assist the Kurds in achieving any political or military autonomy.

Yet the Kurds are not doing very well out of their relationship with the US. Turkish drones have struck joint US-Kurdish bases, and the US has not reacted beyond a rebuke. In fact, Turkey has been stopped from invading by Russia rather than by the US. Turkey is now taking a lead from Russia in their policy towards Syria.

The Kurds in Rojava are reliant on the US to ensure that aid is sent via the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. And the continuing relationship between the US and SDF has been some factor in preventing the ground invasion threatened at the end of 2022.

The KRG has an uneasy relationship with the PYD/PKK. It supports the Kurdistan National Council (KNC) in Syria, a smaller group with affiliations to the KRG, which has complained about the heavy-handedness and effective one-party rule of the PYD in Rojava.

Iran has been Russia's chief ally in Syria, but has been carved out of recent talks. Iran will be concerned to avoid pressure to remove its own forces from Syria. It continues to provide Russia with drones to use in Ukraine, but Russia has turned a blind eye to the uptick in Israeli attacks against Iranian targets in Syria. Ankara has also restored its own relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Turkey's steps to normalise relations coincide with a renewed push to welcome Assad back into the Arab League, which meets in Riyadh this spring. □



Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Sweden, the four countries with relatively reliable statistics and recent relatively high Covid rates, all now report downturns. So does China, but the danger of a fierce new variant emerging this winter remains. We call for:

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



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The suffrage story, a working-class slant



Book review

By Jill Mountford

I don't really get the graphic novel. I am neither the target audience nor a fan of the art form.

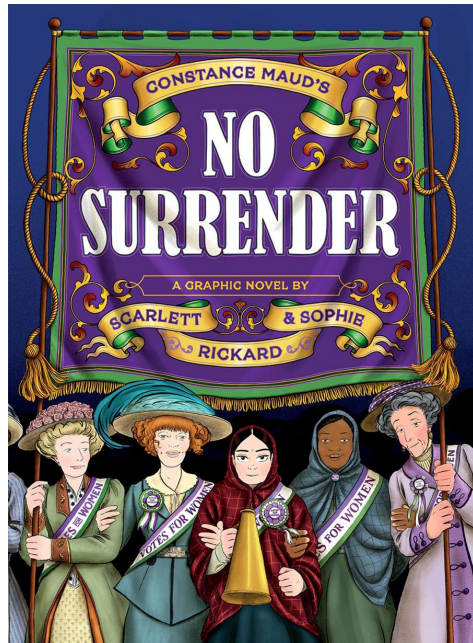
That said, Scarlett and Sophie Rickard's rendition of Constance Maud's classic women's suffrage novel from 1911, *No Surrender*, is a job well done on several levels.

The Rickard sisters have taken an important social realist novel about the battle of votes for women written in 1911 and breathed new life into it for a new, younger readership in the twenty first century. And that's a good thing because, despite *No Surrender* being sometimes poor in prose, it is rich in social history.

Written by an active suffragette, in the moment, at the height of the battle, it championed working-class women activists in the suffragette movement at a time when they were increasingly dismissed and disregarded by the autocratic leadership of the Women's Social and Political Union.

No Surrender was one of three suffragette novels written and published during the militant period of the campaign. *The Convert* by Elizabeth Robins was published in 1907, and *Suffragette Sally* by Gertrude Colmore in the same year as *No Surrender*.

All three novels had working-class women as the main or central protagon-



onists, and in all three novels it is working-class women who have the most spirit and fight in them, with most to gain from women winning the vote.

In *No Surrender* Constance Maud is meticulous in her account of real events: the skirmishes, the violence, the solidarity, the personal sacrifices and the collective mass movement. The cause of votes for women is one of two love stories running through this novel, and it is the all consuming passion.

The other story is a personal one of love that cannot last the distance, love that is doomed because of political differences. That love story provides a vehicle for the reader to consider the case for women's suffrage by counterpoint to the arguments against it.

Jenny Clegg, the main protagonist, is a millworker from Lancashire. She is a

poor, hardworking, plucky and, above all else, principled young woman who is convinced by her friend Mary O'Neill, an Anglo-Irish aristocrat (the character in part inspired by Constance Lytton), to join the women's suffrage movement. Jenny becomes a committed activist for the cause and as a result faces a major conflict with her beau, a labour movement activist, Joe Hopton, who is very much anti-women's-suffrage.

Maud, like Robins and Colmore, set out to dispel the popular myth that the suffragette movement was all for middle-class and aristocratic "ladies". And good for all them for doing so.

Typecast

The working class has prominence in Maud's novel. Unfortunately, working-class men don't fare too well there. They are generally typecast as cruel, selfish, ignorant brutes. No doubt many men were more than capable of being drunken, wife-beating bullies, but I thought the typecasting laboured and not without with a wisp of melodrama.

The graphic novel version may save us from some overdone prose, using words so sparingly inevitably loses out

on the detail of polemical discussions. Where this graphic novel offers something additional, even new, conjuring up hell's fire and dreamscapes of nightmare situations, is in the chapter entitled 'The Punishment'.

Overall Scarlett Rickard's illustrative style has a soft and characterful nature about it. Which is fine: the Rickard sisters are retelling a very human story. The illustrations convey emotion, energy, anger and atmosphere very well throughout the novel.

However, they do a particularly good job around force feeding the hunger-striking suffragettes. Here the reader is given the opportunity to fall into the nightmare of horrors. Scarlett Rickard's illustrations of the pain, suffering, humiliation and hallucinations endured by the rape of forced-feeding grab and drag the reader in. You are left in no doubt that this vile abuse goes beyond the torture of the body but enters the deepest recesses of the mind too. Reminiscent of Munch's *The Scream* and Hitchcock's dreamscape in *Vertigo*.

Maud and Colmore wrote striking, though second-hand accounts of force feeding in their novels, Sylvia Pankhurst wrote an arresting first-hand account experience of this torture. Scarlett Rickard, through her illustrations, has added something useful to the understanding of this deeply personal violation.

There is much more to consider in the original novel and the graphic retelling of *No Surrender*. Read both. I am a convert. □



International solidarity and China

By Ben Tausz

Since around the time of the courageous Sitong Bridge protest in Beijing, and accelerating with the explosive "White Paper" protest movement, there has been a step-change in the situation for building international solidarity with struggles against exploitation and oppression in China and the territories it controls. The labour movement here in Britain, and worldwide, can and must take up that responsibility.

Workers' Liberty activists are participating in, and collaborating with, broader circles of left-wing émigrés and international students from both mainland China and Hong Kong. Though the Chinese state aggressively surveils and

intimidates its émigrés, these circles are holding critical political discussions and organising for campaigning action.

For example, a group of Chinese international students attended striking nurses' picket lines in London on 18 January. They brought a banner and distributed leaflets offering solidarity, and connecting the struggles of health workers in the UK and China. Their [leaflets](#) argued that "Both Tory and CCP governments treat healthcare workers disposably" and denounced catastrophic under-resourcing and poor working conditions in healthcare, and restrictions on union rights, in both countries.

Another group, [China Deviants](#), organised a London protest in December in solidarity with the White Paper Move-

ment. They are planning a series of educational workshops, and an upcoming event commemorating the 2020 death of Wuhan health worker and Covid whistleblower Li Wenliang.

Other longstanding struggles continue. 5 February is the anniversary of the 1997 massacre of Uyghurs in Ghulja who were protesting cultural repression. The Uyghur community, with trade unionist and socialist allies in the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, will commemorate it by protesting London's Chinese Embassy (1-2pm that day).

In this context, the new call from the Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong campaign (LMSWHK; in which Workers' Liberty participates among other socialists, anar-

chists and trade unionists) is vital. LMSWHK is proposing a new united campaign here in the UK, based in the left and the workers' movement, in solidarity with all the oppressed peoples and working classes of China, Hong Kong, Tibet, Taiwan and the Uyghur Region.

The proposed campaign's [draft platform](#) supports battles for political freedoms, union rights, social justice and economic democracy for all those peoples. It demands the democratic right to self-determination for Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong and the Uyghurs. And it plants its flag independently of our own government and ruling classes: opposing imperialism and sabre-rattling by all the imperialist powers from east to west; and fighting rac-



ism and anti-migrant, anti-refugee legislation here in Britain.

LMSWHK proposes a planning meeting in late February and an inaugural conference a month later. It is inviting other campaigns, political and labour movement organisations, and trade unions, to co-sponsor the call and get involved.

The labour movement in Britain must step up to the duty of international solidarity. Bring the proposals to get involved in this new campaign to your union and your political organisations! □

• Platform and sign-up will be posted at bit.ly/s-hk

More crises to come in China

By Chan Ying

There should be little doubt amongst Chinese citizens that protesters won an important battle against Xi Jinping's government, a regime that seemed all powerful.

Xi had to change tack drafted after pledging that his government is "unwavering" in its commitment to dynamic Zero-Covid. A combination of drastic economic downturn and widespread protests, as Omicron eluded every isolation attempt, was more than the Chinese Communist Party could cope with. So Xi went for a sudden and reckless dismantling of curbs.

China's National Health Commission has now announced (Thursday 19 January) that positive cases have dropped 44 per cent since peaking nationwide on 5 January. It has also announced 60,000 Covid deaths in hospital in five weeks since its zero Covid policy U-turn. From 1 Nov to 13 Jan, the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had reported fewer than 50 deaths. The same Centre then announced on 22 January 12,658 deaths related to Covid-19 in hospitals between 13 and 19 January.

A Peking University study has estimated that 900 million people in China have been infected with the virus as of 11 January. The CDC's chief epidemiologist, Wu Zunyou, has declared (22 January) that he has little fear of a second Covid wave in the next two or

three months, because over 80% of the country's population has been infected.

The figures are still unreliable. There is wide anecdotal evidence of doctors being put under pressure not to cite Covid as a cause of death, and many patients may not reach hospital.

China uses a much narrower definition of Covid deaths than any other country and this makes even approximate comparisons impossible. And China is a vast country where data collection would be very uneven even if there were a real wish and a conscientious attempt by the national government to get it.

The regime cannot be trusted to do anything with data other than save face, minimise the wrath of its citizens, and continue with the facade that it cares for its people's well-being. In reality, Beijing cannot prevent people blaming the regime for the Covid deaths spreading across every city and village.

Sun Chunlan, vice-premier in charge of Covid policy, has sought to reassure citizens that severe cases in hospitals have decreased steadily. Xi Jinping in his Lunar New Year message last Wednesday, spoke for the first time about the current wave of Covid infections, saying he was worried about its spreading from cities to the countryside.

Reason for concern

In the past 20 odd years, younger economically-active villagers have flocked to cities in search of better paid employment. The elderly have been left behind, and now over a quarter of the rural population are over 60 years old.

The Chinese government previously prioritised the economically active under-60s for vaccination. Despite some recent efforts, it has not been able to raise the vaccination rate for the elderly beyond 85% for those over 65 and two thirds for those aged over 80.

Health provision and staffing levels in rural areas is also much poorer than in cities. Until the U-turn, health workers had little training or experience in dealing with Covid.

The Lunar New Year holiday is a peak period of travelling within China, with the Ministry of Transport expecting over two billion passenger trips, doubling last year's figures. (The country's population is just over 1.4 billion).

Hundreds of millions of migrant workers have taken their annual holidays from factory work in cities to visit their families in the countryside for the first time after three years of ultra lockdown. Millions of other city dwellers have taken their first opportunity since Covid started to travel to different parts of the country or overseas.

There are many reasons for vaccine hesitancy in China, including distrust of quality control of domestically pro-

duced vaccines, and earlier government announcements that vaccines were most suited for adults of working age. The affluent prefer mRNA vaccines and antiviral medicines such as Paxlovid, which are expensive or not readily available.

Doctors and nurses in the frontline are overworked and under huge stress, and many have suffered wage cuts, salary delays, and promised year-end bonuses disappearing. Local government finances have been exhausted by the huge cost of operating the ultra-lockdown Zero Covid policies over nearly three years, and the massive housing bubble crisis has drastically reduced local government income through land sales. Many hospitals no longer have the cash to pay their medical staff.

Unpaid wages affect many other sections of workers. The China Labour Bulletin estimates that over the years over 85% of strikes and protests in the pre-Lunar New Year period concern unpaid wages, sometimes amounting to over a year's pay. This year, unpaid wages are compounded by redundancies as enterprises struggle to cope with loss of orders, dislocated logistics, cash flow, Covid in the workforce and supply chain problems.

The technology sector was a key driver of China's economic engine, alongside the property market. Both are now limping along. Conflicts with the US have hit companies like Huawei. Beijing's policies to curtail and control its domestic tech giants Tencent and Alibaba have damaged those companies' balance sheets, leading to redundancies.

And the vast army of millions wearing white hazmat suits hired to implement the ultra-lockdowns and quarantine centres have suddenly been made redundant.

A new recovery is likely to be bumpy, probably relying on consumers spending their savings from lockdown times rather than driven by new investment. Some foreign investors remain unconvinced of a definite change of policy, while others are unnerved by future policy zigzags. Companies like Apple remain very heavily involved, with limited options to diversify their production and supply lines.

On top of this, the news that the



country's population has past its peak and set to decline in the coming years will weigh heavily on the CCP, since this was projected just a few years ago to occur much later, sometime in 2027. In fact the working population had already peaked in 2014.

The ageing population and the sharp decline in birthrate make it highly unlikely that the regime can restore recent decades' fast pace of economic growth. The difficulties for the regime may put Chinese workers in a better position to fight for improved wages and conditions even if Xi tries to step up repression. □

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CHINA AND TROTSKYISM



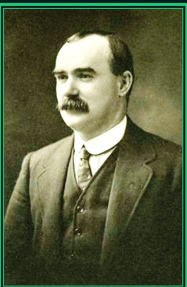
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Liam McNulty



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

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Ireland's war of independence

By Micheál MacEoin

On 21 January 1919, Irish Volunteers from the 3rd Tipperary Brigade lay in wait for a Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) patrol, guarding explosives on the move from a nearby quarry.

As the horse-drawn cart, carrying 160lb of gelignite, approached the position of the ambush party, the Volunteers, led by Sean Treacy and Dan Breen, called for the RIC men to surrender and then opened fire. Both RIC officers, James McDonnell and Patrick O'Connell, were killed. The Soloheadbeg ambush was the first engagement in what would become the Irish War of Independence.

On the same day, though not co-ordinated with the ambush, the first meeting of Dáil Éireann took place in the Mansion House in Dublin. It comprised the 27 who could get there of the 73 Sinn Féin MPs elected (out of 105 Irish seats) to the British House of Commons in the December 1918 General Election.

In the election, Sinn Féin had won a mandate for its platform of "withdrawing the Irish Representation from the British Parliament" and convening a "constituent assembly comprising persons chosen by Irish constituencies as the supreme national authority to speak and act in the name of the Irish people..." On 21 January the Dáil issued a Declaration of Independence, which it formulated as ratifying the Irish Republic proclaimed in the Easter Rising of 1916.

Sinn Féin had its roots in the "advanced nationalist" or separatist milieu of the early years of the twentieth century. Formed by Arthur Griffith, its programme had been for a "dual monarchy" based on a spurious analogy with Hungary's co-equal status with Austria (but under the same monarch) in the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire.

Sinn Féin was not formally involved in the Easter Rising, but it became the main political beneficiary of the revolution felt at the execution of the rebel leaders and the British moves from April 1918 towards introducing World War 1 conscription to Ireland. As it burgeoned, it mutated, developing into an umbrella group for most of the separatist forces. It adopted a republican programme (in place of "dual monarchy") in 1917 and fought the 1918 election on a programme of Irish national self-determination and opposition to conscription.

Sinn Féin's victory over the long-dominant Irish Parliament Party (IPP) indicated that the Irish majority was moving away from the old demand for Home Rule (a measure of limited devolution) towards full independence. That made a confrontation with the British increas-

ingly likely.

After decades of failed attempts, the British Parliament had passed a Home Rule Act in August 1914, together with another law which suspended it until after the World War. The British ruling class was trying to find a Home Rule solution which would keep Ireland within the British Empire (which was important to them for military reasons, and because of repercussions elsewhere in the Empire if Ireland seceded) and accommodate militant Unionist opposition in Ireland's north-east and its Tory supporters in Britain.

At the end of January 1919, in the wake of the ambush and the Declaration of Independence, and after a meeting of the Executive of the Irish Volunteers took place, An t-Óglach stated that the formation of Dáil Éireann "justifies Irish Volunteers in treating the armed forces of the enemy – whether soldiers or policemen – exactly as a National Army would treat the members of an invading army".

The Volunteers, originally set up in November 1913 as a more-or-less Home-Rule counterpoint to the Unionist Ulster Volunteers, but now the Irish Republican Army (IRA), spent most of 1919 procuring arms and getting republicans out of jail. The Republican political leadership sought to construct a counter-state. The RIC were boycotted, and RIC stations and other symbols of British rule burned to the ground. Parallel institutions, such as the Dáil courts, increasingly won the support of the population outside of the north-east.

Support

By mid-1920, British support had largely collapsed in the south and west of the country. The republicans took control of most Irish county councils in elections called by the British authorities in June 1920.

The British now supplemented the RIC and British Army forces by recruits from Britain – the "Black and Tans" and the Auxiliaries – who pursued a policy of terror and reprisal, causing great outrage, including in the USA.

The guerrilla operations of the IRA were undergirded by the mass refusal of most of Ireland to assent to British authority.

Meanwhile, the Irish labour movement grew to an unprecedented size and strength. "Trade unions exploded in all directions", writes Emmet O'Connor. From a base of 100,000 members in 1916, membership affiliated to the Irish Trade Union Congress grew to 225,000 in 1920. Ireland saw an unprecedented wave of militancy, including "soviets" in Monaghan in February 1919, Limerick in April and several other areas between 1919 and 1922.

As Conor Kostick has summarised:



Sean Hogan's flying column, 3rd Tipperary Brigade

'Between 1918 and the conclusion of the Irish War of Independence in 1921 the organised Irish working class made five distinct and powerful interventions.

"On 23 April 1918 a general strike took place against the threat of conscription; for a month at the beginning of 1919 Belfast was gripped by a strike for a shorter working week; in April that year Limerick workers took over their city and declared soviet rule; in April 1920 a massive general strike forced the release of hunger strikers; and for most of 1920 transport workers sabotaged the movements of men and material by the British Army.

"Alongside these set-piece battles was a general spirit of resistance and confidence in the possibility of taking action amongst Irish workers, who were themselves part of a great upsurge of revolutionary enthusiasm that was sweeping through Europe".

Politically, however, the Irish working class left the field open to Sinn Féin. Irish Labour, tied to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, did not contest the 1918 election. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) was led by former comrades of James Connolly such as William O'Brien but there was no active socialist party. Completely absent in the leadership of the Irish labour movement was the perspective of the Irish working class taking the leadership on the national question or offering any distinctive ideas to unify the workers of the north-east with those of the south.

A six-county Northern Ireland government was elected in May 1921, under legislation passed by the British parliament in November 1920, and there had already been a wave of driving out Catholic and "rotten Prod" workers from the Belfast shipyards in summer 1920.

By autumn 1920, the British were putting increasing pressure on the republican movement. In an attempt to turn the tide, at 9am on 21 November, eight addresses in the Irish capital were visited by members of "The Squad", an elite unit of the IRA Dublin Brigade organised by Michael Collins, Finance Minister for the underground Irish Republic and the IRA's Chief of Intelligence. They were tasked with assassinating RIC officers, British agents and, sometimes, informants within the Irish republican movement itself, in an

attempt to smash Britain's intelligence network in Dublin.

The attacks had a huge public impact. Crowds lined the banks and bridges of the Liffey as the dead officers were taken to the port. In London, military barricades were erected in Downing Street and King Charles Street, and 200 ex-officers were signed up to protect Government offices and Parliament.

Reprisals began immediately with the arrest and murder of two Dublin IRA officers and an innocent non-combatant. On Sunday afternoon, 21 November, the British surrounded the Croke Park Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) football stadium. The Auxiliaries drove up to the entrance, before a planned police cordon could be established, and fired into the crowd. 90 seconds later, 114 rounds of rifle ammunition, an unknown number of revolver shots, and a further 50 rounds had been fired from a military machine gun. 14 civilians were murdered, and many more injured, some seriously.

The nationalist *Freeman's Journal* headlined "Amritsar Repeated In Dublin", a reference to the 1919 Amritsar massacre in India, when troops under the command of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer killed 379 people and wounded over 1,200 on a demonstration in the Punjab.

Bloody Sunday turned the tide of Irish opinion further against the British. With the Kilmichael Ambush a week later, when 17 British officers were killed by the IRA in County Cork, the day's events also destroyed the idea in British government circles that Ireland could be defeated militarily.

That led directly to talks through intermediaries, paving the way for a truce in July 1921, and the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921. The Treaty marked a compromise between Britain and a section of the republican movement, accepting dominion status for a 26 county Irish "Free State" within the British Empire and the partition of the island (with an empty promise of that changing through a "Boundary Commission").

The Treaty led to a Civil War within the republican movement (1922-23), and what historian John Regan has called an "Irish counter-revolution", in which a repressive, Catholic and socially conservative post-independence state was consolidated. □

Emmett Till: a lynching which fired the Civil Rights Movement



Film review

By Tom Harrison

'Twas down in Mississippi not so long ago

When a young boy from Chicago stepped through a southern door

This boy's dreadful tragedy I can still remember well

The colour of his skin was black and his name was Emmett Till

- Death of Emmett Till, by Bob Dylan

Till, a film now showing at local cinemas, tells the story of a lynching in the Southern USA which did not go almost unnoticed outside its area as many other such lynchings did. Instead it became a cause célèbre and gave a major impetus to the Civil Rights Movement.

The USA presents itself as a great "melting pot" – a country where diverse people can live together in harmony when they come there after escaping persecution elsewhere. Such a narrative omits not only the genocide of a massive number of its First Nation original inhabitants, but also the kidnapping and enslavement of millions of Africans.

The abolition of slavery after the Civil War didn't bring an end to fear and terror for most African-heritage Americans. Ninety years after 1865, they

were still under racist subjugation in the states of the former Confederacy where slavery once held sway. Racial violence was endemic and white racists got away with murdering black victims, with scant legal consequences.

Emmett Till was fourteen years old. From Chicago, he was on holiday in Mississippi in 1955 staying with relatives. His mother told him "to be small" so as not to "offend" the prevailing white supremacist mores of the American South.

Emmett was a naturally exuberant boy. His outgoing manner upset the sensibilities of a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, who ran the local grocery store. She accused him of flirting with her. "Negroes" guilty of such "uppity" behaviour needed to be punished.

Her husband and his half brother kidnapped and murdered Emmett, dumping his body in the Tallahatchie River.

Emmett's mutilated and swollen body was retrieved three days later. When it was returned to Chicago, his mother, Mamie Till Bradley, insisted on a public funeral with an open casket, so that the world could see the horror wreaked upon her son.

Unlike in most of the numerous racist lynchings that had taken place in the South, the victim was a child. Tens of thousands attended Emmett's funeral, and the crime received widespread media attention throughout America and internationally.

Emmett's mother would not get justice. Bryant and his brother were put on trial, but the all-white jury refused to convict them. The local redneck sheriff

even posited a conspiracy theory when he testified, claiming that the body found wasn't that of Emmett, who was apparently still alive. It was all a plot to advance the agenda of the civil rights organisation NAACP. Such conspiratorial utterings are all too familiar today!

The two murderers later confessed to their crime for a magazine which paid them \$4,000 – a substantial sum at the time. Double jeopardy allowed them to escape justice once more.

The film doesn't make out that all was sweetness and light for black Americans in northern cities like Chicago, either. In one of the opening scenes when Mamie and Emmett go shopping in an upmarket department store, a staff member says it would be better for them to shop in the basement where things are cheaper. It's like complaints black people make in Britain when asked if they are in the right seats when they go first class on the train.

Yet going to American south in the 1950s was truly entering a different world. On the journey to the trial, Mamie and her father had to move to the segregated compartments as soon as they crossed the Mason-Dixon Line.

Danielle Deadwyler puts in an excellent performance as Emmett's mother Mamie, determined to get justice for her son. It brings to mind Doreen Lawrence and her campaign. Jalyn Hall is equally convincing as Emmett, a playful teen whose life was tragically cut short. Tosin Cole plays Medgar Evers, a civil rights activist who helped Mamie's case and was later assassinated. The fine supporting cast also includes Whoopi



Goldberg as Emmett's grandmother.

Producer Barbara Broccoli is to be congratulated for her eighteen year struggle to get this film made, counter-ing as she did the Hollywood money men "who didn't think it worth making". The murder of George Floyd, another lynching, helped change that.

In March last year the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, which made lynching a federal hate crime, was passed into US law. It took over 200 similar attempts to pass such a long overdue measure.

Don't let this film pass you by. There were only ten people in the audience when I went to see it, but that was on a rainy winter's day in Speke. If you miss it at the cinema, make sure you catch it on TV! □

The BBC and Modi's fake anti-imperialism

By Mohan Sen

India's far-right government has banned even clips from a BBC documentary under legislation that allows for "blocking of information in case of emergency".

The "emergency"? The programme documents how India's ruling Hindu nationalist movement, and prime minister Narendra Modi specifically, are responsible for bloody anti-Muslim pogroms.

In 2002, when Modi was chief minister of the state of Gujarat, he facilitated the murder of many hundreds, possibly thousands, of Muslims by far right-led mobs. Many tens of thousands were driven from their homes. We told the story

in *Solidarity* last March (bit.ly/gujarat2002).

Part two of *India: The Modi Question* (bit.ly/modidocu) came out the day we went to press. Part one is certainly worth watching. Without showing any bloodshed, the 2002 footage brings these disturbing events to life, and new information and testimony from UK officials reinforces the voice of Indian activists. I didn't know that three UK citizens were murdered in Gujarat, or that Modi came close to being arrested here in 2003.

The attempt to suppress any trace of the documentary in India is indicative of the authoritarianism of the Modi regime, but also its sensitivity over the Gujarat "riots".

Until shortly before Modi became Indian prime minister in 2014 he was banned from the US and UK because of Gujarat. This clear picture is what the Hindu right wants to erase.

To discredit the documentary, Indian right-wingers are brandishing an idea they have long nurtured, that international criticism of human rights abuses violates India's sovereignty. Criticism from the UK is in the same mold as British colonialism.

This "argument" must be challenged head-on. It's laughable nonsense, but also dangerous poison: a license for right-wing and repressive regimes and movements in large parts of the world – anywhere, really – to suppress criticism

on supposedly anti-imperialist grounds.

Even beyond the pockets of the world still suffering under something like colonial rule, imperialism still exists. There are anti-imperialist struggles. But an attempt by the right-wing government of a powerful independent country to prevent criticism of its human rights violations is not one of them.

It is worth noting that the Hindu nationalist movement played almost no role in the actual struggle against British rule in India. Its open sympathy for fascist Italy and Nazi Germany – including on the basis that Nazi antisemitism provided a model for dealing with India's Muslims – was

not enough to overcome its distrust of the strong secular, cross-community and left-wing elements in Indian nationalism. The Hindu nationalist leaders actively sought accommodation with the British.

As Rishi Sunak made clear in a parliamentary response on the documentary, the Tories stand with Modi. The forces in the Labour Party pushing for an [accommodation](#) with Hindu nationalism are also dismayingly strong. The left must commit to active solidarity with workers and the oppressed in India, and give no quarter to Modi's apologists. We must help keep the memory of what was done in Gujarat alive. □

Teachers' strike is for all who work in education

By a school support worker

In Wales, both teachers and support staff in the NEU will be taking official strike action on 1 February and on three more days in February and March. In England, only the NEU teachers' ballot cleared the threshold of a 50% turnout (with more than 90% of those who voted voting to strike). The support staff ballot had more than 84% voting yes to strike, but 46.46% turnout, below the Tory-set threshold.

The questions on both teacher and support staff ballot papers were almost identical. Both focussed primarily on funding for schools (making an above-inflation pay rise affordable). A victory for the NEU strike would mean, in the first place, government agreeing

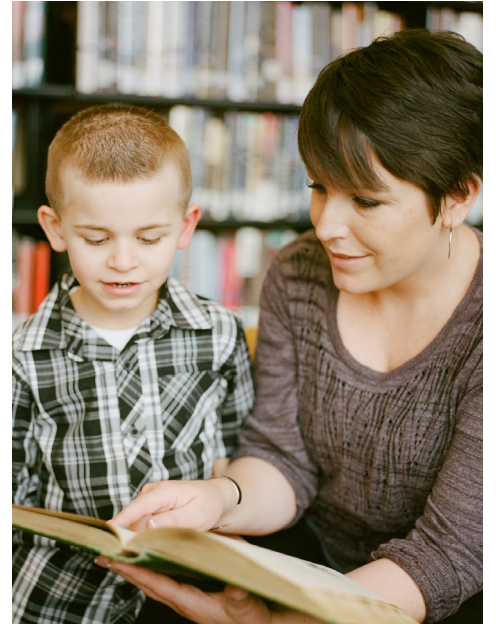
to make a very significant increase in school funding, and would be a huge win for all workers in education as well as for pupils and students. A major boost for school funding is especially important for support staff, whose jobs or employment terms are likely to be more at risk than those of teachers if the current under-funding continues.

Pickets

The NEU is organising picket lines at schools. Hundreds of support staff may decide not to cross picket lines and therefore to withdraw their labour. [Guidance](#) from the Local Government Association quoted by both NEU and NAHT recently indicates that workers taking such a decision should be regarded as being on strike and liable

to "deduction of wages on account of the breach of contract" (not dismissal). The Government's [Code](#) of Practice on Picketing says that pickets can seek to persuade workers outside of the legal strike balloting group not to work.

However, Unison and GMB have told their school support staff members that they must cross picket lines and work as normal (although not cover the work of striking teachers). Union reps in schools will have to be prepared for some school managements taking a more aggressive view regarding e.g. attendance procedures. NEU school groups will need to be organised and united (ideally working with Unison, GMB, and Unite reps and members) to repel victimisation of support staff who take a stand in solidarity. □



Why I refused to cross the picket line

By a Unison member

Health trade unions should have been calling on members to respect the picket lines of other unions and refuse to cross. However, the instruction from Unison to members has been that we had to report into work as normal.

They said: "Unison balloted our members separately to other unions and so Unison members should not take part in any industrial action organised by the other unions. If you do make an individual decision to refuse to work or cross picket lines when your colleagues from other unions are taking action you may find

yourself at risk of dismissal". In my trust this resulted in management issuing an email saying non-union members could join the RCN strike but not Unison members. Workers who had planned to join the RCN picket line didn't, and were angry and confused.

The RCN organised a picket line outside my workplace, with about 70 people joined. I didn't cross, and I took the Unison banner to put alongside those of the RCN. The RCN members recognised the importance of solidarity and said how many of their Unison colleagues had wanted to join the picket line but had been

stopped from doing so by the emails from the union telling them couldn't.

Management came out to the picket line and were aware that I hadn't gone in to work but was on the picket line for the two days. It isn't clear at the moment if management will take disciplinary action. The RCN members on the picket line said they would support me if they do.

There is also a motion going to my next branch meeting saying Unison should have said that – even if they couldn't call people out on strike – they would support members who refused to cross a picket line. If

passed this will be sent to the Region.

In Wales, Unison told members they wouldn't face disciplinary action if they didn't cross pickets; Unison members joined the strike. That should be replicated. As the Tories bring in more anti-union laws, the trade union movement needs to push back.

The importance of the picket line was seen over this last week at my workplace. The postal workers stopped and said they would be turning around and not crossing the picket line. Support came from bus drivers and council bin workers, who have

recently won their disputes. Confidence grew. Discussions became more political.

We had debates about what chants were "allowed". The RCN had said the anti-Tory chants of the first day had to stop. That was ignored.

Young RCN members planned to stand to be reps and will call on the RCN to call out our trust in the next round of action.

In this dispute we have an opportunity to rebuild the trade unions in health. Solidarity and re-asserting the basic principle of not crossing a picket line will be an important part of it. □

CWU moots more mail strikes

By a CWU rep

I'm not aware of any specific discussion having taken place about CWU striking on 1 February. It does now seem more possible that we might strike again before the conclusion of our current re-ballot (16 Feb).

In his latest video message to members, general secretary Dave Ward has said that, unless Royal Mail stops unilaterally imposing changes, there could be another strike "in the next

couple of weeks." The changes that are being imposed are around changes to duties and staffing levels, based on ridiculously low assumptions about workload, leading to understaffing.

Ignoring

In my workplace, changes haven't been imposed yet; management has made proposals, which we've rejected. But in other places, they're ignoring the negotiating machinery and just pushing ahead. This was supposed to

stop as part of an agreement made in national talks, but it seems it hasn't.

The re-ballot campaign is going well, you can see from social media there's a real buzz around it, with large gate meetings taking place.

Some of the material the union is putting out uses the slogan "Win the re-ballot, win the dispute", which suggests delivering a renewed mandate could be the last big push that brings victory. I'd tend to agree that this won't be the case, and that members need to

be prepared for further strikes.

There's also a possibility of a shareholders' revolt against CEO Simon Thompson within Royal Mail. His position is more precarious following his car-crash interview with the Parliamentary Select Committee.

But we shouldn't pin our hopes on that; although he has been especially confrontational, there's no guarantee that whoever replaces him, if he is replaced, will be any better. □

Reject new offer, fight on to win more



Off The Rails

The Rail Delivery Group (RDG), the body negotiating on behalf of Train Operating Companies (TOCs) in the national dispute, has made a new offer. The new offer differs from the previous one in two main ways: the pay element has been slightly increased, and the commitment to rolling out Driver Only Operation across the network has been withdrawn.

These, particularly the latter, are not insignificant. The Tories have a clear ambition to extend DOO as widely as possible and have been forced to back off from that by the action we have taken. Forcing the employers to up their pay offer is also testament to the power of striking.

But these concessions don't represent a sufficient improvement on previous offers to justify accepting the deal and settling our dispute. All the other egregious elements remain: the closure of every ticket office, job cuts, a raft of changes to conditions including compulsory Sunday working, and a new grading structure that will see many workers forced into unpaid promotions – taking on extra roles and responsibilities for no additional pay. And, while a slight improvement in the pay offer is positive, it is still below inflation and therefore a pay cut. The current offer is for a 5% increase or a £1,750 flat-rate increase (whichever is higher for a given grade) for 2022, up from 4% in the previous offer, and a 4% increase for 2023.

According to the TOCs' figures, for someone at the very bottom of the pay scale, earning £20,000, the new offer represents a 13.1% increase, based

on the flat-rate floor. But this is an increase over two years (the deal covers 2021/22 and 2022/23), and does not cover the full amount by which the value of wages has fallen relative to inflation in that time.

And, significantly, the offer explicitly states that the improved pay element is conditional on acceptance of all the changes to terms and conditions. Accepting the offer on the basis that the pay settlement has been slightly increased would, therefore, be to sell off our conditions for a single percentage increase in pay.

The offer does say that ticket office closures and job cuts would be subject to local consultation. Some may think that this creates potential for local campaigns, including local industrial disputes, to defend ticket offices and jobs. If this offer, a similar one, is eventually implemented or imposed, those will certainly be necessary. But those local disputes will, by their nature, be less powerful than our current industry-wide national fight.

Considering

RMT has said that the National Executive Committee is "considering" the offer. Presumably the NEC and national officials have seen the offer in full, but so far, the union has only shared a headline summary of the offer with members. It includes the following: "There are various other proposals on contractual terms and entitlements, including flexible working contracts for new starters." Invariably, the "flexibility" employers want is a one-way street, where they have the power to change our shift times and locations at short notice, and we have no right to refuse. Members need to see the full detail of these elements of the offer so we can be clear about exactly how our employers want to change our working lives.

There is some suggestion this offer may be put to referendum; our view is that, given that the pay settlement is conditional on acceptance of cuts, and given how much of the offer explicitly contravenes union policy (e.g., around defending ticket offices), it should be straightforwardly rejected, as the previous offer was. Reps' meetings should then be called to discuss a new campaign of strikes. If the offer is put out to referendum, it's vital the NEC gives a lead by recommending rejection, on the basis of sharing the offer with members in full.

So far, there is no equivalent new offer on the Network Rail side of the dispute, with RMT members having rejected the previous offer by a 3-1 margin in a recent referendum. Every effort must be made to keep the two halves of the dispute together, and establish the principle that neither side should settle until there are acceptable offers on the table on both sides. That may be a difficult position to win, given the potential for strike fatigue at this stage of a long dispute, but the effort must be made nonetheless. We went into the dispute together, in a common fight as rail workers, across employers and grades, and we must endeavour to end the dispute the same way.

The recent admission by rail minister Huw Merriman that our dispute has cost the government more than they would have had to spend to meet our demands makes explicit something we've known from the start: our fight is political. The Tories and bosses see it as a chance to re-shape our industry, and they know that conceding to us would not only wreck those plans, but would be a beacon to other workers. Merriman was clear that this was the government's calculation, that it was "worth it" to face us down in order not

to set a precedent for other disputes. This surely means that our best chance of winning is by acting in a similarly political way: by making our fight, as far as possible, part of a generalised working-class fightback against the Tories. It's therefore a significant missed opportunity that the union held back from calling wider action as part of the mass coordinated strike on 1 February, choosing to call action only of the small number of RMT drivers on TOCs. RMT members in other grades aren't covered by Aslef ballots, but Aslef drivers are still workers in our industry and workplaces. With the stakes in our dispute as high as they are, it's surely time to re-establish the principle of refusing to cross picket lines, even if there are some risks and challenges.

After a six-month (and counting) dispute, with multiple strikes, members may be feeling battle-weary and financially stretched. But having come as far as we have, we owe it to ourselves to hold out for better than what's on the table now. Our strikes have forced some concessions, but those concessions are still tied to a package of unacceptable cuts. The only way we can defeat them is by stepping up our strikes.

Let's reject the RDG's offer, and prepare to strike again. □

- The RMT's East Midlands Central branch in Nottingham held a special meeting on 22 January to debate the new offer from the RDG.

A summary of that discussion and the branch's proposal for further action are at bit.ly/em-mo.

We share these motions for information, and to encourage other RMT activists to take their own proposals for escalation to their own branches. All proposals should be discussed in national reps' assemblies as well as by the NEC.

"Test cases" against asylum-seekers

By David Santos

On Monday 16 January, three men facing charges related to small boat crossings in the English Channel at Canterbury Crown Court.

These cases now happening are considered "test cases", after a court ruling in [December 2022](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61444444) confirmed that asylum seekers can be prosecuted for piloting boats across the Channel.

Yousef Yari, an Iranian asylum-seeker who was identified as having piloted the boat he arrived on for 15 minutes, pled guilty and was sentenced to nine months in prison and a further fine. Ibrahima Bah, 19

years old, faced a hearing for charges of illegal entry and facilitation of illegal entry, which carries a possible life sentence. He was the pilot on the boat that tragically capsized, leading to four deaths, in December. He has also been charged with manslaughter by the CPS. His trial will take place at the earliest in September, until which he will be held on remand.

The Nationality and Borders Act (NABA), which came into force in 2022, explicitly sought to enable this kind of prosecution.

Solidarity and support for refugees has mainly taken

legal routes, in the UK using the defence that the accused was in fact trafficked. This, along with other tropes and misunderstandings of migrants' agency, often causes the framing to remain trapped within dynamics of humanitarian saviours of desperate, vulnerable refugees.

New laws show that law and even the Refugee Convention cannot be relied upon. Extra-legal resistance is necessary. Further, understanding the issue as struggle for legal recognition has little to say about the struggles faced by migrants and refugees once asylum is granted.

Socialists must acknowledge the border as not only a cornerstone of upholding the global distribution of wealth and power, but also as an essential component of constraining workers' struggle within the UK. We must see displaced people not as vulnerable, desperate people to be "saved", but instead as fellow members of our class, occupying a front line of the class struggle. □

- Abridged. More: bit.ly/3-testc. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants has issued, and many unions have signed, a "Migrant Workers' Pledge": bit.ly/jcwi-m

More online

Glasgow East Labour

CLP blocks strike leader
bit.ly/glasgoweast

Tom Nairn

Food for thought, 1932-2023: bit.ly/nairnobot

Protest, resistance

Russian student writer
Armen Aramyan
bit.ly/doxaresist

Antidepressants

Zack Muddle takes issue
with Martin Thomas
bit.ly/solantidepress

Lessons of Sotsprof

Russia's "Socialist Union"
bit.ly/sotsprof

“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

How many to change bulb?



Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

How many people does it take to change a lightbulb? That question, with variations, apparently dates back to the 1960s. So, how many people does it take to change a lightbulb on the Tube? Or, how many people does it take to relamp a signal in busy times?

I'll walk you through the process. It's long, but there are good safety reasons for the length.

First it takes a driver or someone to spot that a bulb has gone (1). Then they report it to the Line Controller (2). Then that Controller will log the issue, they might speak to someone else (3) who will then need to get a Technical Officer (4) to replace the bulb. In the meantime the Line Controller (1) has spoken to a Station Supervisor (5) to put someone at the station nearest to the failed bulb to tell drivers as they come in about the fault. That Station Supervisor will instruct a Customer Service Assistant (6) to go down to the platform and inform all the drivers that come in to look out for it and take appropriate caution approaching the signal or repeater.

Once the Technical Officer has got the right bulb and is ready to change it over they will go down to the nearest station and call the Controller (1), we'll

work on the basis no shift changes have happened in this scenario, and they will then pick a train that they will travel on to change the bulb. Once that train arrives. The Technical Officer will explain to the driver (7) where the bulb that needs to be replaced is, where they will need the train to stop and to advise whether or not they will want the traction current switched off.

On arrival the TO will then call the Line Controller and explain they need traction current switched off. The Line Controller will then speak to the people who control the power supply (8) and they will then switch the power off. The Line Controller will then call the TO back and confirm that has been done and they can access the track. The Line Controller will then call the driver and explain the same thing and remind them not to move their train. Then the Controller will ring at least one driver behind that train (9) and at least one driver in front (10) telling them to hold until instructed to move. This is so that the movement of trains is regulated without large gaps.

Once the bulb has been changed, which will take about 30 seconds, the Technical Officer will get back on the train, clear all the equipment from the track and then call the Line Controller and confirm the job has been done and the power can be switched back on. The Controller then calls the people who control the power to switch it back on. Then they call the driver back and

confirm the power is back on.

Depending on the signal, a signaller (11) might then call the driver and give them authority to proceed. Once that train sets off with the TO onboard the controller will call back the other drivers and advise them if they have clear signals and it is safe to do so they can all proceed.

A system that works near perfectly until the bulb fails again two hours later. And then another 11+ people can go through the procedure. □

A long way to go!

Just £60 to report this week, from a donation and two sales of *James Connolly, Socialist, Nationalist & Internationalist*. We have a limited number of these books left, but all sales money now will now go straight into our fund.

We have a fair few months left to get to our £35,000 fundraising total and one of the immediate reasons we need this money is to help cover the costs of a speaker tour with two Ukrainian socialists and feminists who will be here in March. The cost of their visas and travel all have to be factored in and if we raised £500 in the next week we would be close to covering those initial costs. So get donating! □

• workersliberty.org/fund

All Quiet on the Western Front



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I've never been keen on re-makes, so in order to "get my retaliation in first" I'm writing about *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the 1930 classic Hollywood film directed by Lewis Milestone, not the new German version directed by Edward Berger (which may or may not be good – I haven't seen it).

Along with Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) and others, it remains one of the classic anti-war films.

Despair

All Quiet... follows the young German recruit Paul Bäumer, who enthusiastically heads off to the war to fight for country and Kaiser, to be confronted by the horrors of trench warfare: the hunger, cold, rats, flooded trenches and the continual presence of death.

His enthusiasm soon fades and turns



to despair.

Many of his classmates die in the carnage. On a short spell of leave he is persuaded to speak to the pupils at his former school, but he can find no words of encouragement for them.

The war is reaching its climax and Paul returns to the front.

The film is based on the novel by Eric Maria Remarque, published in 1929 and banned when the Nazis came to power. □

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

15-16 March, and more?



John Moloney

The union is working hard to ensure our 1 February strike is successful. Some of that is very basic organising work, such as explaining to members what a strike is and what's involved in participating in one. That basic work is necessary as many of the members involved will never have been on strike before.

We want picket lines in as many locations as possible, including at buildings with multiple departments in them where some will be striking and some not. Extensive picketing is a key part of how we make the strike an active and empowering process, rather than a more passive experience where workers simply stay at home.

The union's National Disputes Committee will meet regularly in the run-up

to the strike. One thing it will discuss is whether PCS will formally co-sponsor the central London protest march the National Education Union has called for 11am on the strike day. Our general secretary, Mark Serwotka, is speaking at the rally due to follow the march, so it would be odd for us not to co-sponsor the march and make it into a joint event.

We want as much collaboration between striking unions as possible in other areas, too. We should be encouraging PCS branches to reach out to local branches of NEU and other striking unions to plan joint activities on the day. That could be joint strike rallies, local marches, and strikers' assemblies. In those discussions, I've emphasised the importance of Trades Councils. These are the existing structures we have available to us to facilitate cross-union coordination and discussion, so we're encouraging local PCS branches to engage as fully as possible with their local Trades Coun-

cils and help activate them.

Our National Executive Committee (NEC) has discussed next steps after 1 February. Everyone acknowledges that the 1 February strike can't be a one-off. NEU has announced further national strikes on 15-16 March, and I think there'll be broad consensus on our NEC in favour of coordinating with those dates. Where there'll be more debate is around whether we should take further all-out action in our own dispute during February. That's certainly something I'm in favour of.

The FDA, the association which seeks to represent civil servants in more senior and managerial roles, has just balloted its members on the civil service "Fast Stream", people who are being fast-tracked for senior positions, and won an 88% majority for action on a 60% turnout. This creates the possibility for widening action within the civil service itself.

I also support seeking ongoing coordination with other unions, but it's

important to emphasise that taking action in our own dispute can't be made conditional on that. We need a strategy for winning our dispute, against our own employers. If we commit to coordinated action, and then for whatever reason other unions pull out, I would argue for us to keep our own strike on.

I'm also continuing to work on improving PCS's international work. Recently, I've been developing links with civil service unions in Sweden and Italy. We're aiming to hold joint Zoom meetings for union activists with these comrades, as all three countries – Sweden, Italy, and the UK – have the commonality of hard-right elements in government pursuing policies of anti-migrant nationalism. I also want to set up an activist meeting where a trade unionist from Ukraine discusses the situation they face. □

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

Unite: disaffiliation attempts continue to simmer

By Ann Field

Until 3 February Unite union branches will be nominating candidates for the union's Executive. Voting is 27 March to 25 April. There are two slates: United Left (UL), and what could be called the Sharon Graham (SG) slate.

The United Left, long dominant on the Executive, was always primarily an electoral machine in the tradition of the old Broad Lefts, dominated by the politics of the *Morning Star*. Apart from a sometimes substantial dissident minority, it was uncritical of Len McCluskey, general secretary 2011-21. It declined, then was thrown into disarray when Steve Turner, its candidate in the 2021 General Secretary election, was defeated by Sharon Graham.

UL Executive Council candidates have been selected at meetings of its members. Its slate, [publicly available](#), is a mixed bag. Its slogan is "Members First", but "Serve the Bureaucracy First", or "Serve Myself and My Ambitions First", might suit some candidates better.

The SG slate has had no formal selection process, and consists of members who have included in their self-nomi-

nation statement the phrase "I support Sharon Graham's election manifesto, 'Back to the Workplace,'" or words to that effect. It too is a mixed bag, ranging from lifelong Stalinists to members genuinely enthused by Graham's promises of a workplace focus.

Graham stood for election as "The Workers' Candidate", despite being a long-time senior trade union bureaucrat, and despite the fact that her 2021 election campaign was run at least in part by staff in her Organising Department.

Her "back to the workplace" slogan was interpreted by her best supporters as a call to root Unite's activity in basic workplace organisation and struggle against employers (and Workers' Liberty members active in Unite voted by a majority to back Graham). In her manifesto, and wider literature, the slogan was coupled with anti-political demagoguery (which we criticised) about "the Westminster Brigade", "the Westminster bubble", and the risk of being "dazzled by the bright lights of Westminster".

Since her election Graham has allocated more time, money and resources to winning industrial disputes. That

is positive. But there is still no sign of the Democracy Commission which she promised. As regards her headline promise to unionise Amazon, the GMB has made more headway there than Unite.

She has launched the "Unite for a Workers' Economy" campaign which is supposed to build working-class politics from the grassroots. In fact, the "campaign" has done little but produce some videos, and they have attracted a disappointingly small number of views online. Meanwhile Unite has done little with the strength it holds at Labour conference and in Labour's NEC to push back against Starmer's right-wing lurch.

So an oath of fealty to the General Secretary is a poor basis for an election slate, especially when coupled with an absence of constructive criticism.

Any attempt to broaden the basis of the slate by addressing wider issues would shatter its unity.

The slate is a pole of attraction for advocates of Unite's disaffiliation from the Labour Party. In her election campaign, Graham stated that disaffiliation was not a priority for her – which is not the same as

saying that she is against it.

Since her election, Graham has boasted of how she has visited picket lines rather than attend Labour Party conferences. But it is not difficult to do both. The 2022 Labour conference in Liverpool coincided with a strike by Liverpool dockers: many MPs and party delegates went to the picket lines, and the dockers came to the conference.

Had Graham attended Labour conferences, where she would certainly have been able to speak on Unite's motions, she could have used it as a platform to campaign for the repeal of the anti-union laws, support for strikes, and MPs attending picket lines.

Unite's four-yearly Rules Revision Conference, combined this year with a Policy Conference, is due in July 2023.

An attempt in one form or another to disaffiliate Unite from the Labour Party or to give the Blairite Labour right what they need to expel Unite is virtually certain to be on the agenda. The person who bears prime responsibility for the drive to disaffiliate is Keir Starmer, by virtue of his dismal record as leader. But Graham has created the mood music for disaffiliation.

Despite the Executive elections apparently being dominated by two left-ish slates, there is now no serious organised left in Unite. Sections of the left have collapsed into political dishonesty, knowing Graham's limitations but covering them up in vague slogans like "back to the workplace".

The Executive Council elections and debates around motions to the union's Policy and Rules Revision conferences should be used to try to rebuild a left capable of combining the struggle for union democracy with fighting on both the industrial and political fronts. □

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By an NHS worker

The best that can be said for the NHS unions industrial strategy is that there is plenty of scope for escalation.

RCN members in 73 NHS Trusts struck on 18-19 January. The RCN has live strike ballots in 177 Trusts, but none of the workers who struck before Christmas were called out for this second round, and none of the Scottish Trusts have struck.

Ambulance workers in London, Yorkshire, the North West, North East and South West organised by Unison struck on 23 January alongside Unison members in two Liverpool hospital Trusts (which had had RCN but not Unison members on strike the week before). Unite and GMB ambulance workers in West Midlands, and Unite members in North West, North East, East Midlands and Wales ambulance services also struck on 23 Jan.

The GMB has legal strike mandates in all the ambulance trusts except East of England but decided only members in West Midlands should strike on Monday. Unite's members in Wales are on strike on 24 January.

Different

The GMB has announced four dates for national ambulance strikes on 6 February, 20 February, 6 March and 20 March. Unite (weaker in ambulances than GMB or Unison) has announced ten dates, but different Trusts on different days.

Throughout the NHS, there are now over 300,000 workers who have voted for strikes. A majority of these workers have been denied the right to strike by 2016 Tory laws about balloting thresholds. But even in Trusts where unions have legal strike mandates, union members are being

kept at work by their union leaders, and those leaders are not coordinating strikes even within their own unions, still less with other union leaders for maximum impact.

Scottish RCN members have voted twice for strikes (first in a formal ballot, then again to reject a rubbish deal) but do not even have a date in the diary for their first strike. The Scottish government has promised more talks on a 2023/4 pay deal backdated to January 2023.

If they are offered a record breaking 2023-4 deal that maintains NHS workers' living standards and the RCN can then leverage that deal to keep UK-wide pay scales intact, then that would be good. But it's unlikely. RCN negotiators would have more leverage with dates in the diary for escalating strikes. Rumours have circulated that Health Secretary Steve Barclay wants to settle but the Treasury refuses to grant additional money. The unions have rightly called for more funds.

The devaluing of NHS workers' pay is inseparable from the devaluing of the NHS as a whole. From 2010-2020 the Tories imposed £42 billion "efficiency savings". Those savings were achieved by making healthworkers work longer and harder for less money. There is now nothing left to give.

We need a united workers' movement committed to re-establishing the principle of state-of-the-art healthcare for all, meeting needs, free and well-funded from general taxation. Healthworkers need to insist our unions call coordinated UK-wide, escalating strikes with worker-controlled emergency cover alongside other workers in dispute. Unity is strength! □

• More: "Why I refused to cross the picket line", p.12

Putin can be defeated

By Dan Katz

Much of the British far left – groups such as the Communist Party, *Socialist Worker*, and Socialist Appeal – see the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a war between NATO and Russia, fought on Ukrainian soil. They argue that the US and NATO provoked Russia, in order to isolate Russia and destroy its military power. They oppose Ukraine's self-defence and struggle for self-determination which they equate with a Western war to subordinate Russia to the West.

So it is difficult to know what these groups make of the US and German denial of advanced tanks to Ukraine. Surely, if this was a war which the NATO powers wanted and plotted for, in order to do-down Russia, the West would provide all the weaponry Ukraine needed to do that job.

And yet the US and the Europeans have not acted in this way. They have donated just enough weaponry to stop Ukraine losing, but not enough to allow Ukraine to force Russia out.

The West has refused to donate attack aircraft, long range artillery, tanks and advanced missile systems capable of being used for offensive military operations.

Last week's negotiations between pro-Ukraine states at a US military base in Germany are an example of this continuing policy.

Ukraine is demanding modern battle tanks which it says, plausibly, it needs to overrun Russian positions. In particular Ukraine wants Germany to donate Leopard 2 tanks and to allow these German-made weapons to be donated to Ukraine by other European states which use them. European armies have about 2,000 Leopard 2s in total. Ukraine says it needs 300; some Western military experts say 100 would shift the balance against Russia, which is increasingly using more modern T-90 tanks against Ukraine.

On Friday 20 January the Ukrainian allies agreed to provide billions of dollars of military supplies, including armoured vehicles. But no Leopard tanks (although Britain is sending 14 Challenger 2 main battle tanks).

The German government says it will only allow Leopards to go to Ukraine if the Americans send their Abrams tanks. The US says the Abrams is unsuitable for use in Ukraine.

Why is the West prevaricating? The US and Germany are alarmed by the possible consequences of Putin being defeated in Ukraine and so are denying offensive military equipment. The German state is scared of the Russian reaction to the provision of offensive military weapons to Ukraine;



they are frightened of the war spreading and spiralling out of control.

That is not just a stupid German-US calculation. It is a real possibility.

The US is balancing between not wanting Putin to win in Ukraine, and not wanting to deal with the consequences of nuclear-armed Russia losing.

Yet Ukraine is being destroyed, bit-by-bit, as we watch. Russia is planning a new offensive in the Spring and seems to be massing troops, now, in Zaporizhzhia oblast. On 17 January Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu announced Russia's intention to increase the numbers in its armed forces to 1.5mn. Putin seems determined to continue the war in Ukraine. If Putin and the Russian state win in Ukraine, that will not be the end of Putin's aggressive nationalist-driven imperialism.

Workers' Liberty believes Ukraine should be given the weapons it needs to fight and defeat the Russian attempt to subjugate it. The West should not give in to Putin's blackmail. Ukrainian victory is the only way to a stable, democratic peace.

The US believes that Russia has suffered 188,000 casualties in Ukraine, including 47,000 killed. That is a staggering death-toll in one year of war. By comparison Russia suffered 15,000 killed in eight years of war in Afghanistan. We should not assume that Russia's terrible war in Ukraine will not lead to political consequences for Putin inside Russia, even in his increasingly intolerant, repressive Russian state.

International solidarity means:

Help Ukraine fight and defend its self-determination!

Solidarity with the Ukrainian left and labour movement!

Solidarity with the left and anti-war protesters in Russia! □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

NEU CALLS FOR MAXIMUM PICKETS

By an NEU member

Over 18,000 members joined the National Education Union (NEU) in the week after the union announced on 16 January that it had beaten the draconian anti-union law thresholds and declared an escalating schedule of industrial action.

That growth is only likely to increase and accelerate as the NEU's first strike on 1 February approaches. The more members that join, the more schools will be closed, and the more disruption in those that try to stay open. It will make the strike more effective. Good! These figures show the real appetite among school workers to fight back for pay rises and against cuts.

After Wednesday 1 February, the union's schedule is three weeks of rolling regional strikes between 14 February and 2 March and two days of national strikes on 15-16 March. 15 March is Budget Day; the union will call a national demonstration outside Parliament and a similar protest in Cardiff.

The 15 March demonstration is a good move. It must highlight the arguments around falling pay and funding, and bring activists together to reinvigorate them for the next action. It must be a stepping up and

NEU National Strike
LONDON DEMONSTRATION
national education union
Wed 1st Feb
Assemble 11am
BBC, Portland Place W1A 1AA
March at 11:45am to Westminster

- Bring banners, placards, whistles, school bands, etc
- Families and children welcome
- Let's make this big, colourful and noisy and send a clear message

EDUCATORS DEMAND BETTER

stepping off point, not a last hurrah.

The union has held a series of well-attended "strike schools" for reps to in preparation for the first strike. The London one attracted around 200 members. Preparing activists for the struggle ahead is necessary, and the numbers and mood of these events show the willingness of our members to struggle.

We need a clear and escalating calendar of action. More dates need to be announced soon. The escalation will need to increase if we are to win this dispute.

It is particularly powerful that the union is arguing for picket lines at every school possible and for Districts to set up local strike committees. These committees should be used to strengthen and deepen lay control over the dispute.

1 February will see the NEU strike alongside civil servants in

PCS, university workers in UCU, teachers in some regions of Scotland in the EIS union, and Aslef and RMT train drivers on some lines. It is right that the union seeks for maximum co-ordination with other striking unions. But we must not let the pace of our dispute be slowed by the more timid union leaders.

Support staff members in Wales beat the union law thresholds, but support staff in England fell short, with 84.13% majority vote yes on a turnout of 46.46%. The laws insist on at least a 50% turnout, and 40% of all members, whether voting or not, to vote yes.

Support staff in England should be re-balloted as soon as possible. In the meantime, support staff members who refuse to cross picket lines should be assured of the full support of the whole union. □