



For social ownership of the banks and industry

FRENCH WORKERS SHOW HOW TO FIGHT

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*Banner reads:
"Education workers
– on strike to not die at work"*

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French workers show us how to fight



In 1995 the French working class defeated pension changes proposed by a right-wing government with a strong majority and a newly-elected right-wing president behind it. It was a wave of strikes greater than the French general strike of 1936, and excelled only by the bigger general strike of 1968. The victory led to some years of renewed buoyancy for the revolutionary socialist left in France.

France's pension schemes are not as generous as they seem at first sight, but they are better than Britain's. They are set in law. The ruling class still wants to change the law to cheapen the cost. The Sarkozy-Fillon government in 2010 pushed through some changes despite a big wave of strikes; the current Macron-Borne government is trying for further changes.

The French labour movement has weakened in the last period, partly due to the terrible record of the "plural left" Jospin government (1997-2002) and the Socialist Party governments under François Hollande (2012-17), which have also led to the near-collapse of the French Socialist Party (which was

the country's biggest party for decades, and has a history going back to 1879). In opinion polls, the main beneficiary of the revulsion at Macron-Borne's pension plans is the far-right RN.

That makes it all the more important that the workers' movement is able to rally people by showing that it can defeat those plans and has positive alternatives. It can. The Macron-Borne regime has no reliable majority in parliament and a less cohesive governing party than the right wing had in 1995.

The French strikes give us hope, and many lessons.

They are coordinated. France has eight different "TUCs", and yet they have coordinated strikes and demonstrations throughout.

They develop organisation at the workplace and local level. On every big strike days there have been big local demonstrations everywhere. The initiative is now being taken by "reconductible" (renewable) strikes, strikes reviewed and renewed each day by workplace mass meetings.

They have tempo. Michael Elms's article, on this page, talks of a period of "relative calm", but that was just three weeks, between 16 February and 7 March, during which there are school holidays in most of France. Gaps between strikes in most sectors in Britain



have often been much longer.

And they have a clear direction of escalation. Workers were not told after the 16 February general strike to pause and wait until their leaders devised the next step. 7 March and the subsequent move in some sectors to "reconductible" strikes were already programmed before 16 February.

By contrast, they show us that the "marathon, not sprint" tactics proclaimed by some of the strongest unions in the current strike wave in Britain, and tacitly followed by all others in the public sector, can't win. Especially since these have been "marathons" in which the "runners" (workers) are mostly told to run a few yards, then pause and

wait on further instructions while union leaders ponder or disappear into negotiations on the basis of no clear offer.

Public sector workers in Britain have advantages from political pressures: top managers in most parts of the public sector want pay rises for their workers to ease recruitment and retention of staff, and to help get services halfway functioning again. The government seems set on (and can easily afford) some small pay concessions, to most sections at least, as soon as it is satisfied that it has subdued the strike wave.

Only by reviving and moving at least some way towards the model of France will this strike wave be able to win better. □

Strikes multiply against pension changes

By Michael Elms

After a period of relative calm, French workers have renewed their fight against President Macron's pension reforms at a higher level.

Since January this year, French workers have been staging a series of major strikes and protests against pensions reforms being brought by President Macron and his Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne. These changes would raise the minimum retirement age for most workers from 62 to 64 and increase the amount of time someone has to work in order to qualify for a pension.

The protests began on 19 January with a day of strikes and demonstrations which brought over a million workers out on the streets. There followed days of action of a similar size at roughly ten-day intervals. The turn-out for these demonstrations went wider than big cities and younger, better-organised and relatively better-off layers of the working class. The mobilisations also

drew huge crowds – of a size not seen since the Yellow Vests mobilisations – in small-town France, in seaside and market towns and semi-rural areas.

After another demonstration on 16 February, there was a break for the school holidays, and to allow workers to work back some lost pay.

On 7 March, the movement returned for a nationally-coordinated cross-union day of strikes and protests that brought an estimated 1.4 million demonstrators out.

After 7 March, the strikes were renewed or "reconducted" in many places. This is a common practice for the French workers' movement, where after an initial strike call from a union, workers will hold all-unions, all-grades meetings in their workplaces each day and vote on whether or not to continue the strike that day. Until March, the movement had been very much directed from the top. Now, things are changing. Many workplaces, especially in rail, docks, energy, chemicals firms and also in some big private

sector employers, such as Disneyland Paris, voted in local meetings to continue their strikes through International Women's Day and then on to the weekend.

These "reconducted" strikes were often minority strikes and in general workers took shifts on the weekend to regain some lost wages. But these local meetings deciding to take action beyond what the national leadership has called for show that more and more workers, including in workplaces with few or no organised socialist activists, want to intensify the action.

Students

Since the strikes have returned there has also been an increase in student activity. From a slow start on 7 March, by 10 March there were many university occupations, mass meetings on campuses, and movement in many Further Education colleges (lycées).

Polls show 70% or more French people opposed to the change in the retirement age and around 60% support dis-

ruptive strikes. In the French parliament, the government does not have a stable majority. A Socialist Party deputy, Philippe Brun, told *Le Monde* newspaper that there is "a possible majority in the chamber to vote against" increasing the retirement age. Macron is having to rely on votes from the rightwing Les Républicains party (LR). But LR is worried about losing popularity by tying itself to Macron's policy. They are pressing for amendments to help sell the reform to the public, and that is likely to keep matters stalled in parliament for the rest of March.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the populist-left party France Insoumise (FI) has called for new parliamentary elections and/or a referendum. The committee of trade union general secretaries co-ordinating strike days – the Inter-Syndicale (IS) – has called for negotiations in the Presidential palace.

Activists in the French far-left group Étincelle point out that moving the focus of action from the streets to the

ballot box or negotiations in a closed room would rob the movement of its real strength. The disruption caused by the strikes and the self-expression of millions of workers will create a crisis which can force much more serious concessions – and bigger and better longer-term political changes in France – than a meeting of "responsible trade union administrators" with the President will. Even a referendum or an election at this point, give the depth of feeling and power of the mobilisation, is likely to offer the government more room for manoeuvre if it comes at the cost of winding down the movement.

Socialists in Étincelle and other radical-left are focusing their efforts on increasing local organisation and control of the movement – organising cross-union strikers' meetings in workplaces and towns and increasing the power, disruption and political self-expression of the grassroots of the movement. □

After 15 March: build links locally

By Ollie Moore

The mass strike on 15 March is, in its form, the nearest equivalent to “general strike”-type activity we are likely to see in Britain, this side of mass defiance of anti-strike laws. Those laws prevent a body like the TUC from simply “calling a general strike”. They also prevent workers not covered by an official ballot mandate from legally joining a strike called by any individual union.

Large social progress in Britain, let alone socialist revolution, will, of course, require mass defiance of those laws. But while the labour movement does not yet have the confidence and organisation for such defiance, any opportunity to scale up individual disputes into something wider should be developed as far as possible.

More direct coordination is needed to “generalise” the strikes even further, cohering a set of individual disputes taking action in parallel into a united effort with aims consciously held in common. The joint demonstration in central London, sponsored by the National Education Union and the two doctors’ unions, BMA and HCSA, is a positive step. UCU and RMT, whose members in universities and on London Underground are also striking on 15 March, are encouraging members to attend the march after picketing in the morning. The PCS union, also striking, has, unfortunately, stood apart, choosing

to organise its own, separate march (though to the same final rally-point). Around the country, closer coordination is possible, through local Trades Councils.

Throughout the current strike wave, “coordination” has not progressed much past common strike days, most prominently 1 February and now 15 March. Other days of common strikes, for example across the rail and post, have occurred, but more by coincidence than design. Even the more consciously coordinated strikes have been a matter of behind-closed-doors communication between union leaders, rather than a wider democratic process. Strengthening local Trades Councils, and cross-union strike committees linked to them, can, at least at local level, help consolidate ongoing links between workers in different industries and unions.

The 11 March demonstration in support of NHS workers’ strikes, and to demand the renationalisation and rebuilding of the NHS, was much smaller than it might have been if the unions which formally sponsored it had used their resources to actively mobilise their members. The NHS campaign groups which called the demonstration were right to do so, and should be commended for their initiative and effort. But they do not have the national organisational infrastructure and potential mobilising power of unions

themselves.

Nevertheless, it was an important action in and of itself, the first time during the current wave a national demonstration has been called that explicitly links the demands of ongoing strikes to a wider political programme for social transformation. More of that kind of activity, around issues other than health-care – such as education, transport, and benefits – is needed.

Other recent developments in the strike wave highlight, in different ways, the need for more independent organisation and self-assertion by rank-and-file workers. RMT’s dispute on the national rail has now decisively fractured, with strikes on Network Rail being called off while strikes by Train Operating Company workers continue. The union is conducting a referendum on a new offer from Network Rail, due to conclude on 20 March.

Offer

Although the union leadership is making no formal recommendation, its briefing to members emphasises the offer as “improved” and highlights its positive aspects, suggesting that national officials, at least, want the offer to be accepted.

Many Network Rail reps and workers want to reject the deal and fight on. But with no independent rank-and-file networks that might help dissident reps and branches coordinate a “vote no” campaign and develop a strategy for reinstating and intensifying strikes, the national union’s nudges towards acceptance, and a general sense of weariness, may see the deal accepted.

In Royal Mail, despite securing an overwhelming mandate for further strikes, the Communication Workers Union has called no further action. Royal Mail has committed to pause the imposition of cuts and restructures, but only, it seems, to give an opportunity

for local reps to consult on the manner of the implementation, rather than to withdraw or reverse cuts altogether. Postal workers have, in some ways, a more robust rank-and-file culture than many other workers, with spontaneous shopfloor action, taken without official sanction from the union and in defiance of the law, more common than elsewhere. (To its credit, CWU does not disavow or condemn those actions.) But that culture exists largely on a workplace-by-workplace basis, and is usually expressed over workplace-specific issues. Nowhere in Royal Mail is it given concrete organisational form in a network that sees itself as organising to pressure union structures.

The lessons of the strike wave – still in dynamic process and far from over – are manifold. But central among them is the need for workers to develop a clear understanding of ourselves as conscious organisers of our own disputes, rather than seeing ourselves simply as loyal foot soldiers following orders from above. Socialists can help the development of that understanding by ensuring picket lines, strike rallies, and post-rally meetups on 15 March are used as spaces to discuss next steps.

Waiting and seeing what union leaders decide after the next rounds of talks is not good enough; without significant intensification of action, our disputes will not win. Fighting, in the workplace and within union structures, to persuade workmates of this is a key part of building up the confidence to actually take such action if and when we can win our unions to a strategy of escalation. □



Women's Fightback 28

Women's Fightback is a socialist feminist mag by Workers' Liberty. Issue 28 includes articles on NHS, Iranian uprisings, China and the Feminist Five, Ukraine, one year on, 'Rebel Rebel' review, the family, Flora Tristan and much more. □

• Discounts available for bulk orders. Order at workersliberty.org/wf28

Strikes

Various dates throughout March: Selective strikes by civil servants (PCS)

13-20 March: Serco refuse workers in Breckland and North Norfolk (Unison) strike

13 March to 7am 16 March: Junior doctors in NHS (BMA and HCSA) strike

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

15 March: London Underground workers (RMT and Aslef); university workers (UCU); teachers in England and Wales and support staff in Wales (NEU); civil servants (PCS and Prospect); BBC local radio journalists (NUJ); junior doctors (BMA and HCSA) strike

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

From 20 March: National Express West Midlands bus workers (Unite) begin indefinite strike, unless offer accepted

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

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

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

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

Until 3 April: Discontinuous strikes by workers at drinks manufacturer Diageo's plant in Leven, Scotland (Unite). See here for details

Until 4 May: Serco workers at De-

vonport naval dockyard (Unite) strike every weekend, and every weekday evening – see here for details

Ballots

Until 20 March: Network Rail workers (RMT) vote on whether to accept a new offer on pay and conditions

Until 20 March: RCN members in Scotland vote on new offer

29 March-5 May: Junior doctors in Scotland (BMA) ballot for industrial action over pay

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

23 May to 4 July: Local government workers (Unison) ballot for action over pay and conditions □

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](#).

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

Thursday 23 March, 3pm: Tube-worker monthly meeting

Friday-Sunday, 14-16 July: Ideas for Freedom 2023, London, a week-end of socialist debate and discussion.

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



Carnival of reaction at the Morning Star



By Jim Denham

The Communist Party of Britain's international secretary Kevan Nelson gave a report to the party's political committee last month, published in the *Morning Star* of 25-26 February.

Headed "Signs of Labour collusion with ruling-class attempts to sabotage Britain's exit from the EU", it was terrible, even by CPB-*Morning Star* standards.

The statement opens by quoting James Connolly's famous prediction that the partition of Ireland would mean a "carnival of reaction" and sought to apply it to Sunak's attempt to ease friction on the British border in Ireland and to Ukraine's military resistance to the Russian invasion ("the EU's Borrell, Nato's Stoltenberg and the Zelenskyy government are upping the ante with tanks, fighter jets and so on").

Strangely, Mr Nelson, while denouncing partition in Ireland, seems to be very much in favour of it in Ukraine. Even the ritual token "condemnation"



of the invasion, that usually appears in *Morning Star* (and Stop the War) coverage, is absent and not a single criticism of Putin is to be found in the statement. In fact, the people of Ukraine are blamed for provoking the war "in 2014, following the Maidan coup d'état and the ousting of... elected president Viktor Yanukovich."

Between denouncing the easing of tensions in Ireland and expressing sympathy for Russian "intervention" bringing "respite" to "the long-suffering people of eastern Donbass", Mr Nelson turned his fire on the "secret 'Brexit Summit'" (so secret that the *Observer* of 12 February carried a detailed report

on it) which according to the *Morning Star* (and the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *GB News*, etc) was intended to "sabotage Britain's exit from the EU".

Except that it wasn't. Even Mr Nelson's own statement acknowledges that "the organisers stated that Britain rejoining the EU was not on the agenda": ah, but it's more sinister than that, you see. The organisers went on to say that "there is also clear European as well as British strategic interest in a productive and closer relationship" – this, warns Mr Nelson, "makes clear the intended direction of travel", threatening the "national sovereignty restored by the Brexit vote."

So there you have it: the politics of the CPB and *Morning Star* laid bare: for the hardest possible Brexit, opposition in principle to co-operation with the EU and thinly veiled support for Putin's invasion of Ukraine – a "carnival of reaction" indeed.

The report closes with a call for a "realignment of the left" and many of us would surely agree with that: a "realignment" that breaks decisively with the filthy politics of neo-Stalinism.

Lineker

Quite correctly, the *Morning Star* has given support to Gary Lineker and his defence of asylum seekers. The paper correctly noted (editorial March 9) that "Braverman admits she thinks it more likely than not her plans breach the European Convention on Human Rights, which we as a country are obliged to respect: she doesn't care."

The Convention and the European Court than upholds it are not part of the EU, but have clearly been in the sights of the Brexiteers throughout their anti-EU campaign, and it was obvious that the logic of Brexit was to leave the Convention. What a pity that the Brexiteers' leftist useful idiots at the CPB/*Morning Star* couldn't see that. □

Religion out of schools!

By Simon Nelson

An incident in Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield in which a copy of the Quran was unintentionally damaged has again brought into focus the undue influence of and deference to religious figures in schools.

After losing a dare a 14 year old student brought in a copy of the Quran and read from it outside. When the student was messing about with friends afterwards they dropped it, scuffing a page. Some Muslims consider this to be a desecration of the literal word of God and therefore blasphemous. Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) has not had blasphemy laws since 2008. Despite this, the boy and his friends were suspended and have now re-

ceived death threats.

More alarmingly a local mosque, community leaders, and at least two councillors have played an appalling role. Cllr Usman Ali (Labour) is reported by the National Secular Society as saying the incident was a "serious provocative action which needs to be dealt with urgently by all the authorities." More disturbingly Cllr Akef Akbar (Independent, elected as Tory) held a press conference at the Jamia Masjid Swafia alongside the Imam and West Yorkshire Police in which the mother of the boy who dropped the book apologised profusely for her son's actions, citing his autism as a reason he may not have realised the consequences of his behaviour. She also asked that

no-one is prosecuted or gets into trouble for making death threats against her son, as what he had done was extremely serious even if he didn't realise. She looked scared.

At the same press conference a local Imam said, "[A]ny Muslim in Wakefield, Halifax, where I'm from, Bradford, Dewsbury, United Kingdom, or outside the United Kingdom, will never tolerate the disrespect of the holy Quran... We will sacrifice our lives for it... Had it been, for example, a teacher who had disrespected the holy Quran, had it been, let's say, an adult that had thrown the holy Quran, then the matter would be different. We probably wouldn't be sitting in the [mosque] right now. We'd probably be standing

outside that school and voicing our concerns."

In response the Home Secretary, writing in *The Times* has said new guidance will be issued to schools about dealing with supposed "blasphemy" and confirming that there are no laws against alleged or real blasphemy.

But the schools Minister Nick Gibb has been less clear, apparently supporting the headteacher's decision to suspend the pupils, while again reiterating there are no blasphemy laws.

The headteacher has said that while the book remained intact that the decision to suspend was to show that "their actions did not treat the Quran with the respect it should have... and we will be work-

ing with them to ensure they understand why their actions were unacceptable."

This is a matter that should never have gone beyond students being told to stop messing about. The undue influence of religion even in nominally secular state schools must be opposed. Socialists must stand for secular education where the freedom to blaspheme is absolutely guaranteed. Religion out of schools! □

Eric Lee

Eric Lee is pausing his column for some weeks because of the work he has to prepare the LabourStart Global Solidarity [conference](#) on 28-30 April. □

Behind the far-right outcry on “15 minute cities”



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Arson attacks on street bollards, vandalised wooden planters, a two thousand strong demonstration and a question in parliament claiming international socialist conspiracy: the mundane world of urban planning has become the unlikely rallying point for the post-Covid far right.

According to the conspiracy theory, three unrelated urban planning initiatives – low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), low emission zones (LEZs) and the “15 minute city” – are part of a nefarious plan of shady elites to restrict everyone’s movement to within 15 minutes walking distance of their home.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods were first introduced in Walthamstow in 2014 and have now spread to other parts of London and other cities. The reason is that sat-navs have transformed the way people drive. Rat-runs once known only to locals have been opened up to anyone with a smartphone. Between 1994 and 2020 urban traffic on minor roads increased 36%.

LTNs mean locals often have to drive a few more minutes to get to their homes, but residential streets are quieter, less polluted and safer. Polling suggests large majorities like these schemes once established.

Low emission zones, such as London’s recently extended ULEZ, are designed to reduce air pollution by charging older polluting cars and larger vehicles



to access parts of the city. Air pollution scientist Gary Fuller found that the first ULEZ extension reduced air pollution by 21% across the capital, with greater reductions inside the ULEZ area.

Worldwide air pollution claims seven million lives a year, and 90% of people on the planet live in areas where air pollution exceeds WHO guidelines. Transport contributes over a third of nitrous dioxide pollution and one sixth of particulate matter pollution, leading to a wide range of health conditions including cognitive difficulties, heart and lung disease and cancer.

ULEZ is of course a blunt instrument. Financial support to switch cars is very limited, and it penalises workers who have been pushed out to the suburbs with poor public transport links. Although it has reduced air pollution, rich people, who will not miss the £12.50 charge, can still pollute our air with impunity.

The “15-minute city” is an idea developed by Paris-based academic Carlos Moreno and has implemented to a greater or lesser extent in Melbourne, Utrecht and elsewhere. He advocates

dense cities where you are never more than 15 minutes walk or cycle from shops, the GP, leisure facilities, schools and work. It is designed to make city life less stressful, less alienating and simply reduce commuting time.

For the far-right conspiracy theorists, these three initiatives are a prelude to “climate lockdowns” where an increasingly authoritarian eco-state will prevent people leaving their 15 minute zones. This system of open concentration camps will be maintained by the surveillance cameras that currently enforce LTNs and LEZs.

The small wave of protest emerged from the Covid-denial and anti-lockdown movement, and unites petro-head motorists with organised fascists. Paralleling its Covid-denialist forebear, this movement believes that concerns about climate change and air pollution are just more ruses by power-crazed elites to restrict their freedoms.

Fizzle

Probably the protests will soon fizzle out. Urban planning is generally better than its opposite, unplanned anarchic capitalist development, and people are bothered by having to breathe toxic air. But as the ecological crisis deepens we can expect more of this paranoid far-right agitation

It is in its way a symptom of a profound lack of freedom, democracy and control over our lives and our cities. The people mobilising to defend their rights to pollute our air and drive wherever they please are defending what little power they have.

For almost everyone, a car is the most powerful machine that we can ever

hope to own. All the most powerful machines, including the giant earth-moving equipment that constantly remakes our cities, are the private property of the capitalist class who create an urban environment to suit their own purposes. With this power, they make our cities places of dispossession, exclusion and petty injunctions.

But another city is possible. Ever since the earliest farmers were able to produce more agricultural product than they themselves needed, humans have built cities. The city is the social and geographical concentration of our surplus product. In this sense, as sociologist Robert Parks says, the city is our “most consistent, and on the whole [our] most successful attempt to remake the world [we] live in more after [our] heart’s desire” (quoted by David Harvey in *Rebel Cities*).

But control of the surplus lies with the ruling class, whose “heart’s desire” is to create dirty, miserable cities that squeeze the life out of their workers to create playgrounds and money-making opportunities for the rich. Whatever good intentions councils project on these urban planning initiatives, they will be felt by at least by a part of the population as just another bureaucratic imposition.

The far-right reaction seeks to defend only the petty freedoms of the motorist, whilst leaving all the big machinery and the real power in capitalist hands. Against this we need to fight for collective democratic control of the city, so that we can use the surplus that we create through our collective labour to remake the world according to our heart’s desire. □

Ukrainian socialists speak in UK

By Dan Katz

Brie and Olenka, two young socialist feminists and members of the Ukrainian left party, Sotsialny Rukh (Social Movement), recently toured the UK speaking at meetings and talking to activists.

The comrades have been hosted by Workers’ Liberty and have addressed meetings in Sheffield, Nottingham, Liverpool and Brighton. Along the way they have discussed with Labour politicians, feminist activists, journalists and trade unionists.

Workers’ Liberty believe it is important to listen to the authentic voice of the left in Ukraine, which has been little-heard in the UK. The Ukrainian left and unions are

unanimous in their support for Ukraine’s war of self-defence against Russian imperialism, while also fighting to defend Ukrainian workers against Ukraine’s capitalist class.

Brie and Olenka were shocked by opposition to arming Ukraine voiced by some on the British left, and spoke with passion about the need to help Ukraine fight. The comrades convinced some in their audiences that the left’s obsession with saying no when NATO says yes, and denying Ukraine the means to fight Russian occupation, is wrong.

On 8 March Brie spoke at a Ukraine solidarity meeting at Women’s TUC conference in London. Brie and Olenka met Campaign Group La-

bour MPs in Parliament.

A reception held at the Bread and Roses, south London was attended by 60 people. A Syrian activist told us that Syrians understood very well the problem with Putin, as Russian planes had helped Assad stabilise the disgusting Syrian regime.

The comrades also addressed a packed, enthusiastic International Women’s Day event in London, and Belarusian feminists spoke alongside them. □

•Ukrainian background socialist scholar and activist Marko Bojcun has died. Condolences to family, friends and comrades. We interviewed Marko on the eve of the invasion of Ukraine – see bit.ly/markobojcun

Students rally to India solidarity

By Mohan Sen

Perhaps 170 people attended India Labour Solidarity’s showing of the first half of BBC documentary *India: The Modi Question* at SOAS university in London last month. For the second half on 7 March, 70 came despite very bad weather.

There was a lively discussion – over three hours! – including around an issue also raised at the first showing: how much the Modi regime represents a clear break from what existed in India before 2014, and how much a deepening and development.

The documentary, which indicts the Hindu-nationalist regime and exposes Narendra Modi’s responsibility for anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, has been banned

in India. Students in particular have faced repression for trying to show it. So the SOAS events were on one level demonstrations of solidarity.

The second event also heard from three speakers – UCL academic Laila Kadiwal, who writes about the relationship between gender, caste and religion, particularly in regards to India’s Muslims; Kashmiri legal scholar and activist Mirza Saaib Bég; and, from India by Zoom, Safoora Zargar, a Muslim student activist imprisoned while pregnant during the 2019-20 protests against anti-Muslim changes to citizenship laws – and still suffering persecution.

Alongside its other activities, India Labour Solidarity will be working with supporters at SOAS to organise further film showings and discussions. □

• More on ILS: bit.ly/inlabsol

Trying to revive the community



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Around International Women's Day, Workers' Liberty organised a speaker tour of socialist feminists Brie and Olenka to speak about their life and work in Ukraine. They spoke to meetings in London, Liverpool, Sheffield, Nottingham and Brighton. They also met with women trade unionists at the Women's TUC and with MPs in Parliament.

Brie spoke to *Solidarity*.

I didn't want to leave Kyiv, but I relocated to another neighbourhood as I used to live close to the Ministry of Defence. The area without military facilities where I moved to was eventually shelled by the Russians, although there is little talk about it. I was worried that the shelling would lead to power cuts,

so I had to trek up to the seventh floor on foot. It was hard both for me and my elderly dog. We could constantly hear explosions as the air defence system was operational. It was a huge source of stress for us. I would only go outside for two or three minutes to walk the dog near the house while my brother held the door.

During air raids, we sought refuge in shelters, and I am grateful to those who allowed us in and reacted normally to a person with a large dog. After I left Kyiv, the kindergarten where we usually took shelter came under fire. My mum and I decided to leave the city when we finally managed to fill up the car. We were at the petrol station when the air raid alarm went off, and we had to wait for it to reopen. Suddenly, we heard a loud explosion and felt a shock wave from a shell that hit somewhere nearby. It was terrifying not being able to see anything and not knowing if the next shell would hit us. I turned to my mum and told her I couldn't live here anymore, and the next day we left Kyiv.

The road was very difficult and took about 30 hours. On the way, in Vinnytsia, strangers kindly offered us a place to stay and also treated the dog very well. Later we reached the Lviv region and settled in Stryi. Life there was calm, almost nothing happened. We were lucky to find a place to live that didn't cost much. I did not know if I would have a job, it was not clear what would happen next. After living in Stryi for seven months, I returned to Kyiv in October.

The war has reduced activism. Feminist Solution and I are going to try to revive the community. On 8 March, in collaboration with the Feminist Lodge, we're organising a charity event where feminist musicians of various genres will perform. All proceeds from the event will be donated to the 93rd Brigade, where our comrades are serving. They are currently on a mission in the Bakhmut direction; they need to repair vehicles and are in great need of drones.

It's strange to hear discussions sug-

gesting that anti-militarism necessitates withholding armed assistance from Ukraine. While, as someone with anti-militarist sentiments, I generally support the notion that there should be no weapons in principle, we cannot advocate for this while Russians are killing our military and civilians.

I am also frustrated by the topic of negotiations. There are often Western opinions that Ukrainians simply do not want to sit down and talk. I believe that this format of resolving the situation is currently impossible. There were negotiations at the beginning of the full-scale offensive, but during these negotiations, Russia was shelling our cities, so what kind of negotiations are we talking about?

We need weapons to defend our people, the civilian population. If you want us all to be killed, then yes, we don't need weapons for that. Ukraine is now fighting for the war to end, and we have no other way but to deter Russian aggression. □

Firefighters' pay debate: Take risks, push the envelope



Letter

Jack Horner (*Solidarity* 664) rightly states that the pay offer the Fire Brigades Union has put to its members, with a recommendation to accept, "will likely be a real-terms pay cut for 2022-23."

The offer is a significantly smaller pay cut than the ones initially proposed. It seems

highly likely the offer will be accepted, and probably by a large majority. That is no sell out, and acceptance would represent, if hardly a "victory", then a respectable score-draw. Nevertheless, for revolutionary socialist trade unionists to positively recommend acceptance of pay cuts, however small, is a serious enough matter to require special considerations.

Horner concludes that there is (or was) no prospect of winning any improvements through strikes, deeming the

offer "final", because "there are no signs of extra money". But many trade unionists have experience of disputes where employers say their offer is "full and final", and that no extra funding is available, only to miraculously discover some when placed under the pressure of industrial action, not just the unenacted potential for it represented by a ballot mandate. Of course, nothing is guaranteed. Class struggle involves a significant amount of risk-taking. But against the

backdrop of the most significant upsurge in workers' struggle for a generation and a resounding mandate in hand, there was surely a case for erring on the side of risk rather than caution.

If the FBU leadership calculated that an effort to build opposition to the offer and mobilise for action would have backfired so catastrophically that it would have wrought irreparable damage to union organisation, acceptance might be seen as a necessity to preserve the union itself. But the conditions that would have to be in place to justify such a calculation would surely not have produced such a resounding vote for strikes in the first place.

Horner dismisses the idea that the wider strike wave should have played any part in the assessment. For sure, attempting to overcome the challenges of a dispute in a given sector by abstractly stressing the interests of the wider class struggle is folly. But part of the role of socialists in the labour movement is to seek opportunities to generalise disparate industrial disputes into a class-wide fightback.

That is not now an abstract matter. Each of the current disputes is substantially bound up with the fate of the others.

Across-the-board coordination and escalation will be required for any of the disputes to win. Any group of workers settling for below-inflation offers creates downward pressure in all other disputes. Do other workers have no right to appeal to firefighters to say: "Join us"?

What is the positive content of Horner's "hard-nosed", pragmatic realism? Workers who have voted overwhelmingly to strike can not be persuaded to actually do so now an improved offer has been made (even though it's still a pay cut); striking would achieve nothing anyway; the biggest wave of action for 40 years is "overstated" and probably in decline, so firefighters should cut their losses; and anyone who thinks otherwise is a "posturing" "toy-town syndicalist".

Could firefighters have won an improved offer by rejecting the real-terms pay cut and striking for more? We'll never know. But in a labour movement still very much dominated by pragmatic realism of a thoroughly conservative type, the instinct of socialists should always be to seek ways to push the envelope. □

Ollie Moore, London

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/fbu-pay. A further response from Jack Horner: bit.ly/2horner

Legal regulation of drugs



Letter

I am sure many supporters of Workers' Liberty would agree with John Smithee's sensible call (*Solidarity* 665) for legal regulation of all drugs. Drug-taking is a victimless crime and prohibition causes all manner of social harm, not least ceding a multi-billion pound world market to organised crime.

Many non-addictive and relatively harmless drugs, like psilocybin mushrooms and MDMA, are illegal whereas alcohol and tobacco are highly

addictive and very harmful. There is some evidence that humans have taken mind-altering substances since the Stone Age and like music or dance it appears common to all forms of human society and culture. Drug policy is deeply racialised and black and ethnic minority people are far more likely to be criminalised than white people. Prohibition has not prevented use.

Obviously too much of anything is a bad thing. Successful working-class movements have tended to have taken active steps against heavy drink and drug cultures. Some drugs are addictive,

but addicts are best treated with the care and support of healthworkers and trained specialists rather than police and prisons. Prohibition also frustrates research into the potential health-benefits of these substances.

Workers' Liberty does not make it a priority to campaign on this issue and has not formal policy but I think this short summary is reflective of the occasional discussions we have had over the years. More of that discussion can be found by searching the Workers Liberty website. □

Stuart Jordan,
London

Why junior doctors are striking

By Grace Allport

Between 13 and 16 March tens of thousands of junior doctors in England, members of the British Medical Association (BMA), are striking over pay. Manchester-based BMA activist Grace Allport spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity.

Our first strike starts early on Monday 13 March and ends early on Thursday 16th. We're asking all junior doctors – all qualified doctors in training or similar – to strike. There are 56,000 junior doctors in the BMA in England, out of 183,000 BMA members in total – though of course some members won't strike and some non-members will.

Junior doctors are mostly in their mid-to-late 20s. We provide most out-of-hours cover and we do it more cheaply than other staff. If our work is covered by more senior doctors, for instance consultants, and other highly trained medical staff, that will be much more expensive for employers.

It's a somewhat different situation from other industries – we're not saying no one should cover any of the work we'd normally do. But they will have to prioritise treatment saving life and limb over elective procedures.

Other doctors and NHS workers who are on strike when we are need to think carefully about what they're qualified and safe to do. However you judge the motivations behind it, the idea that's done the rounds that medical students



could substitute for us is not appropriate or safe. It's also a bit nonsensical, since a lot of what they do will have to be checked by others. Lastly, while medical students are not well off and covering during strikes might be tempting, a lot of them are in the BMA and for obvious reasons have a very immediate interest in the success of our fight.

Our central demand is "pay restoration" – for real-terms pay to be restored to, and rise above, the level it was at in 2008 when it started to fall. Particularly after 10% inflation in the last year, that's a big amount – we're proposing a 35% increase to push back from a 28% real-terms cut. We don't necessarily expect that this year, but we want a real-terms increase combined with a clear time-frame for full restoration. We also want an agreement on preventing any future declines relative to inflation and cost-of-living.

At the moment junior doctors are

generally on £29,000, which on paper at least is about £14 per hour. With small uplifts for working weekends and nights, maybe £30,000 or a bit more.

We had to organise to win the pay restoration policy in the BMA. It was controversial, but not as controversial as we expected. We won the argument at the junior doctors conference and then at the ARM [Annual Representative Meeting, the BMA's national conference] as a policy for all members. Of course it's a relevant idea for much wider layers of workers, and hopefully success for us will inspire others to make similar demands.

Clarity about demands is one thing we've tried to learn from the 2015-16 dispute. We've learned to keep our demands clear and simple.

I think there have been lessons learnt about other issues too, including how the government operates. In 2015-16 they asked us to cancel action to allow negotiations. This time they've already made that request, and we've said no. We've also learnt about the problems with multi-year pay deals that have no mechanism to guarantee real-terms pay rises.

There are clearly negative lessons from last time, but I think the positive one is that we got concessions despite the problems. If we're united, organised and determined we can win much bigger demands.

Given all the problems the government has had, I think there's certainly

quite a bit of possibility for decisive strike action to shift them. Many of us at least are going in with our eyes open that a couple of days here and there won't be enough. That's why we're starting with three days, which no other health union has done. I believe we will need to escalate.

The question of additional NHS funding to cover pay rises hasn't been made explicit in the BMA's demands for the dispute. In general of course we argue for more funding. I would be strongly opposed to bigger pay rise coming out of existing NHS budgets.

One thing in terms of supporting us is understanding and challenging the lies being pushed – that we all drive our Ferraris to work for a few hours a week. The reality is that many of my junior doctor colleagues are seriously struggling, doing a very hard job for £30,000 a year, after racking up £100,000 of debt. In any case, no workers should have their pay cut.

We want people to join us on the picket lines. □

The book cover is red with white text. It says "CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM ON THE LEFT" in large letters, and "ARGUMENTS FOR SOCIALISTS" below it. The author's name "DANIEL RANDALL" is at the bottom.

For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, **£9.99** □ bit.ly/shop-wl

National Union of Students: don't disaffiliate!

By Michael Baker

The Tuck report into anti-semitism in the National Union of Students (NUS) has led to a wave of student-led attempts to disaffiliate their university student unions from the organisation. In Warwick, Northumbria, Oxford, and UCL, motions have been submitted recently or will be shortly. Sheffield University holds an annual vote on reaffiliation, which is also coming up. Warwick voted to disaffiliate, while Oxford narrowly voted to remain.

The arguments to leave vary. Some opt for a misguided left-wing argument (the Manches-

ter campaign is arguing that the NUS has never done anything to support their activism, but has taken credit for the student left's successes). Some on the left also argue that the left should play no part in the NUS after its unjust sacking of president Shaima Dallali over the then-unpublished contents of the Tuck report. Others argue to leave as a direct response to the report itself, writing off the NUS as an inherently anti-semitic organisation.

Others still give explicitly right-wing arguments: the NUS is 'not worth this SU's value for money', or that a new replacement for the NUS can be made that is more tailored

to the needs of particular universities or groups of universities – the Russell Group, for example.

We oppose the summary sacking of Dallali with no democratic process, but that is not a reason to reject the findings of the largely even-handed [Tuck report](#). The NUS has drawn together an action plan for implementing the changes in the report: the best way we can ensure this is acted on is by remaining in the organisation and applying pressure via the election of left-wing NUS delegates that fight for internal democracy and accountability.

The NUS is the only existing national structure for engag-

ing in student politics – for that reason alone, students should remain affiliated to it. There is no reason to believe that a breakaway alternative would sway anywhere near a majority of the 400 institutions involved in the NUS.

The problems within the NUS reflect broader issues, of which antisemitism is just one. The NUS suffers from very low engagement (which allows the paid staff to act as they please), a lack of internal democratic structures and a top-down NGO or advocacy model. But the answer is to fix it. If the NUS continues to be the body that negotiates with the government on issues like

maintenance loans and cost of living payouts, individual student unions will still be affected by NUS negotiations, but will have no say in how the decisions are made.

The NUS argues that most student bodies have received more from cost-of-living and pandemic-relief payouts in recent years than any student union has paid for affiliation. While true, that is accepting fundamentally conservative terms of debate. Student unions should not disengage, but engage meaningfully in collective student representation, with higher ambitions. □

Clara Zetkin, founder of In

By Max Shachtman

Clara Zetkin, with the German delegation at the International Socialist Women's Conference of 1910, was responsible for establishing International Women's Day as a yearly event. This obituary of Zetkin (1857-1933) by Max Shachtman tells us more about her life and politics.

For more than a quarter of a century, her name was prominently associated throughout the Socialist world with the movement to win the working class woman to the standard of revolution. To her, more than to any other single force, goes the credit for the rich educational and cultural work among proletarian women which was carried on for decades in Germany. Virtually by her own efforts, she founded the socialist women's periodical *Gleichheit* (Equality) and edited it uninterruptedly from 1892 to 1917, when the social patriots summarily removed her from the journal which had become synonymous with her own name. If a socialist woman's movement came into existence in Germany, distinct and separate from the feminist and other bourgeois movements, it was in no small measure due to the unremitting labours of her brain, her pen, her tongue. Little wonder then that the Executive Committee of the Communist International, after its foundation, confided to her the direction of Communist activity among the working women throughout the world.

Her activities, however, were not confined to this specific field. Clara Zetkin was a party woman, above everything. And in the party, she stood unwaveringly on the side of that small band of warriors who constituted the Marxian group from the very outset of the internal struggle. She stood elbow to elbow with the Left wing of Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring in their fight, made in common with Kautsky, up to a certain point, against the revisionist program of Bernstein, David and Co. which finally devoured Bebel's party.

Opposed the Social Patriots

The solemn decisions on the question of imperialist war adopted by the Congresses of the Socialist International and of the German Party retained their significance for her even after August 4, 1914. Standing at the head of the Wuerttemberg party organisation, together with Crispian and Westmeyer, she vehemently opposed the treacherous action of the Reichstag fraction in voting for war credits, and demanded that it adhere to the decisions of the International. Nor did she rest content with a formal gesture. When Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring issued the

first number of *Die Internationale* in April 1915, delivering those crushing blows at chauvinists and Kautskyans alike, the name of Clara Zetkin was to be found on this roll of honour together with Karski, Jogiches, Thalheimer and the other internationalists who subsequently founded the Spartakusbund. Like Rosa and countless others, she was thrown into prison during the war, to the great relief of the Kaiser's socialists. An illegally distributed Spartacus leaflet of that time commemorated the contrast between the two camps in the social democracy by showing three pictures: Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin, each in her prison cell for anti-war activity, and Scheidemann, Noske, David and other social-imperialists photographed at a discreet distance behind the front, fraternising with army officers in front of their quarters; the pictures were eloquent enough without comment – nor did the leaflet supply them with any.

To Clara Zetkin falls the distinction of having initiated the first successful international socialist conference after the outbreak of the war and the collapse of the Second International. Upon her own responsibility, the international socialist women's conference was convened in Berne, Switzerland, in March 1915, with representatives from all the important belligerents on both sides. There were not many in those black days of treachery and reaction who were ready to speak and act for internationalism, but among them was to be found the already aging but tireless German revolutionist. At that time, it is true, she did not yet stand on the side of the Bolsheviks. The latter's delegates to the Berne Conference, Inessa Armand and N.K. Krupskaya, were the isolated extreme Left wing, whose resolution to the Conference, edited by Lenin, was overwhelmingly rejected because it put the question of the break with all patriots and Centrists, in the sharpest and most unmistakable manner. Not even Zetkin was at that time prepared to consummate the rupture. But even though Lenin submitted the ambiguous and hesitant decisions of Berne to an acrid criticism, the Conference was nevertheless the first European milestone along that road, marked later on



Clara Zetkin (left) with Rosa Luxemburg (right), 1910

by Zimmerwald and Kienthal, which led directly to the founding of the Communist International in Moscow in April 1919.

The first years of the Russian revolution and the Communist International undoubtedly marked the high water mark of Clara Zetkin's development and activity. The great period of stormy revolutionary flood brought out all that was best and most positive in the Communist leaders of the time. Despite her years, she put at the disposal of the German and international movements those talents which distinguished her. A fervid temperament, a sincerity of devotion, kept alive in her a luminous flame which dimmed only towards the last. An abyss lay between her and that legion of others, fawning careerists and stock-market revolutionists, who came to the Comintern in its early years like so many tourists and soon left it to write apologies for their momentary aberration.

Her gift of oratory, warm with a rich inspiring prose, was not always combined with the quality of profound and original political thinking. In this respect, she had leaned very heavily upon the sturdier and surer Rosa Luxemburg throughout the years before and during the world war. The political firmness and strength which she gained from this heavy association did not, unfortunately, grow in the years that followed.

The young Communist Party of Germany was cruelly deprived of its central staff immediately after the war. Left without the gifted brain of Luxemburg, the popular and tireless revolutionary spirit of Liebknecht, the organising talents of Tychko, the leadership of the party slipped by default into the hands of an inferior stratum of the Spartacists [Spartacists], whose qualities were not

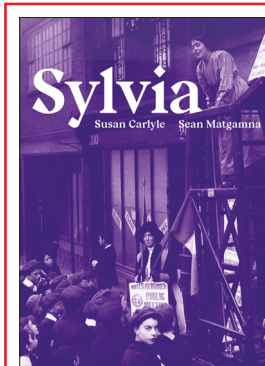
exactly enhanced by the accretion of the motley Left wing that joined it after the splitting of the Independent Socialists at Halle. She who had once, drawn her strength from the wells of a Luxemburg, now turned to Paul Levi, who proved to be more skilled in the collection of rare pottery than in the leadership of a revolutionary party....

In taking her position in the instructive internal disputes of the Comintern, Clara Zetkin did not, alas! always distinguish between the revolutionary Left wing and the adventurist or infantile ultra-Left.

In her defence of Levi against Bela Kun, Pepper and Froelich, as in her defence of Serrati against Bordiga, there was a noticeable distinction between her position and the position, let us say, of the Lenin who so demonstratively proclaimed himself a member of the "Right wing" at the Third Congress of the International. As became even more apparent in later years, Zetkin was unable to adjust herself to the requirements of the revolutionary epoch. Her interventions against ultra-Leftism were essentially actuated by a distinct leaning to the Right.

This weakness she revealed most tragically throughout the whole period of the October 1923 struggle in Germany. Trotsky's arguments that it was possible and necessary to set a date for the insurrection and to orient the strategy and tactics of the party towards it – that is, his application of the experiences gained in the Russian October to the German situation – she regarded as a species of Blanquist heresy. The protests of the militant and Left wing sectors of the party against the dilatory and headless policy of the Brandler Central Committee always encountered her ardent resistance. Even after the catastrophe, she came to the defense of Brandler, Thalheimer and Radek, not in the spirit of placing the responsibility on the international leadership, where it belonged, but as an apology for the calamitous course of the Right wing combined with a bitter attack upon the Left.

She was linked with Brandler from the earliest days of the Spartakusbund, and the Left wing socialist movement before it. And those bonds were strengthened by her violent reaction against those whom Zinoviev, Stalin and Bucharin helped to impose upon the German party as its leadership in place of the discredited Right wing Central Committee. The characterless ultra-Leftists of the type of Ruth Fischer, A. Maslow, Katz, Schwartz and the camarilla around them, aroused her contempt and deepest mistrust. If she reconciled herself somewhat to the post-1923 leadership,



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

International Women's Day

it was not due to the change of heart on her side. Rather the contrary. After the removal of ultra-Leftist leadership in 1925, the party and the International engaged upon that protracted course towards opportunism in which Clara Zetkin felt herself far more at ease than during the period of the dry sectarian ponderosity of Maslow's literary effusions and the wind and fury of Fischer's clamorous oratory. Brandler and Thalheimer, virtually marooned in Moscow up to that time, commenced a bolder factional activity inside the party and for a time it appeared that the pitiful Thaelmann leadership was to be "solidified" by the rehabilitation in the party of the Right wing exiles. The latter counted on Zetkin's support, nor was it withheld.

It was only when the dawn of the "third period" sealed the fate of the Right wing for a second, and apparently last time, and the expulsion of Brandler, Thalheimer and their supporters was consummated, that all hope was abandoned. The ultra-Leftist wrecking crew, considerably inferior to the group of Maslow and Fischer, which was given the helm of party leadership, practically completed the elimination of Clara Zetkin from all active participation in it. It cannot be said that it was an event entirely distasteful to her. She had after all once worked by the side of a Rosa Luxemburg, a Franz Mehring, a Karl Liebknecht. Even in later years, her party had at least been under the leadership of a Paul Levi who, no matter how much his defects impeded and finally put a stop to his political growth, nevertheless had a head on his shoulders, as Lenin said.

By this time the regime in the International had reached a point where she could no longer speak her mind openly. The old militant no longer appeared on the tribune of the party or the International. Her bitter protests against the treatment of Brandler and his friends, against the abominations of the party leadership, were uttered only in private letters exchanged with carefully selected confidantes.

Sympathetic to L.O. at Start

Her sympathies for the Russian Opposition suffered an even more ignominious end. In 1923 the parties of the Comintern had not yet been fully "educated" in anti-Trotskyism. The first open attack of the septumvirate upon Trotsky caused a distinct uneasiness in the International. The Polish party protested against the campaign; in France, the most prominent party leaders expressed themselves similarly; in Germany, the Moscow apparatus encountered, if not a resistance, then at least a reluctance to join the pack. At that time, Clara Zetkin took no great



Zetkin ~1930

pains to conceal her sympathy with the Opposition. It is true, to be sure, that she did not rally to its political platform. Trotsky's refusal to have Brandler and Thalheimer made the scapegoats for the Zinoviev-Stalin policy in the German October, took the form of a conditional defence of the former which was not unwelcome to Zetkin. In addition, she was not alone among the Right wing elements in the International (Warski was another, for example) who confounded the Opposition's fight for party democracy with their own desires to "loosen a little" the rigid lines of revolutionary Marxian doctrine. When the gap widened between the Opposition and the party bureaucracy, when the program of the former unfolded to its fullest extent, when the precise nature of its attitude towards the Brandlerites became unmistakable – Clara Zetkin's support became lukewarm and then cold. Helplessly ensconced among the tarnishing frescoes that formed the facade of the bureaucracy, she had become a purely decorative figure in the International, her prestige and her authority, with the heroic revolutionary memories attached to them, serving a cynical bureaucracy to conceal its malpractices.

Here was a revolutionist who had been accustomed to speak out fearlessly, to struggle against authority under the greater odds, to swim against the stream in the company of such protean figures as the founders of German Communism. A just cause had always found in her a courageous champion. Even in causes not so just she had never failed to express her convictions. In 1922, at a time when a member of the Comintern could still defend his views even when they were opposed by the most authentic leaders, she protested to Lenin and Trotsky against the death sentence imposed upon the counter-revolutionists of the S. R. party.

But half a decade of Stalinist rule had reduced the Comintern and its leading figures to such a state that a Clara Zetkin, who once found words in behalf of those who had effected the death of

Uritsky and Volodarsky, who had almost assassinated Lenin and blown up Trotsky's military train – could look on in silence while the artificers of the October revolution, the Rakovskys, the Trotskys and hundreds of others, were sent into prison, exile or banishment. But no, not entirely in silence. For with an eye to the renown still attached to her name, the bureaucracy assigned her the task of writing the scurrilous pamphlet for international consumption, in which she demonstrated that the Bolshevik-Leninists were really counter-revolutionists and that the banishment to Turkey of the organiser of the October insurrection was fully justified.

To resist a Lenin and submit to a Stalin – no, it is not some integrating force in the present regime, making for true homogeneity of revolutionary doctrine, that explains such a phenomenon. Such a humiliating fall was the inexorable result of that moral disembowelment to which an oppressive bureaucracy is compelled to resort to its own ranks. What a terrific arraignment of a regime that can preserve itself only at the cost of such unspeakable triumphs!

Silent on Slander of Luxemburg

If she violated her own conscience in a public assault upon the Russian Opposition, she at least maintained silence when others traduced the memory of Rosa Luxemburg. But it was a silence unworthy of one who was fortunate enough to have such a mentor and friend. When Paul Levi was beating a retreat to the social democracy in 1921-1922 by trying to portray Rosa as a Menshevik, Clara Zetkin came to her defence with magnificent vigour, and concluded by pillorying the defamer of the great Eagle. Later, too, even under the Zinovievist dispensation, when a Ruth Fischer was seeking to disseminate the idea that Rosa had been "a syphilis germ in the body of German Communism", Clara Zetkin still found sufficient strength of mind and purpose to excoriate such an abomination. But the triumph of Stalinism has meant not only the physical but the spiritual undermining of the International.

In the last two years, the campaign launched against Rosa Luxemburg exceeded all imaginable bounds. A Kuusinen, a Bela Kun, a Kurt Sauerland, Stalin himself – people who never reached up to the hem of Rosa's skirts – left no mud untouched with which to besmirch her. Hundreds of "red professors" were let loose around the grave of the dead like so many desecrating vultures. The last Lenin-Liebknecht-Luxemburg week was celebrated throughout the official world by poisonous attacks upon Rosa – more elegant in phrase than Ruth

Fischer's, but no less despicable – and hymns of praise to Stalin.

Paralysis of Stalinist Degradation

And Clara Zetkin? In the corridor of the program commission of the Sixth World Congress, another of the old Spartacans, an educated Marxist, Hermann Duncker, almost wept with mortification before his intimates at the idea that the theory of socialism in one country had been inserted in the program of the International. "Must we now vote to include it in the program too?" Yet he voted for it, and did not voice his protest openly. Clara Zetkin must have asked herself a similar question when the detestable campaign was launched against Rosa. But this time, she too voiced no open protest. The peculiar triumph of Stalinism which heralds its own collapse meant for her, as for all revolutionists who failed to choose the alternative of open struggle, a gag in the mouth, a paralysing of the will, a terrible spiritual degradation.

Clara Zetkin was one of the half-dozen Spartacans left in the International, and with her death the best of the living is gone. She embodied in her finest days the link between the pre-war Left wing movement in the social democracy and the International that was reconstituted under the banner of Bolshevism. She brought with her the great tradition of that resolute group that formed itself under the name of the heroic organiser of the slaves' revolts in antiquity.

Is it perhaps symbolic that Clara Zetkin should die just after the ignominious death of the Communist party which she helped to found? The tradition of the Spartacans, however, established in the dark days of the war, is not irrevocable. The new Communist movement in Germany, rising like a phoenix out of the ashes of the dead, will revive all that was glorious in the old tradition and the memory of the old warriors, and enrich it with the struggle for the liberation of all the oppressed. □

• *The Militant*, 22 July 1933. Abridged here, full text bit.ly/cz-ms. Original headline: "The death of comrade Clara Zetkin. A historical appreciation of the great woman revolutionist".

In Defence of Bolshevism

Max Shachtman



Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today, by Max Shachtman, intro by Sean Matgamna. 312 pages **£10** □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Connolly's Marx

Socialism and Religion: the known and the unknowable



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

Perhaps upon no point are the doctrines of Socialism so much misunderstood, and so much misrepresented, as in their relation to Religion. When driven into a corner upon every other point at issue; when from the point of view of economics, of politics, or of morality, he is worsted in argument, this question of Religion invariably forms the final entrenchment of the enemy of Socialism – especially in Ireland.

"But it is opposed to Religion," constitutes the last words, the ultimate shift, of the supporters of capitalism, driven from every other line of defence but stubbornly refusing to yield. "Socialism is Atheism, and all Socialists are Atheists," or "Your Socialism is but a fine name to cover your Atheism in its attack upon the Church;" all these phrases are so commonly heard in the course of every dispute upon the merits or demerits of the Socialist doctrine that we require no apology for introducing them here in order to point their illogical character. So far from it being true that Socialism and Atheism are synonymous terms, it is a curious and instructive fact that almost all the prominent propagandists of Free-thought in our generation have been, and are, most determined enemies of Socialism. The late Charles Bradlaugh, in his time the most aggressive Free-thinker in England, was to the last resolute and uncompromising in his hatred of Socialism; G.W. Foote, the present editor of the *Freethinker*, the national organ of English Secularism, is a bitter enemy of Socialism, and the late Colonel Bob Ingersoll, the chief apostle of Free-thought doctrine in the United States, was well known as an apologist of capitalism.

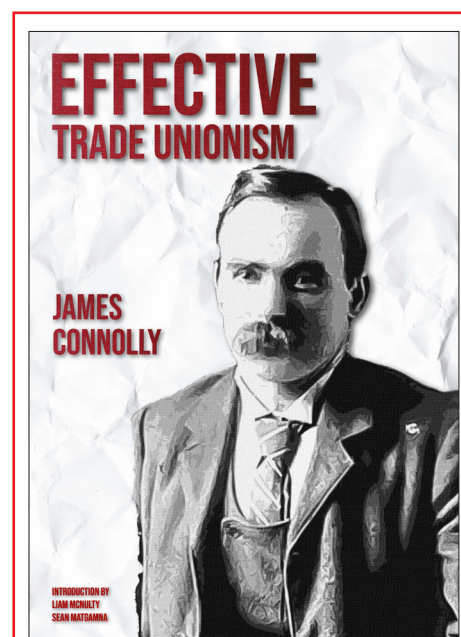
On the continent of Europe many other quite similar cases might be recorded, but those already quoted will suffice, as being those most easily verified by our readers. It is a suggestive and amusing fact that in the motley ranks of the defenders of Capitalism the professional propagandists of Free-thought are comrades-in-arms of His Holiness the Pope; the ill-reasoned and inconclusive Encyclicals lately issued against Socialism make of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church belated camp followers in the armies marching under the banners raised by the agnostic exponents of the individualist philosophy. Obviously, even the meanest intelligence can see that there need be no identity of thought between the Free-thinker as such, and the Socialist as a Socialist. From what then does the popular misconception arise? In the first instance from the interested attempt of the propertied classes to create such a prejudice against Socialism as might deter the working class giving ear to its doctrines – an attempt too often successful; and in the second instance, from a misconception of the attitude of the Socialist party towards the theological dogma in general. The Socialist Party of Ireland prohibits the discussion, of theological or anti-theological questions at its meetings, public or private. This is in conformity with the practice of the chief Socialist parties of the world, which have frequently, in Germany for example, declared Religion to be a private matter, and outside the scope of Socialist action. Modern Socialism, in fact, as it exists in the minds of its leading exponents, and as it is held and worked for by an increasing number of enthusiastic adherents throughout the civilised world, has an essentially material, matter-of-fact foundation. We do not mean that its supporters are necessarily materialists in the vulgar, and merely anti-theological, sense of the term, but that they do not base their Socialism upon any interpretation of the language or meaning of Scripture, nor

upon the real or supposed intentions of a beneficent Deity. They as a party neither affirm or deny those things, but leave it to the individual conscience of each member to determine what beliefs on such questions they shall hold. As a political party they wisely prefer to take their stand upon the actual phenomena of social life as they can be observed in operation amongst us to-day, or as they can be traced in the recorded facts of history. If any special interpretation of the meanings of Scripture tends to influence human thought in the direction of Socialism, or is found to be on a plane with the postulates of Socialist doctrine, then the scientific Socialist considers that the said interpretation is stronger because of its identity

with the teachings of Socialism, but he does not necessarily believe that Socialism is stronger, or its position more impregnable, because of its theological ally. He realises that the facts upon which his Socialist faith are based are strong enough in themselves to withstand every shock, and attacks from every quarter, and therefore while he is at all times willing to accept help from every extraneous source, he will only accept it on one condition, viz., that he is not to be required in return to identify his cause with any other whose discomfiture might also involve Socialism in discredit. This is the main reason why Socialists fight shy of theological dogmas and religions generally: because we feel that Socialism is based upon a series of facts requiring only unassisted human reason to grasp and master all their details, whereas Religion of every kind is admittedly based upon 'faith' in the occurrence in past ages of a series of phenomena inexplicable by any process of mere human reasoning. Obviously, therefore, to identify Socialism with Religion would be to abandon at once that universal, non-sectarian character which to-day we find indispensable to working-class unity, as it would mean that our members would be required to conform to one religious creed, as well as to one specific economic faith – a course of action we have no intention of entering upon as it would inevitably entangle us in the disputes of the warring sects of the world, and thus lead to the disintegration of the Socialist Party.

Socialism, as a party, bases itself upon its knowledge of facts, of economic truths, and leaves the building up of religious ideals or faiths to the outside public, or to its individual members if they so will. It is neither Freethinker nor Christian, Turk nor Jew, Buddhist nor Idolator, Mohammedan nor Parsee – it is only human. □

• *Workers' Republic*, 17 June 1899 (also included in *The New Evangel*)



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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ism, part three

A Political Party of the Workers

By James Connolly

With the advent of an Irish Socialist paper in the labour movement of America will come of necessity a host of questions and questioners upon the attitude of the proprietors of that paper toward the political parties at present in the field for Socialism. Such questions are unavoidable, and it is therefore best that they be faced at once at the outset without delay or equivocation.

Let it be noted therefore that *The Harp* is the official organ of the Irish Socialist Federation [ISF] in America, and that that body was founded with the intention, expressed and desired, of spreading the light of Socialism amongst the working class Irish in this country, and that, recognizing that the existence of two political parties of Socialism has had in the past and has now a confusing effect upon the minds of the American working class, the found-



James Connolly addressing the crowd in Union Square, USA, on May Day in 1908

ers of the Federation recognized that it would be worse than folly to make allegiance to one or the other of these political divisions a test of membership in the newly founded camp of Irish Socialists in America. The Federation is not founded for political action, it is founded for propaganda; it is not in existence to fashion a political machine, it is in existence to present Socialism as a historical development from capitalism and as the only remedy for the wage slavery of the workers. The task of presenting the Socialist side as against the side of the capitalists, with all their powerful allies and weapons, is a big enough job for us without also taking part in the campaigns of slander which form the stock in trade of the American Socialists when they condescend to refer to each other. In their mutual recriminations many wrong things have been said, many right things have been wrongly said, and we are convinced that if American Socialists in general had been more solicitous in finding and emphasizing the points they had in common, and less eager to stretch the importance of the points on which they differed, a great party – great in unity in essentials, great in numbers – might long ere this have been built up in America. And until that party does appear the ISF will confine its work to the making of Socialists; let its recruits when made choose their own political affiliations.

But, it may be said, since the Irish comrades deplore the existing division, have they no suggestion to offer whereby it may be ended? Is it not certain that as you make recruits to Socialism, and those recruits choose their own political affiliations, that in course of time their differing choices will result in bringing into the Federation the disputes which divide Socialists outside? That is true, and therefore it is to our interest as well as in conformity with our desires to find some common ground upon which in our opinion earnest revolutionary Socialists could meet to combine their forces in battle with the common enemy.

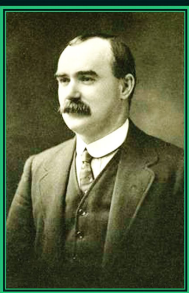
Common ground

The common ground of action we favour is one for which a strong sentiment already exists in the rank and file of both existing parties. It has been adopted and endorsed by practically all the non-English-using federations of Socialists in America, and has therefore strong organized forces already behind it, and it would, as a magnet, draw unto itself all the true proletarian Socialists and weld them into an irresistible force. A common ground of action to be effectual for its purpose cannot emanate from either SP or SLP; it cannot be furnished by unity conferences, no matter how earnest the conferees are; the ghost of all the hatreds and jealousies aroused by the

past years of strife will perpetually rise between the most united unity conference and the realization of its hopes, and, finally, it cannot be realized by an amalgamation of the existing parties. There are too many leaders, save the mark! Too many “saviours of the working class” whose reputations have been built upon disunion; too many petty personal ambitions which might be endangered did the rank and file have an opportunity to know and understand one another; and too much fear that a general reunion might mean a general housecleaning, and the consequent dumping upon the garbage heap of many great lights whose personal predominance is dearer to them than the power of the movement. Some men in the Socialist movement on both sides would rather have a party of ten men who unquestioningly accepted their dictum and called their blind faith “democracy” than a party of half a million whose component elements dared to

continued on page 12 →

Liam McNulty



James Connolly Socialist Nationalist & Internationalist

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

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- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
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→ from page 11

think and act for themselves. Unquestionably the realization of unity must have as its necessary concomitant the acceptance of the fact that the interests of the movement are greater than and superior to the prejudices or rivalries of its leaders.

Economic

What and where, then, is this common ground we have spoken of? As we have already stated, the ISF is pledged to no political party, but this neutrality on the political field is not extended to the economic. There, we believe, an assumption of neutrality would be a crime on our part. Between, on the one hand, the new economic organization, the Industrial Workers of the World, which prepares and organizes the administrative framework of society in the future, and at the same time furnishes the only effective method of resistance against present-day encroachments of the master class, and on the other hand the old-style pure and simple trade unionism of the AF of L with its system of dividing the working class and its professed belief in the identity of interests between Capital and Labour, between

these two economic organizations our choice is as plain and unmistakable as between Socialism and Capitalism; indeed, it is the same proposition presented in different terms. And as we believe that all working class Socialists must realize that their place is in the only real economic organization truly worthy of the name of union, the IWW, so we believe that the same body has it in its power to solve the problem of Socialist unity. On the day that the IWW launches its own political party it will put an end to all excuse for two Socialist parties and open the way for a real and effective unification of the revolutionary forces. To it will flock all the real proletarians, all the loyal-hearted working class whom distrust and suspicion have so long kept divided: it will be the real Political Party of the Workers – the weapon by which the working class will register the decrees which its economic army must and shall enforce.

Division

We do not say this will end forever all fear of the existence of two parties calling themselves Socialists, but it will end all possibility of two revolutionary Socialist parties claiming the allegiance

of the working class at the same moment. Compromisers and schemers will still erect parties to serve their personal ends and satiate their lust for being worshipped; intellectual manikins will still perch themselves upon the shoulders of the workers and imagining their high altitude is the result of transcendent ability on their part will call the world to witness how great they are; but they will be deprived of their power to delude the real revolutionist by the simple fact of the existence of a political party of Socialists dominated

by and resting upon the economic movement of the working class.

This is our hope, our proposed solution of the problem of divided forces, and on the day that that hope is consummated if anyone looks around for the class-conscious Irish workers he will, we believe, find them alert and determined at the head of the fighters. □

• *The Harp*, January 1908

Our videos

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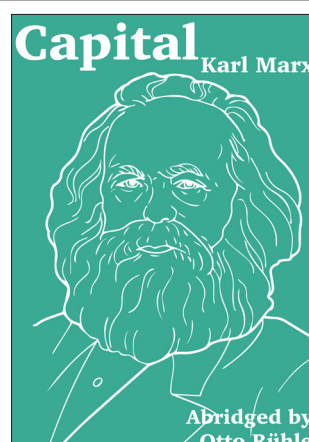
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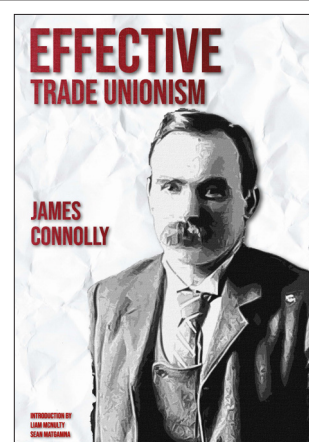
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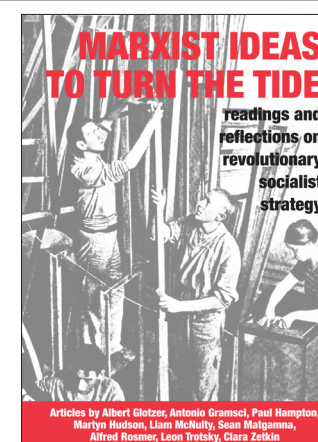
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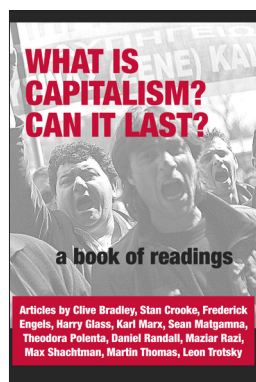
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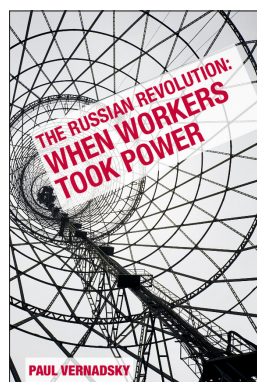
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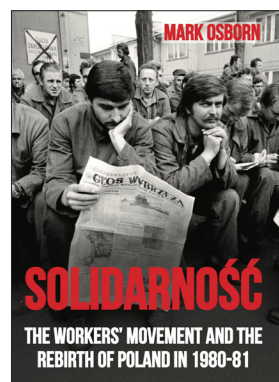
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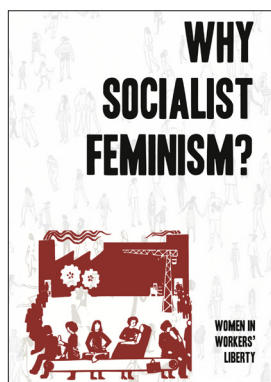
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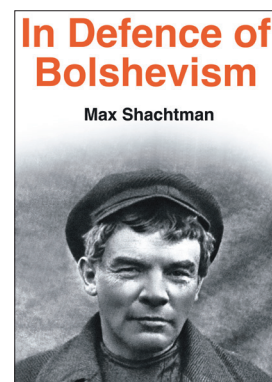
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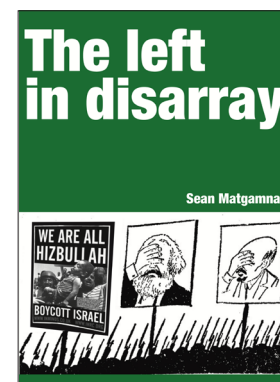
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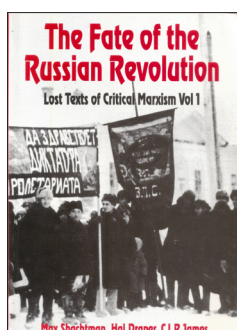
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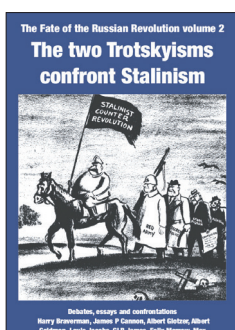
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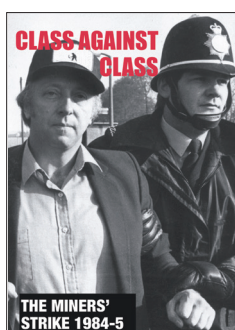
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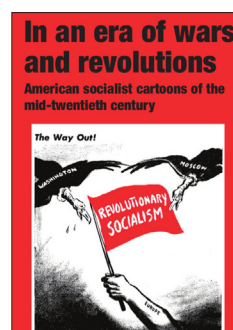
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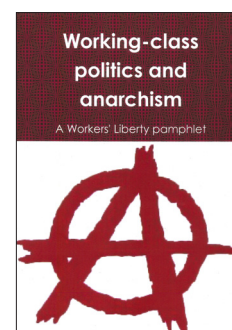
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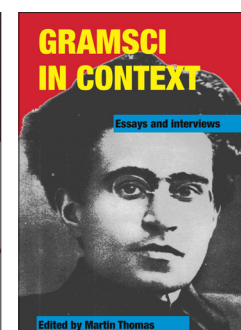
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Indefinite strike plan brings improved offer

By Mark Simon

Over 3,000 bus drivers and more than 200 bus engineers who work for West Midlands Travel were due to start an indefinite strike across the West Midlands on Thursday 16 March. The strike plan produced a last-minute improved offer: workers are voting on it, and if they reject the offer, then the strike starts 20 March.

The ballot for action was a massive step forward for Unite in National Express: the Bus Combine worked with local reps to deliver a 73% turn out and 96% yes vote by the drivers.

West Midlands Travel is wholly owned by National Express and is the largest

bus operator in the West Midlands, providing the vast majority of services in Birmingham, and much of the service in Wolverhampton, Coventry, Walsall, Dudley and West Bromwich. In advance of the strike, Tory Metro Mayor Andy Street has been urging both sides to do a deal! The probable Labour candidate for mayor next year, Richard Parker, has said he wants the buses under public control. By that he does not mean public ownership (which is Unite's demand), but instead a franchising system like Transport for London or the one being introduced by Andy Burnham in Manchester. None of this offers anything to the bus workers

who have seen their wages fall year on year.

Unite's research has shown that on average workers for West Midland Travel lost 6% of their wages in real terms between 2018 and 2021, that's before the impact of 2022's high inflation. West Midlands Travel profit was £71m between 2017 and 2021 (2022 accounts are not available yet). West Midlands Travel's highest paid director got a rise from £156,000 in 2020 to £335,000 in 2021, and the CEO of National Express has averaged an income of £2.6 million a year over the last ten years. The share holders have had their snouts in the trough too, sharing dividends of

£524 million between 2011 and 2019. The dividend for 2022 will cost a further £31 million.

National Express is making a good profit and is a favourite on the stock exchange. They also have massive reserves, enough to make a bid last year for Stagecoach. Like all the bus companies they shared in the more than £2 billion no-strings hand out from the Government over the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. Of course they did not share that with the drivers who worked through Covid surges at great risk.

In recent negotiations driver and engineering reps had already rejected an offer of just over 11%. □

UCU: fight to stop a sell-out

By a UCU member

As *Solidarity* goes to press, members of the University and College Union are about to begin six days of strike, from Wednesday 15 to Wednesday 22 March inclusive. Action was suspended almost a month ago after the joint union leaderships claimed there had been 'significant progress' in talks at ACAS. However, as many activists feared, there is little evidence of that progress now.

The latest statement, issued on 2 March, says simply that

talks continue, and that 'following progress on terms of reference for a review of the HE pay spine, the focus is now on terms of reference covering equality pay gaps, contract types, and workload'. Having cancelled seven days of strike action for 'a period of calm' in negotiations, it looks as if we've essentially got talks about talks.

Meanwhile, employers have said negotiations on pay are over and will impose their offer of an extra 2% pay rise from February (making 5% in total for the second half of this aca-

demic year), and then 3% from August 2023, meaning a total rise of just 8% between August 2022 and 2024. It remains to be seen how many employers will use the 'extenuating circumstances' clause to delay uplifts by up to 11 months.

A further meeting with ACAS is scheduled for 14 March. After February's undemocratic suspension of action, in which the Higher Education Committee, responsible for calling strikes, was not consulted, there is inevitable suspicion about a repeat cancellation. The union leadership have

been focusing on the rebal- lot, with no mention of the strikes in General Secretary Jo Grady's latest social media live appearance.

But no rebal- lot, however good the result, is going to move employers if we don't use that mandate to take action. Branches need to discuss urgently the best local tactics for the summer term, and the central union needs to ensure there is the flexibility to ensure action can be targeted wherever it will hit hardest.

Addressing the UCU branch in Cambridge last week, Jo

Grady appeared to question the effectiveness of a marking and assessment boycott, which had previously been at the heart of her faction's strategy. That grouping, UCU Commons, increased its representation on the National Executive at the expense of UCU Left in the most recent elections, leaving the new committee, which takes office at the end of May following Congress, very tightly balanced. There is now more of a fight than ever to stop a sell-out. □

Scottish teachers vote to accept offer

By James Rink

Members of the EIS teachers' union in Scotland have voted overwhelmingly to accept the latest pay offer proposed by local authority employers and the Scottish Government.

In an online ballot that concluded last Friday, 90% of those voting opted to accept the pay offer. Turnout in the ballot was 82%. The EIS represents 80% of all teachers in Scotland at all grades across all sectors of education.

The offer means that for most teachers their pay will increase by 12.3% by next month in comparison to current pay levels. This includes a 7% increase from April 2022, and a 5% increase from this April.

Teachers will also receive a further

2% increase in pay from January next year, with the next pay settlement then scheduled to be negotiated and payable from August 2024 onwards.

EIS General Secretary Andrea Bradley said: 'it compares favourably with settlements across the public sector, and does provide pay certainty for Scotland's teachers for the next 16 months until the next pay settlement is scheduled to be delivered in August 2024.'

Given the ballot result it is clear that most teachers were prepared to accept but a minority, including many of those most active in the dispute, voted to reject the offer. Their argument was that the politically targeted strikes in the constituencies of key politicians, after a total of five days of national action, were clearly having the impact of forc-

ing concessions from the employers.

Overall the deal represents a significant improvement from the original employers' proposal of 2% from February last year but clearly falls short of the original EIS demand for 10%, which was a lot closer to the actual rate of inflation.

Although there is some disappointment among activists and a feeling that more was possible, there is a general feeling that the EIS is in a lot stronger position as a result of the pay campaign and in particular the success with involving the entire membership in the industrial action campaign. There are clearly lessons to be learned, but much has been achieved in revitalising the union over the last year. □

More online

Cuban feminists arrested

Interrogation for requesting permission to protest: bit.ly/f-cuba

The labour theory of value and Connolly

Both Kane and Connolly get it wrong: bit.ly/ltv-k-c

Estonian life

The second volume of Tammsaare's classic epic is translated: bit.ly/estonia-r

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

CWU: we have to see it through

By a CWU rep

A Royal Mail worker and Communications Workers' Union (CWU) rep spoke to Solidarity

Royal Mail and the CWU have issued a joint statement, with a longer appendix. Royal Mail has paused its "executive action", the unilateral imposition of its planned cuts and restructure, and the joint statement effectively devolves negotiation over these issues down to local level.

It sets a 10 March deadline for local resolution, but this seems ridiculous to me – I can't see how this will happen. Given what Royal Mail has already imposed so far, in many larger workplaces you have well over 100 people displaced from their duties due to the cuts and restructures. How can local negotiation resolve that in a few days?

The negotiations are still to be based on workload levels based on the a particularly quiet "model week" and a 7% cut in traffic on top of that. It therefore feels like moving the deck chairs on the Titanic. If the nature of the cuts themselves hasn't changed, and all we're able to do is negotiate locally over the implementation, I don't know what

we're supposed to do.

There is a feeling of disappointment that, following our resounding vote for further industrial action, the union hasn't done more. I'm not saying people are banging down reps' doors demanding to know when the next strike is, but there was an expectation that we'd follow up the ballot result with further steps to strengthen our hand. That's certainly the feeling in my workplace, and I suspect that's replicated nationally.

We have been here before, with the union and the company publishing a joint statement setting out a roadmap for the next phase of negotiations. This time there's more nitty-gritty detail in terms of negotiations at local level, but this carries significant risks. Reps might be able to tweak things here and there to make the new duty structures more workable for some individuals, but local negotiation isn't going to result in significant concessions for workers.

The victimisation of reps is also a major issue in the dispute. Most of



the cases I've heard about are ludicrous; in one instance, a rep who was a picket line supervisor was disciplined for something someone else allegedly did on the picket line, on the basis that, as picket supervisor, the rep should've stopped it from happening! We need these charges dropped and our reps back in place as an absolute minimum, or we'll have been set back.

We'll see where we are on 12 March [extended to 19 March in a further joint union-management statement on 13 March] which is the deadline for reaching a national agreement. It would be damaging to come out of this dispute with nothing concrete to point to where we could say, "that's what we achieved, that's what makes this all worth it." So if we have to strike again, we will. Having come this far I think people are prepared to see it through. □

Paths of Glory



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Following on from the mentions of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930 and 2022 versions) I would like to close this consideration of anti-war films depicting World War 1 by highlighting Stanley Kubrick's film *Paths of Glory* (1957), featuring Kirk Douglas.

An assault on the "Anthill" – a German stronghold – is mounted by the French army. Colonel Dax (Douglas) leads the suicidal attack but the first wave is completely wiped out. "B" Company, who would have been the second wave, refuse to leave their trenches and Dax stops the attack. The French High Command is furious, partly because one of them wants to claim a victory to boost his promotion prospects. Three men are selected to stand trial for cowardice and Dax, a former lawyer, defends them. The



trial is rigged and despite his efforts the accused are found guilty and executed by firing squad. Shortly after, in a crowded inn, a young German woman sings to the remaining demoralised French soldiers. Dax doesn't tell them that they will shortly be sent back to the front.

Based on real events and adapted from a novel by Humphrey Cobb, the film was controversial and not screened in France until 1975. □

Back to business

With the completion of our Ukraine tour we now need to turn our attention to raising the best part of £30k. Additional funds this week from Mick, Steve, Camila, Praveen, Halya, Alexandra, Michael, Richard, Fang and others have brought our total to £4594. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

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

A thousand picket lines



John Moloney

On 15 March, the PCS is asking all eligible members to take a one day strike. This strike will include members from the HMRC and other areas who have recently voted for industrial action. The union is estimating that up to 136,000 members might take action on the day. PCS will not be on its own of course but will be joining strikers from the NEU, the BMA and in London, the RMT.

Whilst getting all our members, and indeed non-members, out on the day is key, the union has two other aims. The first is having as many picket lines as possible, the second getting is getting people to marches arranged in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Aberystwyth.

Regarding the former, the union would like to have a thousand pickets – up from approximately 700 on the first all member strike day on 1st February. We not only want to have pickets because they are a visible manifestation of the union, but to try and get as many activists and members, particularly young members to the picket line as possible; that is to draw them into union activity. Of course, we want picket lines as a means to persuade people not to go to work.

Marches

Although we have marches arranged in a number of areas, we are making a particular push to get members in London and the south east to the London march. The assembly point is the Embankment Tube at noon, with the march starting at 12.30, a rally outside Downing Street and then ending up at the NEU demonstration at Trafalgar Square.

Of course once we have had the strike, the discussion then has to turn to whether we will take further industrial action in the coming weeks.

From 20 March we will be re-balloting members, with the results known on the 9 May. As I have said repeatedly, I believe we should have as much all-member action along with selective action as possible. Therefore, I hope that the union takes further all member action during the re-balloting period. □

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

Health pay: break the pause!

By Alice Hazel

The strikes over pay for Agenda for Change (i.e. most) NHS employees in England are paused for negotiation. After the RCN cancelled their strikes in England at the beginning of March to go into unilateral negotiations, Unison, GMB, CSP and then Unite called off their planned action to join too.

The government preconditions for negotiations with these unions were: cancellation of strikes; any uplift for 2022-23 would be a one-off unconsolidated payment; the talks to cover 2023-24 pay and “efficiency” reforms; and any offer coming from the negotiations to be recommended by trade unions to their members.

Unite reps met and decided to reject negotiations and the union initially put out a statement saying it would not participate with this “ultimatum”. But it quickly joined, and along with the other unions has gone quiet since.

Throughout the dispute national and (many) branch leaders in Unison have been using the classic right-wing line that members should not “tie the hands of negotiators” by, for example, insisting on a concrete demand for the strike. In calling off strikes and agreeing to negotiations on these



terms they have now submitted to be bound, blindfolded and gagged by the government in order to get round the table! The unions have failed to organise any cross-union co-ordination or unity throughout the dispute, until now when they have coordinated perfectly to grovel to the government. The contrast to the vitality and courage of healthworkers on the picket lines couldn't be more stark!

The so called “intensive” negotiations have produced nothing so far, except to take the momentum away from the strikers and specifically to reduce pressure on the government at the point where the BMA junior doctors commenced their strike action. Questions over the strategy are being asked on healthworker forums and the petition among RCN members calling for recommencement of strikes is gaining coverage and support. Increasing this debate and co-ordination in prepara-

tion for the outcome of the talks is key. It is only with rank and file pressure that the unions have any hope of winning this dispute.

It's clear that the approach chosen by the leaderships so far – occasional one and two day strikes, lack of co-ordination across the unions and cancelling strikes for negotiations – will not achieve anywhere near the strikers' demands and aspirations for the dispute. As has already happened in Scotland and Wales, it is likely that a miserable offer will emerge from the talks. In Scotland and Wales RCN members rejected new offers made by the governments. In both cases new negotiations were held without the pressure of action. The RCN in Scotland are balloting until 20 March on an only slightly improved offer.

The only way to break this cycle would be to restart and sharply escalate the strikes in co-ordination with the BMA and alongside a political campaign for the NHS. The 72-hour BMA strikes, organised to coincide with other trade union action and budget day of 15 March, have started positively with the union demanding full pay restoration and stating they would not enter negotiations for unconsolidated offers. □

Prepare for the ballot in local government

By a Unison member

Unison's representatives on the local government National Joint Committee (NJC) that cover pay for local government and school support staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – voted on Friday 10 March to reject the £1,925 flat rate offer from employers and go to an industrial action ballot. The ballot, which will be disaggregated by employer, is likely to run from 23 May to 4 July, and could see local government workers joining taking strike in the summer and autumn.

The offer did not meet the claim for a 12.7% pay-rise for all workers, or come close to the starting salary of £15 per

hour, or address other issues in the claim (extra leave, reduced working week, or home working allowances). It was less than the latest RPI inflation rate (13.4%, Jan 2022 to Jan 2023) for all workers covered by the claim.

The delayed start to the ballot could be used to prepare branches for the ballot, to reallocate Unison's significant resources so as to reach members and convince them to take part in action. But Workers' Liberty supporters think pressure should be applied to end the ballot earlier than 4 July, to enable some action to be taken in schools before the end of the summer term.

Unison should immediately get on a war footing including: organise national online meetings; recruit more reps to help coordinate the pay campaign and ballot; and start all members' discussions on the strategy including what action should be called and when. This could include discussing strike tactics and learning the lessons from the concentrated action by Scottish local government bin workers last summer, and by local government school workers planned for last autumn, which forced at least some concessions from the Scottish government.

Unison activists have to realise that we have a long way to go in our union to achieve the 50% turnout threshold. We cannot rely on Unison's paid staff

to win it. We need to look to the tactics of branches who got big votes to reject the offer last year, for instance Lambeth and Barnet Unison branches. Where local branches have funds, they should look at how they ensure activists have the resources to get out and convince members.

Right now, Unison activists should look to organise in workplaces to win the vote, and use local rallies and protests with other workers involved in pay disputes or action to help build a mood for the vote. We should coordinate as much as possible with other unions.

GMB and Unite are consulting their members on the offer, both recommending rejection, before deciding whether to go to a formal industrial action ballot. □

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Refugees: stop the Bill, open the border

By Ben Tausz

Gary Lineker has been quickly reinstated as a presenter by the BBC after other presenters “struck” in protest against his removal for criticising the government’s asylum policy. But defeating the actual policy remains a battle.

Less than a year after the Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) became law, Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary Suella Braverman have launched yet another Anti-Refugee Bill. This bill attempts to essentially abolish the right to claim asylum in the UK.

As the Tories pummel migrants with round after round of assaults, we continue to resist not only the latest attack, but the entire anti-migrant policy regime. Our demand remains: open the border.

NABA already downgraded the rights of asylum seekers arriving irregularly. They are liable either to be removed to a third country like Rwanda or condemned to a second-class status, with limited rights and the threat of expulsion lingering for at least ten years.

Now the Anti-Refugee Bill mk. 2 attacks even that second-class status. It creates a legal duty for the Home Secretary to remove to another country, like Rwanda, any adult arriving irregularly who has travelled through a “safe” third country. Given the UK’s location on the map and the refusal to provide legal routes, this is virtually all arrivals – but those people, most of whom have specific material reasons to come to the UK, constitute only a tiny minority of refugees worldwide. Almost all the intervening countries accept far more refugees relative to population than the UK, some many times more.

The new law requires the Home Office to asylum and human rights claims without any consideration and without right of appeal. There are some very narrow exceptions, but the Home Secretary will be given significant leeway to define even these. Immigration lawyer Colin Yeo gives a detailed account.

The bill creates a list of supposedly “safe” countries – the European Economic Area plus Albania – and even allows the government to send asylum seekers from these places straight back, rather than to a third country! So the Tories continue their demagogic denial of the real risks that many Albanian refugees are forced to flee, including blood feuds and exploitation by gangs. But Albania is not the sole problem here: especially with the rise and consolidation in power of far-right European governments such as Meloni in Italy and Orban in Hungary, the pretence that



nobody could have good cause to flee an EEA country is also dangerous.

Of course, the Tories’ track record shows that forced mass removals are actually difficult to implement. No level of coercive violence and disregard for human rights will overcome the constraint that deporting refugees requires a third country to agree to receive them. It appears that Rwanda will take only 200 people in the foreseeable future and even that scheme has been costly and difficult for the Tories to get off the ground.

Meanwhile, there is zero evidence for the Tories’ insistence that this new law would deter irregular crossings. Ministers proclaim they will break the business of those running the boats, but the business is created precisely by the refusal to create legal, safe ways to travel for people in need. Escalating repression has only increased desperation and opportunities to profit from it. It is a business that can only be broken by making it redundant – by opening the border.

So under the proposed law, the people continuing to arrive will be condemned to a state of lifelong limbo, subject to removal orders that may never be carried out. They will be detained under new powers, with the Home Secretary’s detention decisions explicitly exempted from judicial review. Braverman is promising to further expand the UK’s abusive system of immigration detention centres.

A judge might grant them bail after 28 days, after which they will be left to subsist indefinitely, likely in destitution, with no right to work and no path to any legal residency status. For the crime of seeking sanctuary, they will receive a lifetime ban from ever gaining citizenship or even permission to enter or remain in the UK.

Given that the only exit from this limbo offered by the government is the alternative horror of deportation, for many it will be a rational choice to abscond and go underground, as the only chance for any semblance of freedom. Many will be driven to off-the-books employment. Sunak hands a boon to dodgy gangmasters and other unscrupulous bosses, with his proud boast that these workers will be exempt from even the UK’s meagre protections against illegal exploitation.

Tory ministers have insisted that their assistance to “genuine” refugees is generous. But the only current legal routes are for Ukrainians, Afghans (only 22 Afghans have been resettled) and an expensive visa scheme for some Hong Kongers. Dismissing calls to create asylum visas and more safe, legal routes for refugees to travel, Braverman instead says she would instead expand work with the UN’s refugee agency to select people to lift from refugee camps and bring here. Of course, many refugees never reach such facilities, and many would prefer not to be trapped in camps which often contain appalling conditions and systemic neglect and abuse. And even this is only promised only once small boats “stop”, something which – again – cruel restrictions will not achieve. The bill proposes that Parliament will annually set a cap on the number of people to be accepted in this way – a fixture that will undoubtedly become an annual opportunity to whip up racism.

Sunak and Braverman claim that the new law would test the limits of, but not breach, the post-WW2 European Convention on Human Rights and other international law. Nevertheless, the bill opens with an admission that she is unable to confirm its compatibility with the ECHR. Challenges to the human rights court in Strasbourg

are likely. Indeed, the Tories may relish this as an opportunity to again paint themselves, Trump-style, as valiantly battling the forces of the establishment. Outright withdrawal from the ECHR is a favourite theme of agitation for the Tory right.

Socialists put no faith on either domestic or international laws and courts, administered by the ruling classes, to secure our rights. Nevertheless, we fight tooth-and-nail to defend our limited but concrete gains, while struggling for better. It would be dangerously complacent to step aside from battles over human rights law by dismissing them as either matters of “bourgeois legality” or “culture war traps”.

It was welcome to hear Keir Starmer highlight the risks to women of withdrawing “modern slavery”, and Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper condemn the reduction in family reunion visas offered and government’s betrayal of Afghans in danger from the Taliban – though she appeared to have time only for those Afghans “who served our country”. But these remain cautious suggestions of partial decencies, peppered within the Labour leadership’s overall approach of appeasing xenophobia.

Labour’s frontbench mainly attacks the Tories not on principle, but managerial competence. They promise that Labour would do a better job of policing the border and deporting failed asylum seekers. Never mind that those “failed” asylum seekers have included LGBTQ people facing persecution, told by bigoted judges that they were faking their sexuality, and traumatised survivors dubbed liars because officials leapt on minor gaps in their memories. And never mind the wider principles of freedom and the rights of all people to move and live as we choose, not just for asylum.

It is true that the Tories’ plans likely won’t succeed in their stated aims. But to rely largely on pointing that out, implies that “successfully” carrying out mass deportations or walling off the borders would be desirable.

Our response must instead be to consistently put forward an alternative of freedom, equality and working-class solidarity. Rishi Sunak accused Labour of supporting “open-door immigration and unlimited asylum”. While Keir Starmer replied that “nobody on this side ... wants open borders”, we organise in our workplaces, with the [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#), and on the streets, to reply, without apology or hesitation: “yes, we do”. □

• See online bit.ly/new-twi for more on new anti-migrant measures.



Solidarity

For a workers' government



NEU: STAND FIRM

By David Pendleton

Teachers who are members of the National Education Union (NEU) in England will strike on 15-16 March. They will strike alongside workers in other unions on both days. On the 15th there will be a large national demonstration called by the NEU and supported by other unions.

However, the union has suspended action by members of the NEU in Wales, both support staff and teachers, due on the same days. That came after a new offer from the Welsh Government. The offer is:

- 11.8% over two years and therefore still a big real terms pay cut.
- For 2022-23 the pay award has been increased by a total

of 3%, but only 1.5% is consolidated, 1.5% non-consolidated.

- There is no new money from Westminster
- It ties members to a two-year deal when inflation could go still higher
- There are no gains for support staff
- Workload is still not addressed.

It is a poor deal and the executive was wrong to suspend the action. The deal will be put to members, with no recommendation from the executive. (Some in the leadership argued for a recommendation to accept.) Clearly, they should have recommended rejection. The decision not to recommend rejection sends a message to the Westminster government that the union will settle for far less

than our claim for a real terms increase.

The members in Wales should have been encouraged to continue the fight alongside their siblings in England. Members in Wales should reject the deal.

The executive will next meet on 25 March to consider the strategy for the dispute moving forward. Now the union has missed the opportunity to escalate before the end of the spring term, it will now be difficult to devise a strategy that marries the need to escalate or at least to maintain the pace with keeping members together during the exams period.

Activists will need to continue to argue for the action we need to win the dispute and keep members mobilised. □

