

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

TAX THE



Cartoon:
@gewman

RICH!

- » Speed up the strikes for wages
- » Restore NHS and public services
- » Defeat the Tories

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Tax the rich to refloat the NHS



Official statisticians have [reported](#) that the government has borrowed £30 billion less than projected in the 12 months to January 2023.

That's down to world-market gas prices abating, the recession being shallower (so far) than many (including us) feared, and receipts from taxes from the well-off holding up well.

To increase public service pay rises for 2022-3 to 10% would cost the government only [£8.5 billion](#), if we factor in recouping from taxes on the raised wages. Compare: £30 billion. £8.5 billion.

The government insists that such

rises would raise the base for pay for future years, and so their cost is really infinite. That is another way of saying that it wants not just a wage "blip" for a difficult patch in 2022-3, but a permanent downscaling of public service wages relative to other incomes. The Tories have been downscaling them since 2010.

There is no "iron law" here governing wages. The cost of the wage rises is well within the margin of error of official projections, short-term or long-term.

The government will pay out something like [£100 billion](#) over 2023 in interest ("coupon") payments on its bonds (IOUs). The actual figure could vary a lot, since the UK government issues bonds where the "coupon" is not fixed as usual but rises and falls with RPI (retail price index) inflation.

For the Tories, the ups and downs of paying the bondholders are a fixture. Compensating the banks for [defaults](#) on lockdown loans to business is a fixture. Pushing real wages down is a policy priority in the space remaining.

If the Tories decide to use their £30 billion leeway, it may be to cut taxes rather than concede on wages. We call for increased taxes on the rich, to pay wage rises and to refloat public services, in the first place the NHS.

The NHS, social care, housing, education, and a green conversion of energy industries under public ownership and democratic control, require public resources on a scale bigger than the margin of error in government projections. The Tories say that's impossible; that they've already taxed to the max. In his ["five missions"](#) announced on

23 February, Keir Starmer tacitly goes along with the Tories, avoiding promises to tax the rich (except at the blatant margins, as with ["non-doms"](#)) and relying instead on exhorted "growth" and "reforms".

In fact, large revenues could be raised with even a small move towards the socialist programme of confiscating all the large accumulations of wealth. A 1% annual wealth tax on net assets over £10m, with other wealth-type taxes could raise [£37 billion](#) a year.

It is, as Karl Marx put it, a question of the "great contest between the blind rule of the supply-and-demand laws which form the political economy of the bourgeoisie, and social production controlled by social foresight, which forms the political economy of the working class". □

The ups and downs of the labour movement



By Martin Thomas

After describing the rise of trade unions and workers' wages-and-conditions battles in the Communist Manifesto, Marx wrote: "Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers".

Not literally ever-expanding, without setbacks. Marx followed up: "This organisation of the proletarians... is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier".

He didn't mean that every setback will immediately be followed by resurgence, either. Later in the Manifesto he indicated that the outcome of the competing tendencies for workers' organisation to strengthen, and for it to fragment, would depend on struggle. The communists (meaning the "ideological" activists) would, he wrote, intervene in the organic labour movement, not set up "our own" movement beside it.

We would "bring to the front the common interests

of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality"; we would "represent the interests of the movement as a whole" above sections and phases; we would be "the most advanced and resolute section... that section which pushes forward all others". "Clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement", we would "in the movement of the present... represent and take care of the future of that movement".

The impulses of class struggles, combined with the theoretical contribution of "a portion of the bourgeois [by background] ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole", would create one drive in the labour movement, towards internationalism, universalism, militancy, and far-sightedness. Diverse pressures of "competition" (and ruling-class ideas) would create rival drives, towards

nationalism or communalism, timidity, and the sacrifice of wide solidarity to short-term or sectional advantage.

The declaration that the communists' drive would win was not a flat prediction, but a call to action. The logic of class struggle would continually provide communists with chances to strengthen and expand workers' organisation, and to educate ourselves and the broader movement. We will prevail if, but only if, we seize enough of those chances, with sufficient tenacity.

Officials

With hindsight, the factor Marx missed was the managerial hierarchies of trade unions and labour movements, which would flower after his death. The officials are induced, by income, lifestyle, and associations, into seeing their role as deal-makers, and often short-sighted and timid deal-makers at that. Today those officials are flanked by an army of NGO and think-tank people. They become always-available

"leaderships" for the sectional, wearied, short-termist trends endemic in the movement.

The answer is for us to find ways to amplify the expansive impulses from class struggles, by battles for trade-union democracy, for officials to be subject to accountability

and on workers' wages, for rank-and-file movements and strike committees, and by political and ideological education. It can be done. It takes week-after-week persistence, over long periods, and without guarantees in advance of when and where we will prevail. □

Women's Fightback and Solidarity 666

The new issue of *Women's Fightback* will be out for International Women's Day, 8 March, and so *Solidarity* will skip a week, with no. 666 appearing on 15 March (copy date 12-13 March). □

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](#).

Wednesdays 1 and 15 March 7.45pm: Workers' unions fighting back – strike waves in British history

Sunday 5 March 5pm: Ukrainian socialist speaker tour reception, Bread and Roses Pub, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London, SW4 6DZ

Tuesday 7 March, 7.30pm: International Women's Day Workers' Liberty London forum, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1N 1AB

Thursday 9 March 7pm: Ukrainian socialist speaker tour, Nottingham Mechanics Institute, 3 N Sherwood Street, Nottingham, NG1 4EZ

Friday 10 March 7pm: Ukrainian socialist speaker tour, Sheffield Quaker meeting house, 10 St James Street, Sheffield, S1 2EW

Saturday 11 March 1pm: Ukrainian socialist speaker tour, The Liverpool Pub, James Street, Liverpool, L2 7PQ

Sunday 19 March 11am: Workers and Trade Unions for Climate Solidarity: Tackling climate change in a neoliberal world

Friday-Sunday, 14-16 July: Ideas for Freedom 2023, London, a weekend of socialist debate and discussion. Watch this space!

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



It's urgent to speed up and widen strikes

By Ollie Moore

March 15 will see teachers, civil servants, Tube workers, and junior doctors, and possibly others, strike together. Some of those workers, including teachers and junior doctors, will also strike on 16 March, when they will be joined by workers on the national rail.

15 March is Budget day. It is an opportunity to press not only the demands of individual disputes, but a broader package of pro-working-class policies: rebuild the NHS, scrap anti-strike laws, increase benefits... Lively, well-supported picket lines and a strong presence in central London, with local strike rallies elsewhere, could give new impetus to the strike wave, encouraging other workers to begin new fights or rally in their existing ones.

As the first sustained revival of workers' struggle in a generation, it was

inevitable that this strike wave would involve faltering and missteps. In recent days and weeks, a number of unions, including UCU, NEU, and RCN, have cancelled or postponed strikes, either regionally or nationally, without any concrete concessions to put to their members.

The Fire Brigades Union, despite returning an overwhelming vote for strikes, has put a below-inflation pay offer to its members, with a recommendation to accept. That settlement could set a de facto "ceiling" for other public sector pay offers.

The CWU has renewed its mandate for strikes, with an increased majority, but is yet to call any further action. And although RMT has now called new strikes on national rail, they stick to the same sporadic pattern of action which has so far yielded no progress in the dispute.

In every union, workers who believe

a more intense pace of action is necessary to win must organise to challenge the caution of their leaderships. RCN members who oppose the union's cancellation of planned strikes on 1-3 March have organised an online statement; that activity must be channelled into the RCN's formal structures.

Missed opportunities for wider coordination also need to be challenged. RMT has held back from striking on national rail on 15 March so as not to disrupt a planned NEU demonstration in central London, apparently following a direct request from NEU officials. Lay reps on the NEU's National Executive Committee say no proposal to make such a request was ever brought before the NEC, suggesting NEU officials, possibly including unelected officials, have freelanced on the matter.

Dozens of NEU NEC members, along with NEC reps from the PCS, have now launched a public statement calling

for the widest possible coordination of strikes on 15 March.

In the NHS, the junior doctors' strike planned for 13-15 March is a significant new development. Unison has called a strike of its NHS members, mainly in ambulance trusts but also in some other trusts and departments, for 8 March, suggesting it does not intend to coordinate with other unions on 15-16 March (legally it would have to call any 15 March strike by 1 March).

A strong turnout on the national demonstration for funding and rebuilding the NHS on 11 March (now endorsed by NEU) can bolster health workers' fights, and help connect the demands of their strikes to a wider political programme.

Similar mobilisations around the other social issues posed by the strike wave, such as the organisation and funding of education and transport, are needed. □



Israel-Palestine: two nations, two states!

On 27 February, [Standing Together](#), a Jewish-Palestinian social movement in Israel, called a dozen anti-occupation and pro-peace demonstrations across Israel. They declared: "[On 26 Feb] the extremist settler government committed a pogrom in the West Bank Palestinian town of Huwara and Nablus suburbs. They set fire to dozens of houses and cars while sowing devastation and destruction everywhere they went. One Palestinian man was killed and over a hundred were injured. And all of this violence was encouraged by the fascist-right wing government: National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir sent members of his party to resettle the Avitar outpost. Treasury Minister Bezalel Smotrich liked a tweet by Samaria's assistant council leader – "Hu-

wara must be wiped away

– there is no more room for mercy." "Since the start of 2023, more than 70 Israelis and Palestinians have lost their lives because of the occupation. Just this past week [22 Feb], 11 Palestinians in Nablus were killed by Israeli Army gunfire and tear gas. [On 26 Feb] two Israelis were shot to death. But the government is only planning to further increase tensions while preparing the groundwork for another military operation. This is the future that the government is planning for us: pogroms and bloodshed with no end. The only way to prevent future loss of life, the only way to secure a life of security and respect for everyone – is by working for an Israeli-Palestinian peace, which will ensure liberty, justice, and independence for both peoples. There is no security without an end to

the Occupation. There is no democracy without an end to the Occupation. We'll fight against it together – Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis". □



The Labour Campaign for Free Movement has established two working groups for supporters to get more involved, "Organising in Our Unions" and "Fighting Detention".

Interested trade unionists are urged to sign up, even if only to discuss with others in their sector about submitting policy motions. More: bit.ly/lcfm-su □

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

Strikes

1-4 Mar: Outsourced cleaning workers at First Bus depots in Glasgow and Aberdeen (Unite) strike

Until 3 Mar: Selective strikes in civil service departments (PCS)

Various dates to 3 Mar: Petrofac offshore workers (Unite) strike

3-5 Mar: Balfour Beatty railway engineers (RMT) strike

6 Mar: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

6, 13, 20, and 27 Mar: Drax power station workers (Unite) strike

7-9 Mar: Targeted strikes in four areas by teachers in Scotland (EIS)

8 Mar: NHS workers in various Trusts/departments in England (Unison) strike

8-11 Mar: Outsourced cleaning workers at First Bus depot in Aberdeen (Unite) strike

13-15 Mar: Junior doctors in NHS (BMA and HCSA) strike

13-17 Mar: Workers at Amazon's BHX4 warehouse in Coventry (GMB) strike

13 Mar-21 Apr: 20 further days of rolling strikes by teachers in Scotland (EIS)

15 Mar: Strike by civil servants (PCS); teachers in England and Wales and support staff in Wales (NEU) (also on 16th); junior doctors (also 13th-14th); university academic staff (UCU); London Underground workers (Aslef and RMT)

16 Mar: Workers at mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

16-17 Mar: Network Rail workers (RMT) strike

16-17 and 20-22 Mar: Higher Education workers at 150 universities (UCU) strike

18 Mar: Workers at mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

20 Mar: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

30 Mar: Workers at mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

1 Apr: Workers at mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) strike

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

4, 10, and 17 Apr: Drax power station workers (Unite) strike

Until 4 May: Serco workers at Devonport naval dockyard (Unite) strike every weekend, and every weekday evening

Ballots

Until 2 Mar: Tube drivers on London Underground's Bakerloo, Central, District, Hammersmith and City, and Jubilee lines (RMT) ballot for strikes to defend manual detrainment

Until 6 Mar: Firefighters (FBU) vote on whether to accept employers' pay offer

Until 7 Mar: UK Power Networks workers in London, the South East, and East (Unite) ballot for action over pay

Until 20 March: RCN Scotland consults on latest offer

Until 31 Mar: University workers (UCU) re-ballot to renew mandate for industrial action over pay and conditions

20 Mar to 9 May: PCS reballots

Oborne, Corbyn, and antisemitism



By Jim Denham

In *Solidarity* 661 I described the journalist Peter Oborne's largely uncritical attitude to Islamic regimes and Islamist movements; in issue 663 I showed that his claim that the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair was a "hoax" is incorrect.

I will now go on to examine his attitude towards claims of antisemitism within Labour under Jeremy Corbyn and, in particular, his role in making and promoting the Al Jazeera series *The Labour Files*.

It is important to note that Al Jazeera is owned by the Qatari state and in 2019 produced a video claiming that the holocaust had been "exaggerated" by the "Zionist movement", and that Israel was the "biggest winner" from the genocide.

Oborne claims that *The Labour Files* vindicates Corbyn and "many of those around him" over allegations of antisemitism or of mishandling allegations of antisemitism. In fact, the series does no such thing, though supporters of the series, including Oborne (who appears in the films as an "expert commentator"), argue that the Forde report, published shortly before the Al Jazeera series, does do so, whilst simultaneously complaining that Forde was too "even handed" in his findings.

The Labour Files interviewed people who claim to have been falsely accused of wrongdoing while belonging to the Labour Party, but at no point gives any clear indication of what they were actually accused of. It is hinted that these are activists who supported Palestinian rights and that Labour officials concocted accusations of antisemitism as a consequence.

Left wingers have indeed been expelled from Labour on spurious grounds (including under Corbyn's leadership), but not for simply campaigning for the Palestinian cause.

Frankly, *The Labour Files* has less to do with exposing the Labour bureaucracy than with promoting a view of Israel and Zionism held by Al Jazeera, the Qatari state, and the series producer Richard Sanders.

Sanders has described himself as a "fervent anti-Zionist", who believes that Israel is a "fundamentally, inherently, racist, oppressive state". He is entitled to his opinion, but it hardly makes him an impartial observer. It also raises the question of what Oborne (who in 2009 wrote that Israel was founded "in terrible circumstances ... [and] has a profound right to exist") thinks of Sanders' views.

In his *Daily Mail* column of 31 March



The antisemitic mural referred to

2018, Oborne wrote that "the poison of antisemitism has spread into the heart of the Labour Party... the most egregious example of Corbyn's shameful anti-Semitism was his support for a truly disgusting mural... Corbyn's dreadful

lack of judgment over anti-Semitism – and his weaselly attempt at an apology this week – shows that he is unworthy to be an MP, let alone lead a great political party."

Given that none of the incidents that

led Oborne to write that in 2018 were dealt with by either *The Labour Files* or the Forde report, one has to ask: has Oborne had a massive, 180° change of mind the intervening years and, if so, on what basis?

Oborne is obsessed by a particular anti-Western, pro-Islamic (and Islamist) narrative and seems happy to collaborate with someone (Richard Sanders) whose views on Israel appear to be sharply at odds with his own. Oborne's stated abhorrence of antisemitism is surely genuine. The anger at Corbyn's "dreadful lack of judgement" on the subject, as described in that 2018 *Daily Mail* column, was also, no doubt, genuine. But somehow none of this stops him endorsing, and being an "expert commentator", for the *Labour Files* series described above.

Oborne's inconsistency cannot be down to dishonesty: the simplest "Occam's razor" explanation is that he's not one to let facts or consistency get in the way of his obsessions. □

The dark side of IKEA



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

As a company based in Sweden, which is home to some of the world's most powerful unions, you would think that IKEA would be an employer that understood the importance of workers' rights.

And if you read what the company says about itself, it sounds wonderful.

On their website, IKEA says that it takes into consideration "at a minimum" the following: "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work."

That's quite a mouthful. And it means nothing.

IKEA has a long and unpleasant history when it comes to respecting workers rights and indeed the

use of forced labour.

A decade ago, following some very negative publicity, IKEA commissioned an accounting company to look into its practices in East Germany during the Cold War. To no one's surprise (certainly not a surprise to the people running IKEA) it turned out that both political and criminal prisoners in the Stalinist state were used to manufacture the company's iconic flat pack furniture. The accountants determined that IKEA was almost certainly aware that political prisoners were used to make their products. From the company's point of view, hiring what were effectively slaves ensured a higher rate of profit, certainly lowering labour costs compared to what they might have had to pay in Sweden. IKEA apologised, insisting that this would never happen again.

But just three months ago, IKEA was in the news yet again. The last remaining fully Stalinist state in Europe, Belarus, was the focus of attention this time. "Over the past several days, news

reports in various markets have focused on the presence of IKEA in Belarus prior to 2022," stated the company, "including allegations of the use of forced prison labour connected to sub-suppliers. We, at IKEA, take these reports seriously, and are concerned. We are investigating the claims."

Labour law

There is little doubt that IKEA will once again publicly apologise.

But even before the Belarus prison labour scandal had time to subside, IKEA once again stood accused of violating the most basic workers' rights – this time in Poland. At the end of November, Dariusz Kawka, a leader of NSZZ "Solidarność" in IKEA's Polish operation and a member of IKEA European Works Council, was dismissed from his job on disciplinary grounds without a notice period.

This was despite his union activity which protects him from dismissal without prior approval of the company's trade union organisation. After an inspection by the

State Labour Inspectorate, it was reported that the employer had grossly violated labour law. Despite exchanging letters with the employer, including the corporation's board of directors, and many other actions to protect Dariusz Kawka from dismissal, IKEA remains unmoved.

That ILO Declaration which IKEA is committed to? It calls on employers to recognise "freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining". As I understand it, sacking the leader of the workers' trade union is hardly compatible with that. It is also a gross violation of the labour law.

Dariusz's union, NSZZ "Solidarność", has launched a global campaign on LabourStart demanding that IKEA respect the basic right of its workers to join and form trade unions. Please take a moment to show your support for that campaign here: bit.ly/ikea-ls □

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

The way for safety in and out of jail



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Rules barring some trans women from women's prisons in England and Wales are to come into force this week.

Justice Secretary Dominic Raab had already announced in October that trans women with penises or who had committed sexual offences would not be allowed in women's prisons. This has now been extended to cover trans women who had been convicted of a violent offence.

"We want to have a liberal,

sensitive, tolerant approach to the LGBT community as a whole and in particular the trans community who suffer a lot in this country and have high levels of challenges," Raab told Sky News' Sophy Ridge on 26 Feb. "Where you've got trans women offenders, the question is whether they go to the female prison estate – I think we need to be really clear about protecting the other female offenders."

"From next week we will introduce new rules, which means that any trans offender with their male genitalia intact or who have been convicted of a sexual offence, and adding to that, if they have been convicted of a violent offence,

they will not be allowed into the female prison estate."

Prisons in the UK *already* have to risk-assess all prisoners when deciding where to house them. The Equality Act 2010 allows for prisons to house trans women in men's prison regardless of whether they have a Gender Recognition Certificate.

Violence in prison

Violence in prisons is a serious issue. The anti-trans moral panic is making rational public discussion of prison policy more difficult. Crime and justice policy is an area where research and professional best practice are rejected in favour of reaction and posturing as tough by politicians. Reoffend-

ing is high, and there has been a growth in short sentencing which has been proven to be less effective than community support. Other services which are proven to reduce offending rates are cut whilst prisons are expanded.

Prisons are not safe. Prisoners are assaulted and raped, commit suicide, and are murdered in prison. Although women are far less likely to be convicted of a violent offence, women's prisons are as violent as men's, and sometimes more so. That is an effect of the prison system itself. Prisoners also facing violence from staff. The Prison Inspectorate found that the treatment of female inmates at HMP and YOI Foston Hall in Derbyshire was "uncar-

ing and often punitive", citing increased use of force by staff fuelling higher levels of violence on the wings.

The majority of women prisoners have been convicted of a non-violent offence. Prisoners convicted of non-violent offences should be released. Many people in prison need support, not incarceration. Well-funded services should be provided to support people with mental health issues, drug and alcohol addiction, debt, domestic violence and homelessness.

We need a humane justice system which focuses on reducing crime, rehabilitating offenders and keeping everyone safe (inside and outside of prison). □

"Stop the War" march flops

By Dan Katz

Two thousand marchers led by Stop the War (StW) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) demonstrated, often disingenuously, for "peace" in Ukraine, in London, on Saturday 25 February 2023.

These campaigns are now ghosts of their former selves. In the early 1980s CND regularly put 100,000 on the streets to oppose Cruise and Trident missiles. In the run up to the Iraq war, in 2003, StW led perhaps a million protesters.

Many have begun to understand the problem with the way these campaigns have evolved, and stay away.

The march mostly consisted of elderly and baffled peaceniks and cynical (and even older) Stalinists. Nevertheless, Workers' Liberty activists got a reasonable hearing from some who had come to the protest. We distributed hundreds of copies of our leaflet, "Victory to Ukraine".

The initial publicity for this march demanded that the West stops sending arms to help Ukraine. But the organisers realised that would not be popular, and the explicit demand was dropped. This march was for "peace" and "negotiations."

Tom Unterrainer, Chair of CND, is well known for his ability to misunderstand quite straightforward problems, and is now unfortunately expressing his views on Ukraine. Tom, who got the Chair's job because there are so few people in CND it had eventually become his turn, explained: "The only question on the table now is how much destruction will be done to Ukraine [before negotiations start], how many Ukrainians will



die...?" And the answer is: an enormous number of Ukrainians will die if Tom gets his way and prevents Ukraine receiving Western weapons.

Because, of course, if Western arms supplies stop Ukraine will be overrun by Russia, which certainly doesn't intend to end its war any time soon.

And if Russia wins not only will 44 million Ukrainians lose the right to self-determination, but Ukrainian trade unions and socialist groups will be destroyed, democratic institutions will be abolished, and a regime of Russian police-state terror will be imposed on Ukraine.

As the march assembled Peter Tatchell, plus a few dozen Ukraine Solidarity Campaign and Ukrainian activists, staged a counter-protest demanding Victory to Ukraine and an end to Russian occupation. Tatchell said that the StW position "would leave Ukraine defenceless... we must oppose the Putin regime and Russia's war of aggression." Workers' Liberty activists then attended a 1,000-strong Russian anti-war protest

outside the Embassy in west London.

On 24 February 3,000 Ukrainians flying blue and yellow flags, and their British supporters, had marched to the Russian Embassy chanting "Russia is a terrorist state".

On Thursday 23 February activists from Led By Donkeys had painted a large stretch of road outside the Russian Embassy blue and yellow, and the paint was still visible on Saturday. □

More on Ukraine

Holodomor: the Ukrainian famine of 1932-3

bit.ly/ukr-ho

Why we didn't march with StW

bit.ly/ukr-stw

The history behind the war

bit.ly/ukr-h

Delegation to Ukraine reports back

bit.ly/ukr-de

The truth about Maidan

bit.ly/t-maid

And yet more

bit.ly/ukr-i

Protocol patch-up

On 27 February, Rishi Sunak announced that the EU had agreed a wide range of easings to "overlay" the Northern Ireland Protocol attached to the 2019-20 UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement. The Protocol allows Northern Ireland both to be in the EU Single Market (and thus have no "hard" border with the South) and to be in the UK. Since the Tories plan to depart widely from EU regulations – Sunak still seems intent on that – the Protocol requires some border checks between Britain and Northern Ireland. The new agreement minimises those.

The ultra-Brexiter Tories have backed Sunak's deal. The DUP, the main anti-Protocol party in Northern Ireland, is likely to withhold judgement, mindful of the May local government elections. It can scarcely hope for better. Some in the DUP will be reluctant to return to power-sharing in Belfast anyway because that means providing a deputy to a Sinn Fein First Minister. The DUP will also be alarmed at the EU's statement that the European Court of Justice (ECJ) remains "the sole and ultimate arbiter of EU law", although that has been softened with a "Stormont brake" (to be used in emergencies) on new EU laws. That the "Stormont brake" requires Stormont to be functioning will put pressure on the DUP to accept, after some initial complaining.

The clear-cut answer is for the UK to re-enter the Single Market and Customs Union, and move to re-join the EU; and for a united Ireland within the frame of the EU. □

• More: bit.ly/ni-p

Hands off Clara Zetkin



Letters

I was nauseated by Eric Lee's unwarranted attack on Clara Zetkin in *Solidarity* 664. Zetkin was an outstanding revolutionary socialist, feminist and fighter for working class politics over 50 years, whose mistakes towards the end of her life did not make her a loyal Stalinist.

Zetkin's incredible life (1857-1933) and record deserve to be better known. She joined the German Social Democratic Party in 1878 and became one of its most prominent leaders. They built a mass working class party of one million members, a model followed by the best socialists of that epoch, including the Bolsheviks.

Zetkin played a prominent role in founding and building the Second International from 1889 to 1914. She was the principal leader of the working class women's movement within Ger-

many and internationally, publishing *Die Gleichheit* newspaper, training a whole generation of socialist feminists and initiating the international women's day protests.

Zetkin was a central leader of the authentic, rational left within the SPD and the International. She opposed the First World War and organised the first important anti-war conference in March 1915. Zetkin was a pivotal leader of both the USPD and the German Communist Party (KPD) during its early, healthy years.

Zetkin was a giant figure in the early Communist International. She pioneered strategy and tactics such as transitional demands, the united front and the demand for a workers' government. In 1923, Zetkin wrote the first detailed analysis of fascism in Italy and how to fight it – lessons sadly not learned to defeat the Nazis.

Eric Lee's calls Zetkin "a servant of a blood-soaked dictatorship". This is an outrageous slur, ignoring a wide range of sources now available on her later life and attitude to Stalinism. Readers

might want to start with *Clara Zetkin: Letters and Writings*, published by Revolutionary History in 2015.

On 9 January 1924, in a letter to Yelena Stasova, she condemned the "gross misconduct" towards Trotsky. In another letter 29 March 1924, she told Stasova of her meeting with left oppositionist Christian Rakovsky and revealed that Nadia Krupskaya rejected the bureaucracy's attacks on Trotsky. In April 1924 she was voted off the KPD Zentrale, after the Stalin-instigated purge.

Letters

On 11 November 1927, Zetkin wrote to Comintern secretary Nikolai Bukharin criticising the Stalin-imposed leadership of the KPD. She described KPD chair Ernst Thälmann as "clueless and theoretically uneducated", with "self-delusion which borders on megalomania". In a letter to the Russian Communist Party central committee, dated 8 December 1928, she denounced bureaucratisation and called for freedom of discussion.

On 19 December 1928, Zetkin openly clashed with Stalin and his coterie at a

Comintern plenum. On 25 March 1929, she wrote in a letter that the Comintern had become a "dead mechanism" under Stalin's control.

On 13 August 1931, Zetkin wrote to her friend, the right oppositionist Fanny Jezierska criticising the KPD's cooperation with the Nazis. In a letter to KPD leader Wilhelm Pieck on 14 March 1932, she called for a working class united front to defeat the fascists. In her Reichstag speech on 30 August 1932, aged 75 and in poor health, Zetkin again called for a united front to stop the Nazis.

Zetkin did not break publicly with the KPD and never became a Trotskyist. However her actions and words (mostly in private) show that she was far from a loyal tankie hack.

Eric Lee views history through the distorted prism of Georgian Menshevism. This is the perspective of pro-imperialist, bourgeois irredentism. It is no way to judge an extraordinary revolutionary socialist like Clara Zetkin. □

Paul Hampton,
London

Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin

Eric Lee (*Solidarity* 664) says that Rosa Luxemburg "was murdered too early to know how she would have reacted to the increasingly dictatorial Soviet regime in Russia".

In fact we know. Despite the Civil War sharpening and the "Red Terror" in full flow, she laboured to make a similar workers' revolution in Germany, knowing that the extension of workers' power to industrialised countries like Germany was the only way for the Russian workers to escape their dilemma.

"The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle... The future everywhere belongs to 'Bolshevism'."

She drafted criticisms of the Bolsheviks while in jail, though some of them that the Bolsheviks were too democratic, on the national and land questions. After her murder on 15 January 1919, her surviving

close comrades continued her efforts for a Bolshevik-type revolution in Russia.

Back in 1914 Luxemburg had complained that of the three comrades she considered pivotal for their anti-war activity in Germany, Franz Mehring was too old, Karl Liebknecht was always off on some mad-cap scheme, and Clara Zetkin was always ill. Zetkin remained in poor health through to her death in 1933.

Zetkin was an important figure in the Brandler-Thalheimer "right wing" of the early German Communist Party, which was a valuable element in the generally ultra-left-ish early Communist International.

Sixth Congress

The Zinovievites Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow excluded Zetkin from the Central Committee when they become CP leaders in 1924. Later Zetkin dissented quietly from the Stalinist "Third Period" policy of 1928-34.

But by then, old and ill, she wasn't up for fighting the issue. Leon Trotsky commented on Zetkin's role at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (1928), when she let herself be front-person for excluding discussion of the

critique of Stalin-Bukharin politics which Trotsky (then exiled) had written, and which by accident had got into the Congress documentation.

"A respectable old lady – she was formerly Clara Zetkin – said that no ideas emanating from Trotsky could be considered correct. She was merely carrying out a task given her behind the scenes. Assigning dishonourable tasks to people of unchallengeable reputation is the Stalin system".

He described her sympathies for the Left Opposition of 1923 as "brief and vague", and "only because I was against making the Brandler group the scapegoat" for the German CP's botching of revolutionary crisis in 1923.

We can understand why the Bolsheviks went for the trial of the Social Revolutionary (SR) leaders in 1922. The SRs were "terrorists" by proud tradition; had attempted a coup against the soviet regime in July 1918 (Left SRs, using the control they then had of key Cheka units) and assassinations (Aug 1918); many of them backed the Whites in the Civil War.

In 1922 the Bolsheviks were scrabbling to hold on against a wave of exhaustion and discontent, reckoning that to let

themselves be overwhelmed would destroy revolutionary prospects in Europe.

101 years on, we know how successive "holding-on" expedients hollowed out the Bolshevik party, and paved the way for the bureaucracy to destroy it. Zetkin's role in the trial may still seem understandable, but also part of the personal

and political exhaustion which took her via "respectable old lady" to never speaking out against the counter-revolution within the USSR, which she saw first hand: after 1922 she lived much of the time in Moscow (in and out of hospital). □

Martin Thomas,
London

Regulation of drugs

My view is that Marxists should call for the legal regulation of all drugs by the state in order to take the supply of drugs away from petty dealers and organised crime. I use the term: "legal regulation" rather than "legalise" as the latter term by right-wing Tories and the *Daily Mail* can be used to distort a sensible policy regarding drugs.

Legal regulation would allow quality control and labelling and a public health education campaign.

Cannabis should be made available from licensed independent shops; cocaine and ecstasy to be made available from pharmacies; and heroin to be made available to registered heroin addicts through

doctor-led clinics as in Switzerland.

The left are very conservative when it comes to drugs policy. *The Socialist* opposes Tommy Sheridan's slogan of: Fight Heroin; Legalise Cannabis, as they claim it would divert working class people from the class struggle.

Socialist Worker are no better. It claims that drug taking is a product of declining capitalism, forgetting that humans have taken mind-altering drugs for thousands of years. It also mistakenly claims that drug-taking would disappear under socialism.

Does Workers' Liberty support the legal regulation of all drugs? □

John Smithee,
Wisbech

Keir Starmer and the “growth” mantra



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

On 23 Feb Keir Starmer set out his dream of leading a migrant-bashing, law-and-order government whose first aim is to have “the fastest growing economy in the G7”.

In place of detail there is wonkish drivel. “Cross cutting-mission boards” “working across silos” with “flexible budget horizons” will “end sticking plaster politics”. But mission number 1, as with Truss, Sunak and every other bourgeois politician, is to deliver growth.

Yet undifferentiated GDP growth can only deepen the ecological crisis.

GDP growth involves increased production, which in turn means increased material throughput, using ever-growing quantities of energy and ever-growing volumes of waste.

The accumulation of waste – CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide, fertiliser run off, persistent organic pollutants, plastic pollution etc. – is driving ecological destruction on multiple fronts and has already tipped complex Earth systems beyond the “safe operating zone” for human civilisation. Starmer’s pledge to “build a better Britain” is simply a prom-

ise of foot-to-the-floor acceleration.

Starmer also wants Britain to become a “clean energy superpower”. But behind that slogan lies a less ambitious goal: zero-carbon electricity production by 2030. Electricity provides just 20% of total UK energy consumption. 60% of it comes from fossil fuels and biomass. Replacing fossil-fuel power stations with non-carbon energy sources is important but we will not “accelerate to net zero” while 80% of economic life remains powered by hydrocarbons.

More undifferentiated growth will require more energy. On a world scale, energy demand to power GDP growth has outstripped the rapid growth in renewables. Emissions keep rising.

Ecomodernist

There is an ecomodernist fantasy that economic growth can be decoupled from material throughput. UK government statistics appear to back this up. Since 1990 there has been a 40% fall in territorial emissions while the UK economy has grown by 70%. However, much of this fall in emissions was due to outsourcing heavy industry to China and elsewhere. Factor in these outsourced emissions, and the actual reduction is more modest despite huge advances in energy efficiency and rapid growth of renewables.

On a global scale CO₂ emissions and material throughput stubbornly [track](#) growth.

As Marx showed, capitalism rewards the capitalist who can produce and sell commodities faster and with less labour time than their competitors (*Grundrisse* p.658). For this reason “Capital... has an immanent drive, and a constant tendency, towards increasing the productivity of labour”, speeding up both production and transportation (*Capital* vol 1, p.436). The primary way of increasing productivity is by replacing biologically limited human labour with machine labour (*Capital* vol 1, p.495). In this way “more raw material is worked up in the same time, and therefore a greater mass of raw material and auxiliary materials enters into the production process.” (*Capital* vol 1, p.773).

Production and consumption create waste. A value system determined by socially necessary labour time has no way of accounting for this waste, except in so far as it can turn it into a profit (*Capital* vol 1, p.313). Waste is dumped back into the environment, despoiling the air, waterways, seas and soil and disrupting complex biogeochemical cycles.

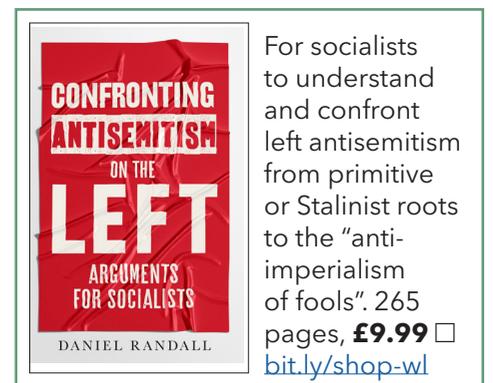
GDP growth involves extracting the “free gifts of nature” from the resource tap in ever greater volumes and dumping ever greater accumulations of waste dumped into the environmental sink.

Thus capital exhausts all the “free gifts of nature”, including our health and vitality as workers.

The alternative to Starmer’s plan for escalating ecocide and vampire-like exploitation is more free time, redistribution of income, and economic activity that is organised democratically according to sound ecological science. Instead of the productive powers of society accruing solely to private capitalists, these powers could allow us a much shorter working week with no loss in living standards.

Even Keir Starmer presumably recognises that unlimited growth of certain industrial sectors – e.g. fossil fuels, livestock farming, fishing, mining, aviation – will bring ecological catastrophe.

Wonk-led Labour, willfully ignorant of ecological reality, offers no vision for a better future for Britain or anywhere else. The fight for a Labour leadership that respects its own internal democracy and represents its working-class membership continues. □



Behind the Omagh shooting

By Micheál MacEoin

A typed statement appeared on 26 Feb on a wall in Derry, claiming the 22 Feb attempted murder of police officer John Caldwell in Omagh on behalf of the “New IRA”.

Caldwell, who has led high-profile investigations into republican groups, was shot several times in front of his son and other children while teaching an under-15s football class at a leisure centre. Six arrests have now been made in County Tyrone.

The “New IRA” was formed

in 2012 from a merger of the Real IRA (a 1997 split from the Provisionals), Republican Action Against Drugs, and smaller groups in east Tyrone and Belfast.

It is perhaps the largest “dissident republican” group. It claims, in fact with some justice, to represent traditional physical-force republicanism, from which Sinn Féin has more recently “dissented”. It is closely associated with Saoradh, a small republican party formed in 2016.

It is mostly based in the Creggan estate in Derry, a deprived

working-class area. Many such working-class communities have little to show from the “peace process” in the way of hope or future prospects.

With a number of sporadic shooting and bombing attacks on police and prison officers in the last ten years, the New IRA’s aim is to stop the post-1998 political and security set-up in Northern Ireland becoming “normalised”.

In April 2019, the journalist Lyra McKee was fatally shot by the New IRA (apparently by mistake) during riots instigated by it. That provoked

wide revulsion.

Then, in 2020, ten senior members of the group were arrested in a sting operation involving a suspected MI5 agent Dennis McFadden, who had risen to a position on the Saoradh national executive.

Probably this latest attack was designed to show the group has not been quashed.

Irish newspaper *The Journal* reports estimates of “upwards of 200 hardcore people involved [around New IRA], with other disparate elements orbiting around it” and suggests that it “has grown in

numbers and armaments despite infiltration of its ranks by suspected MI5 agent Dennis McFadden”.

On 25 February, Omagh Trade Union Council held a “No Going Back” rally. Secretary Anton McCabe, a member of Militant Left (Irish section of the Committee for a Workers’ International.), said: “We are standing not just in horror at what was done to John Caldwell, but standing here saying, ‘Let us build a better society, of justice, peace and equality.’” □

The ambiguities of Hayek



Interview

By Andrew Gamble

Andrew Gamble, author of *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty*, talked with Martin Thomas from *Solidarity* about the recent new biography *Hayek: A Life, 1899-1950*, by Bruce Caldwell and Hansjoerg Klausinger. Friedrich Hayek was an economist who in 1944, and for the rest of his life, especially in the Thatcher years 1979-90, became the leading writer of the free-market right.

This new biography gives more detail and context to the change that Hayek made during the 1940s, switching his main interests from economics to politics, ideology and philosophy. After he moved to Chicago in 1950, his career in economics was effectively over.

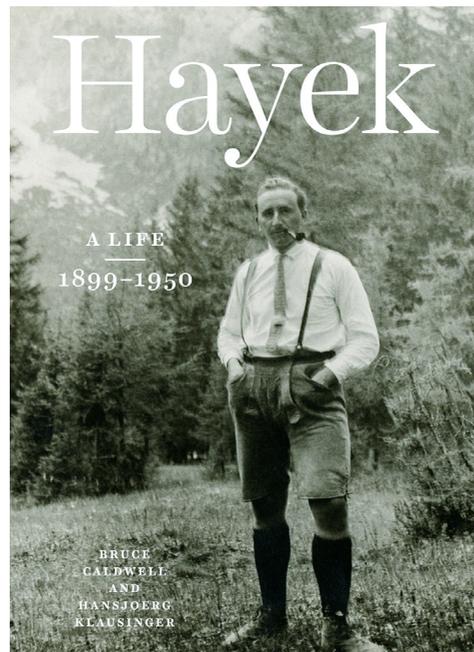
The biography shows some of the contingency involved. If Hayek hadn't been Austrian, then he would have got what he wanted during the war: to work for the government and help on propaganda and advising about Nazi thinking. He was rejected because he was Austrian, but escaped internment. The London School of Economics [where he worked] moved to Cambridge, but as most of the students had been called up, he didn't have very much to do during the war years.

He decided to help the war effort by showing (as he saw it) how socialist economic policies led to Nazism. *The Road to Serfdom* was a departure for him. It was deliberately intended to be a popular book. His previous economics books were only intelligible to specialists. *Reader's Digest* did an abridged version which sold huge numbers of copies in the United States. Altogether since publication *The Road to Serfdom* has sold about 2.5 million copies.

It changed Hayek's life and made him famous.

Bruce Caldwell has written quite a lot before on Hayek. He shares the same economic liberal free market position. In the biography he and Klausinger lay out the criticisms which the book received from a range of people when it was first published, George Orwell, Alvin Hansen and others. But they tend to dismiss most of these criticisms, arguing that the book has been seriously misunderstood.

The biggest misunderstanding, they say, is the charge that Hayek believed in a "slippery slope", the idea that once a country introduced a little bit of planning, one thing would lead to another until it became fully totalitarian. Hayek identifies totalitarianism entirely with



socialism, the attempt to substitute a planned economy for a free market economy. For him Nazism arises out of socialist ideas. It's not anything to do with a response to capitalist crisis, or an intervention on behalf of capitalism. It is a form of socialism.

In 1944 he did not seem to believe that setting up a welfare state risked the slippery slope to serfdom and totalitarianism. His focus was on central economic planning. But in later writings, for example in his new 1976 introduction to *The Road to Serfdom*, he says that Sweden is heading for totalitarianism on account of its welfare state. He clearly seems to subscribe to the "slippery slope" argument that any form of state intervention is risky, and in fact the idea of a slippery slope is there in the very title of the book: *The Road to Serfdom*.

Audience

But his biographers claim that the book was really addressed to socialists, social democrats and interventionist liberals, to persuade them that going down the road of economic planning would risk totalitarianism, not that it would make it inevitable. He was horrified, his biographers say, when the book received a very cool reception from social democrats and socialists, but also from liberals. Two of the leading organs of liberal opinion, *The Banker* and *The Economist*, were very snippy about *The Road to Serfdom* when it first appeared.

In the United States, it became an instant bestseller because it was seized on by parts of the American right who saw it as a godsend for attacks upon, firstly, Roosevelt and the New Deal, and secondly, socialism and any form of state intervention.

In Britain it was taken up opportunistically by Winston Churchill, who made his famous crack that if Labour was elected in the 1945 election, it

would set up a Gestapo – an accusation against people he'd been working with for the previous four years in the War Cabinet.

Both in the British and in the American context Hayek was lauded by the right and vilified by the left, and that fixed him forever in the ideological landscape. He never did communicate very much with people on the left.

Part of the confusion is that in 1944 Hayek was ambivalent about planning. He only hardened his position later. In 1944 he conceded there was a case for collective social insurance and other, even if fairly minimal, forms of intervention, but forms of intervention nonetheless. What he was never clear about was just how much intervention is possible in a capitalist economy before you start going down the road to serfdom.

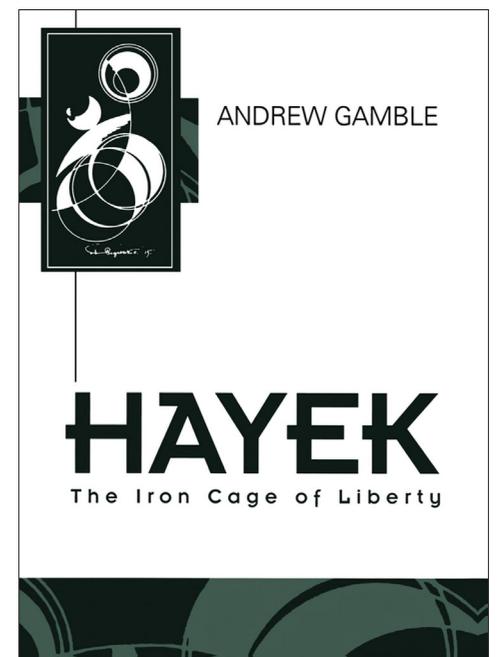
The extreme libertarians in the United States like Ayn Rand denounced the book as pure poison and said it was a social democratic theory of government. The anarcho-capitalists in the States have always rejected Hayek on the grounds that he abandoned the idea of the minimal state.

Tug of war

I think there was a sort of a tug of war going on in his head, between a fundamentalist market liberalism and political realism. The first was represented by Ludwig von Mises, the person his biographers quote Hayek as saying had the most influence upon him. Mises's position was much firmer than Hayek's ever was. As the authors recount, Mises stormed out of one of the meetings of economic liberals at the first Mont Pèlerin conference [put together by Hayek in 1947] saying that all the other people at the conference were "socialists".

Hayek said he didn't want to go back to the laissez faire of the 19th century. But Mises asked him pointedly: why are you criticising laissez faire? For him it was the essence of free market liberalism. Hayek does at times accept the argument that capitalism needs some state interventions in order to make it secure both economically and politically for the future. And that is where he becomes much more interesting than someone like Mises, in that he is trying to identify the ways the state needs to intervene to make sure capitalism can survive.

In his later work, for example, a crucial issue became trade unions and the threat they posed to a capitalist market order. He becomes much more concerned about confronting trade union power than with confronting the power of companies or employers (as in classical free market approaches). He finds excuses for capital exercising "private



power", but no excuse at all for labour doing the same. He wants to see the power of organised labour weakened as much as possible.

Judging Hayek's work as a whole, it is hard to see much wrong with the "slippery slope" interpretation of *The Road to Serfdom*. The new biography tries to sanitise Hayek a little in that respect but it is unconvincing. If he wasn't intending a "slippery slope" argument, why write the book in that form? It is written as a warning, connecting all forms of planning with totalitarianism and the horrors of the police state in Nazi Germany.

Interestingly, there are almost no references in *The Road to Serfdom* to the Soviet Union, where economic planning was much more advanced than it ever became in Nazi Germany. It seems the publishers wouldn't accept criticism of the Soviet Union while it was a wartime ally: an irony of history, though of course they made up for it later.

The biographers are good on Hayek's personal background and the intellectual currents in Vienna in the early twenties. They tell us about people like Othmar Spann, who are almost completely forgotten now, but who were very influential for a short time. Hayek was considered by Spann as his star pupil. Spann later became an advocate of the corporate state and supported Austrian fascism, but fell foul of the government after the Anschluss.

The book gives much more than just the familiar story of how Hayek came back from the war, enrolled in the University of Vienna, and met von Mises, who turned him into an Austrian economic liberal setting his path for the rest of his life. That story remains an important fact of his biography. But it's also important to understand the broader intellectual background which shaped Hayek. □

“My life changed 180 degrees”

Loretta Marie Perera talks with anti-war Russians, one year later

February 24, 2022 needs no introduction. We're now into the second year of Russia's war against Ukraine, with no sign of it stopping.

While 700,000 is the general estimate for Russians who have left the country since the start of the war, with a large spike following mobilisation in September 2022, other [sources](#) cite as many as four million leaving the country in the first few months of 2022 alone – countries such as Georgia and Armenia saw as many as 4.5 times the number of arriving Russian citizens as the year before.

A year ago, several anti-war Russians [shared](#) what they wished the world would know – of their feelings of fear and shame, the wish to leave, their revulsion to a president they have always rejected. A year later, they tell us about how life has changed since the war began.

Life in the city

“I feel trapped here,” said Yulia, in Moscow. “I know I can't say or do things, it's dangerous – not only for me but for people who are close to me. It's like my hands are tied without a rope. I'm like a boiling kettle who should pretend it has no water inside.”

For anti-war Russians who have remained, feelings of exclusion and betrayal and estrangement from their home country are prevalent. “I hate being outside and seeing people just casually walking around, knowing some of them feel good about war,” said Yulia. “Sometimes I start crying while walking or riding a train because I love this city so much, I love this country, and I feel like all these streets are not mine anymore.”

Evgeny, also in Moscow, spoke of the differing situations in bigger cities compared to smaller towns. “It's definitely easier to blend in in Moscow – if you don't stick out and hold your opinions to yourself,” he said. “I recently visited my home region of Buryatia. People still watch state-run media outlets and TV there, and are a lot more susceptible to propaganda.”

“Thankfully,” he continued, “I don't have any supporters of the regime in my immediate circle.”

While support for the war has been difficult to measure – [polls](#) from last year show a decreasing support for war and a larger showing for peace even as headlines declare an unwavering show of support for Putin – any statistics need to be approached with important [nuances](#) often overlooked, and an understanding that Russian society is diverse rather than homogenous. It is precisely this difference that simmers between family and friends: those who

proudly support the war, and those who are dead-set against it.

“I lost some friends due to differences in opinions, and I have almost completely distanced myself from my mother, who is a huge supporter of Putin,” said Yulia. “Although, I did become closer to my brother with whom I share the dread of what-shall-not-be-named.”

To stay or go

Kirill, originally from St. Petersburg, fled the country immediately. “Because of the war, my life changed 180 degrees,” he said. “Right after the war started, I left St. Petersburg for good, because I was already worried about my life and my future; this country did everything to make me leave everything and run away to another country.”

“I feel like my life has changed 180 degrees, and I haven't even moved yet,” said Yulia. “The new anti-LGBT laws added new layers of horror to living in Russia,” said Yulia.

In December 2022, Putin signed into law a new bill on LGBT “propaganda” in Russia. This bill expands a previous law from 2013 which banned disseminating LGBT-related information, or any positive or neutral depictions or discussion of non-heterosexual relations with minors. The law now applies to adults as well.

“Me and my girlfriend are still in Moscow but we are planning to emigrate this year,” Yulia explained. “With this new law, it feels like we are outlaws now. It's like the country we love hates us. That's why we want to leave – we feel like Russia doesn't want us, doesn't need us.”

“[The new propaganda law] hurts me,” said Kirill. “They're trying to exclude the existence of a million people. It's horrible. I am ashamed of the country where I grew up.”

“Last year was one of the worst years for many people, myself included. I definitely plan to move, I'm considering my options,” said Evgeny.

Life today

For Yulia, the past year has been trying. “My mental health was not very good this past year, though I guess that's pretty normal in the current situation,” she said. “I don't read the news anymore at all. I'm trying to survive, to smile, to find happiness in small things I can control,” said Yulia. “But it's like I always have this pain in the background. It's like a huge hole in my chest which stings even when you are feeling good and happy.”

For Kirill, life has changed completely – it will soon be a year since he left Russia and started living in another country. “It has been a very difficult year,” he said. “On the one hand there is a war in Ukraine where my friends live. Any



news from there is just torture. There are a lot of tears.”

On the other hand, adaptation to a new country has been taxing, too. “I am learning the language, trying to understand the culture of the country where I live now,” Kirill said, “It is also very hard, because sometimes I feel deaf and blind. English doesn't always help.”

What the world should know

Last year, these respondents were asked what they'd like others to know. Then, the key response was a rejection of Putin and a love for Ukraine. Today, an urgency to stop the war.

“[I want the world to remember that] there is still a war going on. People are dying. The whole world must stop the Russian Federation's government,” said Kirill. “Many Ukrainians and Russians are dying in this war. Many people are being left without a home. Lives are being broken. It's just horror.”

Evgeny wants the world to continue its support of Ukraine. “It's a battle between good and evil, there's no other way to put it,” he said. “Donate to the armed forces of Ukraine if you can, spread awareness. Do whatever you can. And most importantly, don't fall under Russian propaganda and its lobbyists.”

Even as some aspects of daily life continue in Moscow, Yulia hopes the world knows that there is pain beneath the surface: “[I want them to know] that even when we seem happy, our hearts still hurt for Ukraine.”

What's next?

When considering the future, it is an end to the current regime that all the respondents hope for.

“The first thing I'm gonna do after get-

ting out of Russia?” Yulia said. “Picket near a Russian embassy, participate in a rally, things I haven't been able to do here for a while. Also to donate to Ukraine.”

“And to kiss my girlfriend on the streets. To see and hug my Ukrainian relatives who are now refugees. To sleep without fear after all these years.”

“I can only hope for Ukraine's victory, and for the collapse of Putin's regime,” said Evgeny.

“Empires always fall,” Yulia concluded. “This one will too.” □

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Connolly's Marxism, part two



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

James Connolly had a very narrow idea of the Marxism he expounded. Whereas Marxists such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) and others of that time thought that there were three fronts in the class struggle, the political, economic and ideological (the battle of ideas), Connolly thought and militantly asserted that there were only two fronts, the economic (trade-union) and political.

He believed in fighting for the work-

ing-class side in the trade-union and political fronts of the class struggle, and he spoke and wrote eloquently on that. Much of what he wrote on that is still good and useful: see the pamphlet [Effective Trade Unionism](#).

He did not think there was a third front. He did not believe that Marxism was a general philosophy. He held views on marriage and the family very much out of line with the Socialist International. He argued that Marxists had no business taking positions on marriage, the family, religion, or whether there was an after-life and a super-nature.

In an Ireland torn by religion he functioned after his return from America in 1910 as a Catholic and a nationalist. In

his demand that Britain should coerce the Protestants of north-east Ulster into a united Ireland, putting a militant gloss on the politics of the pre-1914 Home Rule parliamentarians, he was a chauvinist among Catholic nationalists.

The open letter to Archbishop Walsh ([Solidarity 664](#)) shows the limits of Connolly's Marxism. So does the extract printed here, from his 1910 pamphlet *Labour, Nationality, and Religion*.

Connolly's 1908 article [A Political Party of the Workers](#), which we will print in the next issue, has Connolly outlining his post-DeLeon conception of what the political struggle was about. Connolly, the one-time doctrinaire, though he was a dissenter from some of Daniel De Leon's, had become a broad-church

socialist. His position that Marxism meant that our ideas – or some of them – mechanically reflect our material reality became something very like "spontaneism", the belief that the working class becomes effectively socialist as a result only, or mainly, of the pressure of the material environment.

To his other and explicit disagreements with De Leon (see [Solidarity 624](#)) should be added a fourth: on the nature of a revolutionary party and its functions.

His neglect after 1910 of the Socialist Party of Ireland, successor of the Irish Socialist Republican Party of 1898-1903, showed how little he retained of his old views. □

Socialism has only one great principle

By James Connolly

Had our opponent clung to that anchor [the "point" below] it would not have been possible for him to introduce so much extraneous matter, so much senseless speculation and foolish slander as he did introduce in the course of his long-drawn-out criticism. That point, as stated by Father Kane, is:

"Once for all we must understand a Socialist to be that man, and only that man, who holds the essential principle of Socialism, i.e. that all wealth-producing power, and all that pertains to it, belongs to the ownership and control of the State."

Thus, at the outset of his lectures, in his first discourse, the reverend gentleman makes it clear that Socialists are bound as Socialists only to the acceptance of one great principle – the ownership and control of the wealth-producing power by the State, and that, therefore, totally antagonistic interpretations of the Bible or of prophecy and revelation, theories of marriage, and of history, may be held by Socialists without in the slightest degree interfering with their activities as such, or with their proper classification as supporters of Socialist doctrine. If this great central truth had been made as clear as its importance justifies, and as firmly adhered to by our opponent as the Socialists themselves adhere

to it, then it would not be necessary for the present writer to remind our critics of those uncomfortable facts in Irish history to which we have referred in our introduction, nor to those other facts in universal history we shall be forced to cite ere our present survey is finished.

Says our critic:

"We now come to examine its principles. One fundamental principle of Socialism is that labour alone is the cause of value, and that labour alone can give any title to ownership. This was first formulated by Saint Simon, and is generally adopted by Socialists. This principle is false. It is founded on an incomplete explanation of the origin of value. We will put it to the test later on. At present we need only remark that a thing may be of real use and therefore of real value to a man who has a right to use it, even independently of any labour spent upon it. Fruit in a forest would have real value for a hungry man, even though no human labour had been given to its growing."

Another principle, one invented by Karl Marx, is what he calls the materialistic conception of history. It is an application of the wild philosophic dreams of the German, Hegel; it means, in plain English, that the economic or, broadly speaking, the trade conditions existing in the world determine the way in which the production of wealth must work

out. Now, this working out of production determines what men's social, ethical, and religious opinions shall be. But the economic conditions are always in a state of evolution, and thus, after a time, they come into collision with the previous social, ethical and religious state of things. But these latter do not die without a struggle, and consequently react, and limit to some extent the influence of the material evolution which is going on. I have given this principle as fully as I can in a short space. It assumes that everything in the world depends absolutely and exclusively upon the mere action of mere material causes. It is a principle the only proof of which is in the begging of the question, in supposing

that there is no God, no soul, no free will, nothing but mud and the forces of mud."

We are indebted to our critic for his statement of the importance of this doctrine of the materialistic conception of history, although we are amused at his characterisation of the doctrine itself. In the beginning of his description, ever mindful of the necessity of prejudicing his hearers, he describes it as an application of the "wild philosophic dreams" of Hegel; in the middle it is stated that the doctrine rejects dreams as a foundation of religious belief and bases our ideas of religion upon the impression derived from material surroundings, and in a final sentence, so far from it being dreams, it is "nothing but mud

and the forces of mud".

Let us examine briefly the true context of this doctrine. While remembering that there are many good Socialists who do not hold it, and that a belief in it is not an essential to Socialism, it is still accepted as the most reasonable explanation of history by the leading Socialists of this world. It teaches that the ideas of men are derived from their material surroundings, and that the forces which made and make for historical changes and human progress had and have their roots in the development of the tools men have used in their struggle for existence, using the words "tools" in its broadest possible sense to include all the social forces of wealth-production.

It teaches that since the break-up of common ownership and the clan community all human history has turned around the struggle of contending classes in society – one class striving to retain possession, first of the persons of the other class and hold them as chattel-slaves, and then of the tools of the other class and hold them as wage-slaves; that all the politics of the world resolved themselves in the last analysis into a struggle for the possession of that portion of the fruits of labour which labour creates, but does not enjoy, i.e. rent, interest, profit. Here let us say that no

EFFECTIVE TRADE UNIONISM

JAMES CONNOLLY

INTRODUCTION BY LIAM MCNULTY SEAN MATGAMNA

Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

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Socialist claims for Marx the discovery or original formulation of the doctrine of the materialistic conception of history – indeed, the brilliant Irish scholastic, Duns Scotus, taught it in the Middle Ages; but that more precise formulation of the guiding forces of history which relate to the influence of economic factors, and which we call economic determinism, has indeed Marx as its clearest expositor, although the Irish economist, William Thompson of County Cork, in 1826, had pointed it out before Marx was out of swaddling clothes.

On the first point, viz., the influence of our material surroundings upon our mental processes and conceptions, a few words should be sufficient to establish its substantial truth in the minds of all those who do not fear the light.

Coracle

Down on the western coast of Ireland the fishermen use, or did until quite recently, as their sole means of sea-going, a little boat made simply of a framework covered with animal hides or tarpaulin, and known as a coracle. At one time in the history of the world such boats represented the sole means of ocean travel. Now, is it not as plain as that two and two make four that the outlook upon life, the conceptions of Man's relation to nature, the theories of international relations, of life which characterise the age of the Lusitania, the flying machine, and the wireless message, could not possibly have been held by even the wisest men of the age of the coracle. The brains of men were as able then and as subtle in their conceptions as they are to-day, in fact the philosophers of ancient Asia

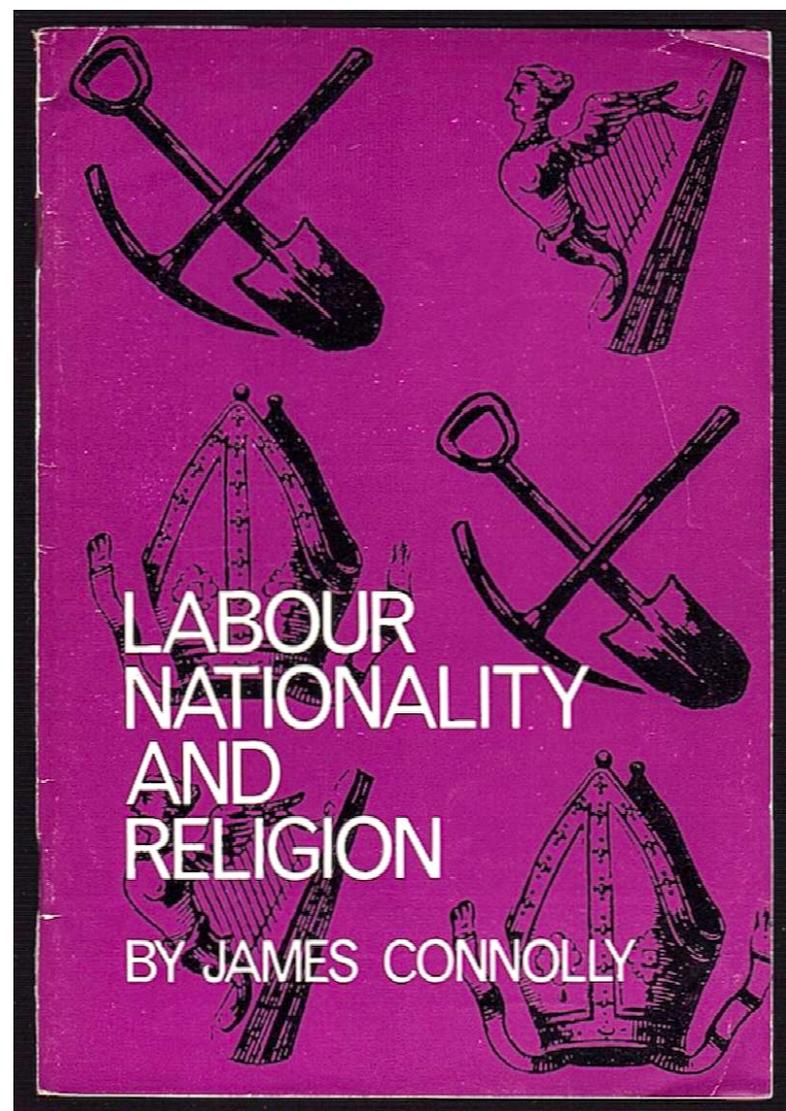
have never been surpassed and seldom equalled in brain power in the modern world; but the most subtle, acute and powerful mind of the ancient world could not even understand the terms of the social, political, or moral problems which confront us to-day, and are intelligently understood by the average day labourer. We are confronted with a salient instance of this in Holy Scripture.

We read the inspired revelation of prophets, judges, and saints giving the world instructions for its future guidance; we read of commands to go forth and convey the gospel to the heathen; but nowhere do we read that those inspired men knew or spoke of a continent beyond the Atlantic in which immortal souls were sitting in darkness, if souls can be said to sit. The wise men of the ancient world, the inspired men of the Holy Land, the brilliant philosophers and scholastics of mediaeval Europe, were all limited by their material surroundings, could only think in terms of the world with which they were acquainted, and their ideas of what was moral or immoral were fashioned for them by the social system in which they lived. Slavery is held to-day to be immoral, and no chattel slaveowner would be given absolution; but when Constantine the Great accepted the Christian religion the Pope of the period received him with acclamation, and no one suggested to him the need of surrendering his slaves, of which he held thousands. Queen Elizabeth of England, "Good Queen Bess", engaged in slave trading and made a good profit in the venture; but no Catholic historian or pamphleteer of the period ever attacked her for

that offence, although attacks for other causes were made in plenty. How is it that the point of view as to the morality of slavery has changed? It cannot be that religion is changed, for we are told that religion is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. If it is not because it has been discovered that it is cheaper to hire men and discharge them when the job is done, than it was to buy men and be compelled to feed them all the time, working or idle, sick or well, for what reason has the change in our conceptions come? Stated brutally, the fact is that slavery is immoral because it is dearer than wage labour. And so with all our other intellectual processes. They change with the change in our environment, particularly our economic or social environment.

A negro slave in the Southern States of America was told by his owner to go up and fasten the shingles on the top of the roof of his master's dwelling. "Boss", said he to the slaveowner, "if I go up there and fall down and get killed you will lose that 500 dollars you paid for me; but if you send up that Irish labourer and he falls down and breaks his neck you won't even have to bury him, and can get another labourer tomorrow for two dollars a day". The Irish labourer was sent up. Moral: Slavery is immoral because slaves cost too much.

As man has progressed in his conquest of the secrets of Nature, he has been compelled to accept as eminently natural that from which his forefathers shrank as a manifestation of the power of the supernatural; as the progress of commerce has taken wealth, and the power that goes with wealth, out of the exclusive ownership of kings and put it in the possession of capitalists and merchants, political power has acquired a new basis, and diplomatic relations, from being the expression of the lust for family aggrandisement, have become the servants of the need for new markets and greater profits – kings wait in the ante-chambers of usurers like Rothschild and Baring to get their consent for war or peace; Popes have for hundreds of years excommunicated those who put their money out at usury and have denied them Christian burial, but now a Pierpont Morgan, as financier of the Vatican, lends out at interest the treasures of the Popes. And man, caught



in the grasp of the changing economic conditions, changes his intellectual conceptions to meet his changed environment.

The world moves even although men stand still, and not the least of the changes have been those of the ghostly fathers of the Church towards the world and its problems. Like the girl to the kisses of her sweetheart, the Church has ever to the blandishments of the world –

"Swearing she would ne'er consent, consented."

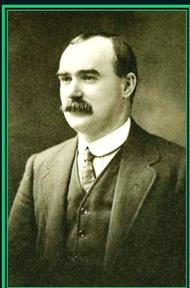
Our critic proceeds:

"The third principle of Socialism is the theory of Karl Marx, by which he tries to prove that

all capital is robbery. He calls it the theory of Surplus Value. Value is the worth of a thing. Now, the worth of a thing may be in that it satisfies some need, as a piece of bread or a blanket; or the worth of a thing may be in that you can barter it for something else, as if you have more bread than you want, but have not a blanket, you may give some of your bread to a man who has no bread but can spare a blanket. The first kind of value is use value, or own worth. The second kind of value is exchange value, or market worth. Instead of mere direct barter, money is used in civilised nations as

continued on page 12 →

Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist &
Internationalist

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an equivalent and standard for exchange value. Now, Karl Marx asserts that exchange value, i.e. the worth of a thing as it may be bought or sold, arises only from the labour spent on it. He goes on to say that a workman only gets his wages according to the market value of his labour – that is to say, he is only paid for his time and toil – whereas the value of his labour, i.e. the worth which results from his labour, may be far in excess of the wages which he gets. Marx calls this value or worth which results from labour over and above the wages of labour, which is equivalent to the labourer's support, Marx calls this overworth surplus value. He states that while it goes to the pocket of the employer, it is really the property of the workman, because it is the result of his labour. This surplus value is really capital, and is used by the employer to create more surplus value – that is to say, more capital.

Worth

Let me put this in another way: while the value of a thing for a man's own use may depend on the thing itself, the value of a thing in the market arises only from the labour spent on it. But the labour spent on it may also have its market value in winning its wage, or it may also have its use value in producing greater value than its wage. But this use value arises from labour as well as the exchange value, and, therefore, belongs to the workman and not to the employer. All this ingenious and intricate system rests absolutely upon the one assumption that exchange value depends only on the labour spent. Now, this assumption is quite false and quite groundless. The worth of a thing in the market will depend first of all upon the nature of the thing's own worth for use. Secondly, upon the demand and other outside circumstances. And thirdly, upon the labour spent. A bottle of good wine will have more exchange value than a bottle of bad wine, even though it may not have cost

more labour. A pair of boots carved out of wood with long and careful toil will fetch less in the market than a simple pair of brogues. The principle that labour alone is the source of value and the only title to ownership was adopted by the American Socialist platform in 1904, with the recommendation that the workmen of the world should gradually seize on all capital.

"Now, as to the Socialist system. In the official declaration of the English Socialists we read – the object of Socialism is 'the establishment of a system of society, based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth, by, and in the interest of, the whole community'."

There is little to refute here that will not have readily occurred to the mind of the intelligent reader. In fact, the haste with which Father Kane left this branch of the subject evinced his knowledge of its dangerous nature. The exposition of the true nature of capital, viz., that it is stored-up, unpaid labour, forms the very basis of the Socialist criticism of modern society, and its method of wealth production; it is the fundamental idea of modern Marxist Socialism, and yet in a discourse covering four columns of small type in the *Irish Catholic* (what a misnomer!) the full criticism of this really fundamental position takes up only twelve lines. And such a criticism!

"A bottle of good wine will have more exchange value than a bottle of bad wine, even though it may not have cost more labour." Does the reverend father not know that if good wine can be produced as cheaply as bad wine, and in as great quantity, then good wine will come down to the same price as the inferior article? And if good wine could be produced as cheaply as porter it would be sold at the same price as porter is now – heavenly thought! It is the labour embodied in the respective articles, including the labour of keeping in storage, paying

rental for vaults, etc., that determines their exchange value. Wine kept in vaults for years commands higher prices than new wine, but could chemists give new wine the same flavour as is possessed by stored-up wine, then the new would bring down the price of the old to a price governed by the amount of labour embodied in the new.

"A pair of boots carved out of wood with long and careful labour will fetch less in the market than a simple pair of brogues." How illuminating! But what governs the price of the brogues? Why, the amount of labour socially necessary to produce them. The amount of labour necessary to produce an article under average social conditions governs its exchange value. "Boots carved out of wood with long and careful labour" are not produced under average social conditions; in discussing the economic question we discuss governing conditions, not exceptions. Hence the exchange value of boots such as those instanced by Father Kane is as problematical as the moral value of his hair-splitting. If you do not believe labour cost governs the exchange value of a commodity, ask a Dublin master builder to tell you what factors he takes into account when he is asked to give an estimate for building an altar. If he is a Catholic he will cast up his estimate with the same items as if he were a Protestant – that is to say, he will count the cost of labour, including the cost of labour embodied in the raw material, and he will base his estimate upon that cost. Ask any manufacturer, whether employing two men or two thousand, how he determines the price at which he can sell an article, and he will tell you that the cost of labour embodied in it settles that question for the market and for him. Yet it is this simple truth that Father Kane and such enemies of Socialism deny. Altars, beads, cassocks, shoes, buildings, ploughs, books – all articles upon the market except a politician's conscience – have their exchange value, determined in like manner – by their labour cost.

Sneer

The learned gentleman winds up his lecture with a sneer at Socialist proposals, and an unwilling admission of the terrible logic of our position in future politics. He says:

"The means and method of

the Socialist have now to be considered. Here we have to consider their destructive and constructive methods – what and how they are to knock down, what and how they are to build up. Here, however, we meet with an endless difference of Socialist opinions. As to the knocking down process, some Socialists are very enterprising, and appear to quite fall in with the anarchist programme of the dagger, the firebrand and the bomb. Others prefer to work through parliament by legal voting and by legal measures. Most of them appear from their speeches and writings to be very little troubled with scruples as to the right or wrong of means to be employed. Some fashionable and aesthetic dabblers in Socialism, amongst whom are men of culture, education and wealth – as, for instance, are some prominent members of the Fabian Society – would work very quietly and very gently; they would even contemplate offering some compensation to the owners whose property they stole, but more probably when the real crash came they would gracefully retire with their culture, their education and their money. A man who makes £25,000 a year by amusing the public is not the sort of man who is likely, when the time comes, to willingly give up all that he owns for the honour of sweeping a street crossing as a Socialist. That is only the superficial nonsense which some people pass off as Socialism. Come to the practical point. The way in which Karl Marx explains how all capital is to be confiscated is as follows. On the one hand, that fierce competition which is the war of the financial world will result in the survival of a very few and very grasping capitalists. On the other hand, the

army of labour will be more enlightened, better organised, and more scientifically led. It is easy to see what the enormous multitude of the proletariat – with force, votes and law on their side – can do with the few fat but helpless millionaires whose money is wanted. In any case the Socialist intends by one means or another to take private property from all those who have any. As to the constructive methods of the Socialist, we have dreams, visions, castles in the air, fairy tales in which there is much that is amusing, some things that are very sentimental, and some things that are very foul, but in all of them one element is lacking – common sense."

Unions

It is surely not necessary to point out that according to the Socialist doctrine the capitalist class are themselves doing much of the constructive work; they, pushed by their economic necessities, concentrate industries, eliminate useless labour and abolish useless plants, and prepare industry for its handling by officials elected by the workers therein. On the other hand, the "army of labour, more enlightened, better organised and more scientifically led", banded into industrial unions patterned after the industry in which they are employed, will have prepared the workers to take possession of the productive and distributive forces on the day the incapable capitalist class are forced to surrender to a "proletariat with force, votes and law on their side". □

• From the pamphlet [Labour, Nationality and Religion: Being a discussion of the Lenten Discourses against Socialism delivered by Father Kane, S.J., in Gardiner Street Church, Dublin, 1910.](#)

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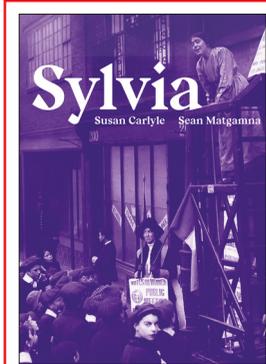
Post workers: tired, frustrated, angry

By a CWU rep

On 16 February Royal Mail workers renewed their industrial action mandate. Negotiations between the company and the Communication Workers Union (CWU) continue, with former TUC general secretary Brendan Barber now, according to a CWU statement, "assisting in facilitating contact". A postal worker and CWU rep spoke to Solidarity about the ongoing dispute.

The ballot result, which reps worked incredibly hard to mobilise, shows that there is still a will to fight, but at the same time, many people feel they can't afford further action. The picture varies from workplace to workplace; where I work, we have 100% union density and the strikes have been solid, and would continue to be so. But people are feeling the squeeze in the cost-of-living crisis.

Royal Mail has been obstructing



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

workers from doing overtime shifts in many workplaces, which is one of the ways people make up money lost through striking. That created a lot of bad feeling, which contributed to the ballot return, but it also means people are out-of-pocket.

Many offices are running below their agreed staffing levels, with multiple delivery duties not covered. There is supposed to be an agreed process for negotiations over staffing arrangements, but Royal Mail seems intent on bypassing all that to impose its restructure, which will involve consolidating vacant duties into ones that are covered, which will increase our workload.

Everyone was watching the Parliamentary Select Committee proceedings. [Royal Mail CEO] Simon Thompson's conduct there has caused a lot of anger. He said, under oath, that there has been no management directive to prioritise parcels over letters – but that's exactly what workers are told to do by local managers, so someone's not telling the truth. Our business standards emphasise a requirement to be honest in our professional conduct; if any of us were caught lying at work, we'd be sacked for it. But there's very much a one-rule-for-them double-standard, that allows senior managers to lie and mislead and get away with it. It seems Royal Mail has no intention of actually providing the service it

is committed to provide.

As the dispute has gone on, management culture has worsened. There's an authoritarian, bullying style of management where workers are just ordered around. How bad that is in a given workplace often comes down to how strong the local rep is, so the company has been aggressive in victimising reps. A very large number of reps have been suspended or served with disciplinary charges. It's a clear attempt by the company to defeat the dispute by breaking the union at workplace level.

We've been told to expect another joint statement from CWU and Royal Mail. The hope is that the company will commit to suspending its "executive action" (its unilateral imposition of its cuts and restructure programme), withdraw the suspensions and charges against our reps, and enter into further talks. If that statement isn't forthcoming there will need to be more strikes. And of course, we have been in this position before, with Royal Mail effectively reneging on the commitments it made in a previous statement.

There were 18 days of strikes in December, although that was spread across different departments, so no-one was actually on strike for all 18 days. The feeling on the shopfloor is complicated; people are fatigued by the drawn-out dispute, and worried about the financial implications of fur-

ther strikes, but at the same time most people know that we can't afford not to strike.

The union has said for some time that it will be making the process for applying for hardship payments more accessible, but that doesn't seem to have been acted on. The current process is quite longwinded and difficult. Our union subs are relatively low, and I don't know why we didn't use the years since our last national strike to increase the subs slightly and put the extra straight into a fighting fund, so that we could now access to support further action. It would also be good to see other unions donate, but of course, they have their own strikes to think about.

Posties are obviously aware of the context of the wider strike wave, and there has been casual discussion about the possibility of general strike. We have linked up with other local picket lines when we've struck on the same day as other unions. But it's human nature to worry first and foremost about your immediate circumstances, so people are mainly focused on what's happening in Royal Mail.

Overall, the mood is one of tiredness, frustration, and anger. Some of the frustration is with the union for not having done more, but that is difficult when we're faced with an employer so determined to undermine us. □

Reject the offer, rebuild local government unions

By Dave Pannett

On 23 Feb council employers offered a flat rate award of £1,925, or 3.88% for those on higher wages, from April 2023, for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland

The claim from the unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) was for RPI + 2% (interpreted as 12.7%), a £15 per hour minimum wage in two years, plus extra leave and other improved conditions.

The value of council workers' pay has fallen by 25% in real terms since 2010, and the lowest grades have now almost been caught up by the government's legal minimum wage of £10.42 (from April 2023).

With this backdrop, it is not surprising that council leaders, finding it difficult to recruit and keep staff in the lowest grades, have made a flat rate offer aiming to outstrip the legal minimum and the £11ph now offered by Aldi and Sains-

bury's. But £1,925 (the same as last year) takes the lowest grades only from about £10.50 to £11.50 per hour, nowhere near £15.

At 9.42% for the lowest grade and less for all others, it is way behind 12.7%; also, way behind food prices, 16.8% higher in January 2023 than Jan 2022, or the likely increase in energy bills come April.

Even if inflation falls in 2023, the £1,925 does not make good real-wage losses suffered in 2022-3 and the loss since 2010.

The flat rate offer means that many council workers, above the lowest grades, will for the second year see a pay offer running much lower than the claim.

In Scotland the three unions' claim is for £4,000 flat rate (approx. £2.20 extra per hour) or 12%, whichever is the greater. There is no response yet from local government employers in Scotland. The Scottish Gov-

ernment identified about [£100 million extra](#) for local government pay as part of its February budget, though that [won't address](#) a £1 billion funding gap that Unison Scotland reports.

Members of the local government unions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland should reject the offer, even though it may be a better offer than some other public sector workers have been offered for 2023-4. We should aim to join and coordinate with other workers and look to our comrades in local government in Scotland who won improvements last year by selective action by key groups like bin workers taking action in the summer and plans to bring out school staff.

Across the UK it is possible to win more concessions from councils and make greater progress towards £15 per hour minimum and reversing years of cuts, including pay cuts.

Scottish comrades should refuse to accept less than their claim without a fight.

Rejecting the offers and winning mandates for action are not the same thing. Since Unison outside Scotland took no action over pay in 2022-3, or for many years past, and there is very little coordinated action over council cuts, winning strike mandates will take a lot of work and resources from the unions

By disaggregated balloting, Unison, GMB and Unite in the NHS won mandates in the ambulance service and some NHS trusts. The unions and can build on that and on the 2022-3 experience in Scotland.

If we are to rebuild the confidence of workers in local government that we can resist cuts and reverse years of real-wage decline, then we have to start now, and take the opportunities presented by a broader strike wave. □



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Brings you to tears, makes your blood boil



Film review

By Zack Muddle

Writer and director Sarah Polley's new film, *Women Talking*, based on Miriam Toews' book, is a devastating exploration of abuse and sexual violence, trauma and women's oppression – and resistance.

In an isolated religious community, a group of men have been drugging and raping the women and girls for years. Women have long been excluded from education, silenced, and kept disempowered, some domestically abused. *Women Talking's* opening declaration, "What follows is an act of female imagination", alludes to the response of the village elders to the attacks. The attacks were dismissed as either "wild female imagination", or as perpetrated directly by supernatural beings such as Satan himself.

"Do nothing. Stay and fight. Or leave." These are the options considered by the women collectively after one of the attackers is caught, a whole group are arrested, and the rest of the colony's men have left, temporarily, to bail out the accused.

The opening declaration, like the movie itself, is half true. It is, as Toews put it, "an imagined response to real events."

The insular Mennonite "Manitoba Colony" in Bolivia is home to less than two thousand people. In 2009 a group of men from this anti-technology Christian group were convicted of the rape and sexual assault of (at least) 151 women and girls. Documented victims ranged from three to 65 years old. They had been drugged through their windows with a spray used to anaesthetise cows. The bruises, blood stains and dirty handprints were blamed on demons, as were the foggy memories some had of the attacks, and the splitting headaches and woozy lethargy from the drugs. The attacks had started in 2005 and continued until two men were caught by a woman as they entered her house in June 2009.

Toews was raised in a Mennonite colony in Canada, which she later left. Her book is set in a (fictional) colony in Ukraine, although Polley's film feels, if anything, as if it is set in the USA. The message is universal.

The reality is more grim and complex than the film. In Manitoba Colony people speak Plautdietsch. Most women are not only illiterate but unable to speak Spanish, making their isolation from the outside world greater – a barrier to even accessing counselling. I could find no evidence that collective discussions of the type documented in the film took place, nor of serious social change within or mass exodus from the colony.

Many of the victims stopped attend-



ing the colony's only social space, the church, out of shame. Younger victims fear they will never marry as they are "stained". In reality, after the first two attackers were caught, various men in the Mennonite colony did actually help round up the rest. But in such a patriarchal culture the attackers may well be seen as damaging the other men's "property" as much as violating and traumatising fellow human beings.

Women Talking's "imagined response" is a metaphor. It explores feelings and responses of women who have been wronged by men's abuse or violence. It elucidate freedoms struggled for, the damage of being made to disbelieve yourself, the way "forgiveness" can permit continued abuse. It portrays complex feelings of love towards men and boys who are nonetheless complicit in perpetuating women's oppression; who are themselves victims of a society which shapes them into that toxic role; and who may, or may not, be able to change. It takes you through the pain of contemplating tearing your world apart to escape abuse. It is additionally an indictment of religion and of rigid, unaccountable, authority – and its abuse.

Women Talking will bring you to tears and make your blood boil. □

• 24-hour sexual abuse helpline: 0808 500 2222 or bit.ly/abuse-s

Remake of All Quiet



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I have now seen the "remake" of *All Quiet on the Western Front* by German director Edward Berger. Unsurprisingly, it differs considerably from Lewis Milestone's 1930 classic.

The bare outline – of both Erich Maria Remarque's book and the 1930 film – is followed, but that's about it. A key scene where the central character, German soldier, Paul Bäumer, returns home on leave is omitted, thus denuding

the film of much of its personal impact.

It's another powerful anti-war statement with brutal combat scenes; but these men are human beings with emotions, feelings, families and loved ones, and this dimension is frequently sacrificed to technical spectacle. Berger does however widen the historical scope, with scenes from the end of the war where the French Commander Marshall Foch is seen demanding agreement to his armistice ultimatum from a cowed German delegation.

The background to the German capitulation is touched on: the German Social Democratic Party

(SPD) is mentioned a couple of times but Rosa Luxemburg or Karl Liebknecht are not. There is no mention (as far as I can remember) of mutinies, unrest at home and the impact of the Russian Revolution.

As the Armistice hour approaches the German High Command orders an utterly pointless and in effect suicidal attack. □

A steady pace

An additional £537 was raised in the last week for our specific fundraising for the Ukrainian speaker tour, within our overall funding goal of £35,000. Overall total so far: £3,265.22. Thanks to Vino, Camila, James, Kath, Pat, Stuart, Reuben and others for their support this week. With Bri and Olenka arriving by 5 March, we really need to raise the additional funds to help cover the costs of the tour for them and the organisers of our meetings (see page 3). Every donation will help. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund and GofundMe.

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PCS new ballot from 20 March



John Moloney

The PCS union will reballot members over the ongoing dispute concerning pay, pensions, redundancy moneys and job security. Although I could not attend the National Executive that made that decision, I welcome the re-ballot.

As in the original ballot, voting will be done on a disaggregated basis, with 186 separate ballots taking place, covering over 124,000 members. The current levy of members, which in essence is an increase in subs, will stay in place allowing the union to run selective action.

The current dispute mandate runs out on 6 May, and so the new ballot will run from 20 March until 9 May.

Separate to the "big" ballot, we are running ballots in the Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and other areas. These cover over 30,000 members. Therefore if these are successful, we could see 150,000 members plus in dispute by the time of the national conference, which starts on 24 May. This means that there can be a democratic debate there as to the tactics of the strike, in particular as to the balance between selective and all-out action.

I remain in favour of the maximum amount of all out action coupled with selective action. The combination of the two, in my opinion, is more likely to win concessions than relying just on selective action or all out action. In parallel to the re-ballot, the union continues to build for the one-day strike on 15 March (of course one should be used to reinforce the other). All the time the union continues with selective action. □

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

RMT calls Tube out on 15 March

By Jay Dawkey

While Aslef got out of the blocks faster this time round, RMT have rightly called out all grades on 15 March in the ongoing dispute over pensions, job cuts and agreements.

While all further action is welcome we will need to escalate and accelerate the action to win. A faster pace and longer strikes are needed. □

Junior doctors strengthen NHS fight

By Alice Hazel

The BMA junior doctors have announced strikes from 7am 13 March to 7am 16 March, following a 98% vote for strikes on a 77% turnout.

The new potential for all the health unions to co-ordinate, including the BMA, must increase pressure on the government both on pay and on rescuing the NHS.

Unions have called ambulance strikes on 6 and 20 March. Unison has called a strike in ambulance and other trusts on 8 March, and won additional mandates in trusts it reballoted. Christine McAnea, Unison's General Secretary, has tweeted, "Talks alone won't be enough to call off these [strikes]. We want to see the colour of their money."

But in general Unison have made it clear they are desperate to get in on the talks which the RCN has got with the government (from 22 Feb). Sara Norton, Unison's main health sector negotiator, has said: "Our position is clear: for negotiations to be meaningful and to avert strike action Unison must

be at the table, talks must cover all NHS staff and the government must make an upfront commitment to improving pay for 2022-23."

That seems to leave open the possibility of cancelling strike dates with even the slightest movement from government. And the union leaders obviously chose not to name 15 March, which would bring them out alongside other unions, and on a day with big union demonstrations and rallies, for maximum input. They also chose not to join in on 1 February.

Backward

The RCN cancellation of its 48 hour strike on 1-3 March for negotiations with the government (with no offer tabled) is a huge backward step in the dispute. As one Sheffield nurse said: "I think its incredibly short sighted of the RCN to call off the strike... the withdrawal of our work is our main negotiation tool here. This is exactly the time when we should be escalating industrial action to keep the pressure up and present a determined front."

Rail: more strings than an orchestra



Off The Rails

From Off the Rails

Members of the mostly-clerical Union TSSA in the fourteen Train Operating Companies (TOCs) involved in the national dispute have accepted their leadership's recommendation and voted to accept real-terms pay cuts and attacks on working conditions. The deal – 5% or £1,750 for 2022-3, 4% for 2023-4 – is way below inflation.

TSSA's justification of this capitulation laughingly claims that it "has been at the forefront of the strikes and industrial action on the railways since the summer of 2022" and claims the credit

for securing "an improved deal on pay". But this is still a real-terms pay cut.

Even this paltry "rise" comes with more strings than an orchestra. It allows the companies to press ahead with their attacks on pay and conditions, with a feeble note that TSSA still opposes ticket office closures.

Unsurprisingly, manager members were more keen on the deal than non-manager members, with 80% and 60% respectively voting to accept. With a turnout of just 57%, the votes would not have met the thresholds that the law requires for industrial action ballots – but those thresholds only apply to fighting the employers, not to giving in to them! The laws are not "democratic" as the government likes to claim – they are anti-union.

The RCN's agreement to negotiate on "productivity enhancing reforms" alongside pay has left many aghast, wondering what more can be squeezed from working days by NHS bosses. RCN members in London have launched a petition to keep the pressure on the leadership during negotiations, calling for reinstatement of strikes while negotiations are ongoing, for rebalancing, escalation and co-ordination, and support for demonstrations.

The cancellation of strikes followed similar tactics in Scotland and Wales, where RCN members have been and are being balloted on increased but measly offers. The RCN Wales ballot closed on 27 February with an "overwhelming" majority to reject (reported unofficially as 80%). RCN has not called new action, but instead demanded new talks "within five working days". When RCN members in Scotland rejected a previous offer, RCN officials also called no action, instead coming back a bit later with a slightly improved offer and balloting again. That ballot closes on 20 March. □

The silver lining to the cloud of TSSA's surrender is that TSSA represents little in the railway workforce, either in numbers or in industrial strength. Activists in other unions never really expect them to stay the course. Hopefully some of their members will continue with this fight, either by joining RMT or by respecting picket lines – or both! □

UCU to strike on 15 March

By Cathy Nugent

The Higher Education Committee of the University and College Union (UCU), meeting on 24 February, voted to call a strike on 15 March alongside other unions on Budget day.

The strike will interrupt a "pause" in strike action put in place without any real consultation with the union's democratic structures by general secretary Jo Grady. The pause was justified on the grounds that "calm" was needed while negotiations at ACAS continue.

Yet the pause coincided with the employers imposing a below-inflation pay deal and no significant progress

on many other aspects of the union's long-running and wide-ranging dispute. Rightly, branches have protested about the pause – that it indicated a drive from Grady to put together a shoddy deal – and have been pushing for greater branch and membership control over the direction of the dispute.

Union activists must also now work very hard to win a new ballot (closing 31 March) to continue strikes and move to a marking and assessment boycott in the summer term. Our dispute, including our fight for higher pay, is far from over! □

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solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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

One year on, help Ukraine defeat Putin!

By Dan Katz

As the Russian offensive in Ukraine enters its second year the anniversary was marked by defiant Ukrainian protests across Europe. On 24 February, in London, thousands marched to the Russian Embassy chanting, "Russia is a terrorist state". Hundreds marched in many towns across Britain, including over 1,000 in Edinburgh.

Defence of Ukraine is still popular. The latest UK opinion poll shows 68% backing Ukraine and only 15% opposed to helping Ukraine.

On the battlefield Ukraine's victory unfortunately remains far from certain. Ukraine's survival depends a great deal on Western – centrally American – military supplies and political will. The US has given Ukraine \$48bn of aid and weapons.

The battlefield gains Ukraine made in Kharkiv oblast (September) and Kherson (November) were made possible by US supply of HIMARS rocket artillery in June. But the lack of follow-up by the West has allowed Putin to retake the offensive using newly-mobilised conscripts.

The West is deliberately not giving Ukraine everything it needs to expel Russia. It fears Putin's reaction to a devastating military defeat in Ukraine.

Russia continues its attritional war despite losing over 1,000 tanks and taken 200,000 casualties. By October 6% of Russians said they knew someone who had been killed in the war.

Occupied

17% of Ukraine's territory is still occupied by Russia and a new offensive launched three weeks ago by Russia aims to take more ground before temperatures rise and the ground becomes muddy. The new offensive is taking place in six areas across the Donbas front and it is expending enormous effort to take the Ukrainian town of Bakhmut which has been destroyed in the process.

Rebuilding Ukraine will take many hundreds of millions of dollars of aid. The West could help immediately by cancelling Ukraine's debts and donating aid, rather than making loans and selling materials to Ukraine.

8mn Ukrainians are now refugees across Europe and at least 5mn are internally displaced.

500,000 mostly well-educated Russians have left Russia, including 100,000 IT specialists.

When the war started commodity prices spiked, Ukrainian wheat exports were blocked by Russia (partly responsible for 62mn more people across the world facing hunger in 2022), and Russian oil exports shifted dramatically towards India and China. Western sanctions have damaged Russia's

economy, and disrupted and reconfigured the world economy for the worse, without stopping Russia's attack on Ukraine.

Russia's economy contracted by only 2% last year with high energy prices compensating for damage due to sanctions.

The NATO alliance has been reinvigorated by the war. Germany's Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, announced a massive €100bn increase in arms spending three days after Russia's attack. Finland and Sweden aim to join NATO and Finland's armed forces, for example, are formidable; it is able to mobilise 230,000 troops within a few weeks.

NATO is planning its biggest ever exercise, Steadfast Defender, set for early 2024.

In the background China is assessing the US's resilience and response, gauging the implications for its own wish to seize Taiwan.

Russia has lost influence in other areas round its borders. In September 2022 Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey attacked Russia's ally, Armenia. Russia had not got the resources to defend its client. Elsewhere, in states formerly incorporated into the USSR – Kazakhstan, for example – a shift has taken place away from Russia, towards China. Russia itself is now more dependent on China, which it hopes will begin supplying weapons.

Ukraine is firing 5-6,000 shells a day, using as many shells each month as the US produces in one year. Ukraine has used up supplies of old Soviet munitions and now depends on NATO-standard 155mm rounds.

So far the US has donated 1mn 155mm howitzer shells. Since the end of the Cold War between the West and the USSR, armament industries have been run-down and, for example, in 2011 in the bombing campaign against Libya, European states quickly ran out of precision bombs which had to be supplied by the US.

The Ukrainian state and society has proved much more resilient and robust than Russia expected. Putin expected to take Kyiv within a few days. Russian-speakers in Ukraine's east bore the brunt of Russia's brutal war and occupation, and Ukrainian pollsters now believe that a majority of the Russian speakers in Ukraine regard Ukraine as their homeland. 86% of Ukrainians now want Ukraine to join NATO.

Ukraine intends to launch a new counter-offensive in the Spring. The most likely direction is south through Zaporizhia oblast towards the Russian-occupied town of Melitopol. The British left and labour movement must rally to Ukraine and the organisations of the Ukrainian labour movement. Victory to Ukraine! Workers of the World, Unite! □

Navalny comes out for Ukraine's 1991 borders

By Michael Baker

Alexei Navalny, Russia's jailed opposition leader, has published a manifesto for the first time in his long and varied political career. Is this "better late than never", or "too little, too late"?

The manifesto has fifteen points, but most discussion has centred on a small handful of them. Perhaps most notably, as well as calling for the unconditional withdrawal of troops and cooperation with international investigations into Russian war crimes, Navalny has made a U-turn on his prior position regarding Ukraine's borders, particularly Crimea:

"What are Ukraine's borders? They are similar to Russia's – they're internationally recognized and defined in 1991. Russia also recognized these borders back then, and it must recognize them today as well. There is nothing to discuss here."

There may be "nothing to discuss" now, but a change has clearly taken place – in 2014, when asked whether he would return Crimea to Ukraine if he became leader of Russia, Navalny gave a now-famous line: "what, is Crimea just a sausage sandwich to be bandied back and forth?". In 2016, he said that if he gained the leadership, Crimea would have a "proper referendum". His 2023 position has been welcomed by many, and likely reflects a perceived shift in perspective from Navalny's base, an attempt to reposition himself in the middle of the "sensible" Russian liberal population.

The other main talking point has proved more contentious. Given extensive and ongoing debates about Russian imperialism and collective responsibility, Navalny has placed a flag in the sand:

"Are all Russians inherently imperialistic? This is nonsense. For example, Belarus is also involved in the war against Ukraine. Does this mean that the Belarusians also have an imperial mindset? No, they merely also have a dictator in power. There will always be people with imperial views in Russia, just like in any other country with historical preconditions for this, but they are far from being the majority. There is no reason to weep and wail about it. Such people should be defeated in elections, just as both right-wing and left-wing radicals get defeated in developed countries."

Navalny is largely correct: imperialism is, first and foremost, the domination of one country's ruling class over another country, rather than an



interpersonal or cultural phenomenon (though the latter aspects can appear as symptoms of the former). While individual Russian people may express or exhibit conservative and imperialistic beliefs, they are not the arbiters nor the main perpetrators of Russian imperialism: that lies with Putin, his cabinet, and his army.

This will not, however, be particularly reassuring for many Ukrainians, who are all too aware of how the present invasion and war plays into a historical pattern of successive Russian governments repressing Ukrainian national identity.

Once upon a time Putin was, however foolishly, painted as the "sensible" candidate, a somber and astute statesman who wouldn't make any rash decisions. This proved a costly mistake. It will be little comfort to the many Ukrainians whose lives and homes have been destroyed as a result of that mistake that Navalny, a man who in the past has been happy to ally with Russia's nationalist and far right movements for gains in the polls, has now placed the blame for Russian imperialism solely at Putin's feet.

None of this stops Navalny's manifesto from being a broadly positive and constructive step for the Russian opposition. But whether he will be the one to implement the political programme he proposes is another question entirely. Navalny remains in prison with poor health, and will likely stay there as long as Putin and his party are in power. As Navalny himself is the only opposition candidate with anywhere near national recognition or popularity, his prospects for release in the short to medium term are looking slim. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

NEU: FORWARD TO 15-16 MARCH!

By Patrick Murphy

Before the National Education Union (NEU) National Executive (NEC) meeting on 25 February the government announced that they were prepared to enter into serious talks about the issues on the condition that we suspend our regional strikes (28 Feb to 2 March). The unanimous decision was to confirm that the strikes would proceed.

Based on the Department for Education's (DfE's) own published attendance figures, which they delayed issuing, 57% of pupils were not in school on 1 Feb, 42% in primary and 76% in secondary. Since our ballot result was announced on 16 January, 50,000 new members have joined the NEU. The union action has impact.

Meetings

There have been plenty of meetings between unions and the DfE but ministers have stuck firmly to the line that this year's pay award is closed and not up for discussion and that we should focus on the review body process to argue for a higher award next year. They have shifted from that, and the talks offered will, in fact, take place despite the NEU's rejection of any precondition.

Yet within hours of the offer of talks the DfE released (21 Feb) its [STRB evidence](#) for the 2023-4 pay round. It proposed a 3% offer for experienced teachers and an overall cost limit of 3.5%. They also stated plainly that these rises would be paid for within existing school budgets. A key NEU demand is that any pay rise is fully funded.

The government may offer a one-off non-consolidated payment to boost 2022-3's inadequate



award. That would do nothing to redress the decade plus of real-terms pay cuts and would not mean that future awards start from a higher platform.

It is nevertheless a significant shift by the government from their previous position.

The clear lesson is that strike action is effective. The next few weeks are crucial. The regional strikes need to be as strong as 1 February, and 15-16 March should be a major demonstration of strength and determination.

The March Executive will consider timetables for strikes next term, and for a further ballot of support staff members in England, who narrowly missed the thresholds in January.

We agreed the timetable for a Sixth Form re-ballot opening on 13 March. Escalation is the only thing likely to win. □

• Patrick Murphy is a member of the NEU National Executive, writing here in a personal capacity. Abridged: more at bit.ly/2302neu

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban