



For social ownership of the banks and industry

WORKERS' PLANS TO SAVE THE PLANET

» **Public ownership of energy industry**

» **N Sea oil workers back transition plan**

» **Join XR protest 21-24 April**

XRTRADE ✕
UNIONISTS
GLOBAL EQUITY,
POWER + SOLIDARITY!
ORDINARY PEOPLE
WILL REMAKE THE WORLD
FOR ALL LIFE!



See inside

Strike wave: signs of revival

NHS, teachers, civil service: strikes could escape doldrums

Page 3,21, 23

SNP falls into turmoil

But a real political alternative is needed to change things

Page 11

How NHS failed on Covid control

Good sick pay and PPE were known to help, but NHS bosses stalled

Pages 8-9

James Connolly and religion

An open Catholic identification hurt workers' unity

Pages 14-16

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban

Workers' plans to save planet



Editorial

Workers' Liberty exists to catalyse workers' struggle and organisation so we can replace capitalist direction of our labour by the "free association of producers", democratically coordinated to social and environmental purpose.

Part of that is workers' plans for the ecological crisis. In recent months, North Sea offshore workers have devised a [plan](#) to shut down the oil and gas wells and use their skills and plant to build offshore wind and tidal power. This will require public ownership not only of the fossil fuel industry but also the ports and surrounding infrastructure.

We work for the example of the North Sea oil workers to be repeated in other ecologically destructive industrial sectors, and to help the workers' movement become strong enough to implement the plans.

It is urgent. The latest [IPCC report](#) is trailed as the "final warning" to limit warming to 1.5°C. At 1.1°C climate change is "increasingly driving displacement" of people in Africa, Asia, North, Central and South America, and the south Pacific. Three billion people live in areas that are "highly vulnerable" to climate breakdown.

For 27 years now, scientists have issued increasingly alarming reports. Instead of acting on these warnings, capitalist society has escalated of the activity that is driving climate breakdown. Over half of historic CO₂ emissions since 1750 have been emitted since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. More CO₂ was released last year than any other year on record.

This was not inevitable. It is a consequence of allowing the blind pursuit of profit to rule.

Growth

Capitalist growth requires ever-growing inputs of energy and matter. This puts a significant obstacle in the way of transitioning to zero carbon energy sources. So far, the rapid growth of solar and wind technologies has only added to the world energy budget rather than displacing fossil-fuel energy.

Second, 60% of known oil and gas reserves and 90% of known coal reserves must be left in the ground to have a chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C. These reserves are worth over \$1 trillion, and fossil capitalists will not give them up without a fight.

As yet we are far from having political institutions that are willing to challenge fossil capital. Far from curbing fossil capital's growth, capitalist states use taxpayers' money to subsidise expansion. In the UK, for every £100 spent on North Sea oil expansion, £91.25 is paid for out of public funds.



Third, extensive carbon dioxide removal (CDR) is necessary for all the scenarios produced by scientists that limit warming to 2°C. But removing and storing atmospheric CO₂ produces no vendible commodity and will need to be funded by states. But no individual nation state has an interest in shouldering the cost of fixing a global problem.

All these factors point to the need for new political institutions that can take control of production and organise productive forces to restabilise the climate and restore ecosystems. For many years, scientists and environmental activists have prioritised "raising awareness" of the climate crisis.

But awareness alone is not sufficient. Floods, wildfires, drought and heat exhaustion have made most people aware.

The difficulty is what to do about it. What is the social force that can halt the runaway train of capitalist growth and organise economic life according to sound ecological science?

The only force that could potentially fulfil this role is the international workers' movement. As workers we have a direct interest in organising against our bosses, limiting the amount of surplus value they extract from our labour. This tendency to organise extends beyond the workplace into politics and beyond the nation state to international organisations.

History shows us times of heightened class struggle when workers have won democratic control of their workplaces and organised production to meet the needs of their communities. We work to repeat that on a global scale. □

• XR event in London: 21-24 April, with a march on 22 April. bit.ly/xr-2124.



Corrections

Some corrections to the interview in *Solidarity* 667 with Sarah Ronan came in too late for the printed paper. The corrected version is online: bit.ly/sr-am □

Too little but also too much



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

"Private property", wrote [Marx](#), "has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it – when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc..."

Much of socialist effort, within capitalist society, involves supporting working-class struggles to "have" more within this society, to limit the gap between workers and the rich.

And we see an emancipatory side even to capitalist consumerism, when it spurs workers to widen aspirations, to seek roses as well as bread.

But capitalism remains a society which tilts us ever more, and destructively, to racing for atomised accumulation of "stuff".

The luxury-goods firm LVMH, formed only in 1987, has through the years of neoliberalism become the largest corporation in Europe.

Inequality has risen. And a new [report](#) – from a right-wing thinktank, Onward, not from socialists – shows what has happened even with better-off workers.

Better-off workers have more "stuff". Yet they spend less time seeing their friends, visiting restaurants, going out, and exercising than in 1974 (and less than half the time volunteering, despite the relative increase in the numbers of retired people in reasonable health).

The "free time" activities they do are more fragmented, the average person's day going from about 20 "episodes" to 30-odd. Some of that is down to interruptions by smartphones (or, at least, by the way we let smartphones dominate us). Some, to more fragmented work hours which in turn fragment "life" hours.

Sleep

Average hours of sleep are slightly longer than in 1974, but sleep is more fragmented and poorer (partly smartphone use, partly work hours), and 43% of adults are sleeping less than seven hours.

Working hours overall have risen over the 50 years, despite a large increase over the 50 years in productivity, and the long-term trend for decades until the early 1980s for the labour movement to win

reductions (though slowly) in the workweek. Weekend work hours have increased more than the average. More people work more hours which make it difficult for them to meet friends. The report doesn't mention a parallel trend: work regimes have over 50 years generally made it [more difficult](#) to socialise, chat, make friends there.

Housework time has decreased through technology. Childcare time has increased. This has downsides: it means children's growing-up is more "privatised", more enclosed within the small family unit, less sociable, less autonomous. Parents, as the report says, are "less comfortable letting their children play independently".

So, in Marx's terms, there are more "objects" that we "have", but we are made more

"stupid and one-sided", more oppressed by our work hours, more atomised.

The trends that Juliet Schor found in her book [The Overworked American](#) in 1991 are here in the UK, over the decades: "Marketing experts and advertisers spend vast sums of money to make... choices appealing – even irresistible... Americans have been found to spend more time shopping than anyone else. On the other hand, the 'market' for free time hardly even exists... Employers... do not offer the chance to trade off income gains for a shorter work day..."

"Nor has society provided a forum for deliberate [collective] choice" between the accumulation of often unsustainable privatised "stuff" for the better-off and freedom and sociability for all. □



Strike wave: signs of revival

By Ollie Moore

The resounding vote by teachers in England in the National Education Union to reject a poor pay offer, despite government insistence that the offer was “final”, shows a significant will to fight.

Despite the challenges in many disputes, the strike wave continues and even expands on some fronts. Junior doctors in the British Medical Association and Hospital Consultants and Specialist Association are demonstrating a basic strategic good sense that the rest of the movement should emulate: when they got no concessions following their first strike, from 13-15 March, they followed up swiftly and escalated to four days (11-15 April).

Amazon workers in Coventry are pursuing a similar approach, with their next round of strikes an escalation to five days. GMB is also spreading the dispute to other Amazon sites, with consultative ballots planned in five additional locations. Civil servants in the PCS continue selective action through-

out April, with a further national strike planned on 28 April. In that dispute, Workers’ Liberty supporters in the PCS Independent Left network are [proposing escalation](#). There are ongoing and planned strikes by [Heathrow airport security workers](#) (Unite), [outsourced rail cleaners](#) (RMT), and others.

The NEU leadership encouraged rejection of the teachers’ offer, which was turned down by a 98% majority on a 66% turnout. The two additional strikes the union has already called, on 27 April and 2 May, are unlikely to push the government much further, especially as the union leadership pushed through NEU conference (3-6 April) “exemptions” from those strikes for GCSE and A level classes and joint union secretary Mary Boustead said the union should work with head teachers to staff up those classes. An amendment supported by Workers’ Liberty teachers to narrow the “exemptions” was defeated.

Action will need to be intensified. The conference voted for three days of strikes in late June and July and a reballot to prepare for more strikes in

September. (Proposals for strikes during the GCSE and A level period, which in many secondary schools is full of last-minute cramming seen by many students and teachers, as well as school managements, as vital, were heavily defeated, and not supported by us).

In the NHS, the cross-union network NHS Workers Say No is continuing to mobilise for rejection of employers’ latest offer in health. The different health unions are running their referenda to close on 14 April (RCN and Unison) or 28 April (GMB and Unite). There is a real possibility that at least some unions will reject the deal, despite the leaderships of all the main health unions pushing for acceptance. The surge of grassroots opposition has rattled the leadership of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in particular, which is now seeking a police investigation into a petition of its members calling for an emergency general meeting.

This wildly heavy-handed overreaction highlights one of the worst historic roles of the trade union bureaucracy, to police (literally, in this case) dissent from unions’ grassroots against the conciliatory strategies often pursued by union officialdom. The RCN is, perhaps, an extreme case: it has always been a hybrid organisation, fulfilling some of the functions of a trade union whilst rooting itself in its identity as a professional association – i.e., explicitly *not* a union. But some unions, such as Unison, have pursued similar tactics in the past, for example in 2013 when officials [called the police](#) on a group of members protesting interference and obstruction by regional officials in their branch elections.

Bureaucracy

Mostly, however, the day-to-day of trade union bureaucracies is less egregious. It may not always consist of attempting to hold back struggles; Amazon workers’ strikes at the BHX4 warehouse in Coventry have been encouraged and empowered by GMB officials, who rightly see the dispute as prestigious for the union as an institution as well as important to the workers themselves.

In moments where the union’s institutional interests and the immediate interests of a workers’ struggle against an employer come into conflict or tension, union officials may do the right thing. But the matter should be left as little to chance as possible. To give themselves the best chance of having such tensions resolved in favour of struggles, union members need strong rank-and-file organisation, both through the union’s

basic democratic structures such as branches, and independently, through networks and caucuses that seek to activate and reform those structures.

The need for such organisation is shown clearly by the progress of disputes in higher education, on the rail, and in Royal Mail. Attritional trench warfare tends to give the upper hand to bosses, with their already-accumulated wealth and power, rather than to workers, whose power depends on mobilisation to break the limits “already” in place. Unions should instead seek ways to “shorten” disputes on workers’ terms by intensifying action to a level that can win.

With the Network Rail side of its national rail dispute settled for a below-inflation deal, RMT pulled strikes by Train Operating Company (TOC) workers for 30 March and 1 April. The employers’ latest offer on that side of the dispute has not been put to referendum, but remains under consideration by the union’s National Executive Committee. Meanwhile, the union has a re-ballot of TOC members from 6 April-4 May, rightly urging members to vote yes in order to renew the mandate. But RMT leaders imply that renewing the mandate is what will “keep up the pressure” on the bosses.

Clearing the arbitrary, anti-democratic thresholds of the Tories’ anti-strike laws is, by design, difficult, and winning and renewing mandates are significant achievements that deserve to be celebrated. But where disputes have been long-running, and mandates are renewed multiple times, there is even less incentive for employers to concede to a new mandate if they have already ridden out previous action.

Unions that make ballots themselves the focus, and neglect to empower members to develop strategies to *use the mandates* in the most effective way, instead calling only token or ineffectual action, and calling off already-planned strikes, may find members eventually conclude there is little point voting. That point is likely a long way off in RMT, where previous re-ballots on TOCs have returned higher turnouts and increased majorities for action. But renewing the mandate merely to continue negotiating over a poor deal, or to call only sporadic strikes, won’t win.

Opportunities abound as well as challenges and difficulties. And victories like that of the National Express bus drivers in the West Midlands, who won a [16.2% pay increase](#) after the first week of an indefinite strike, show that, where workers take bold, decisive action, we can win. □

Strikes

3-16 April: British Library workers (PCS) strike

3 April-6 May: Passport office workers (PCS) strike

4-28 April, then discontinuous action until 23 June: Trades workers at Dundee City Council (Unite) strike

5-28 April: Rolling regional strikes by DVSA workers (PCS)

6-12 April: British Museum workers (PCS) strike

11-14 April: Junior doctors (BMA and HCSA) strike

14-15 April: Outsourced railways cleaners at several companies (RMT) strike

16-18 and 21-23 April: Workers at Amazon’s BHX4 warehouse in Coventry (GMB) strike

24-25 April: Outsourced ISS domestic and catering staff at South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (GMB) strike

24 April-21 May: St. Mungo’s charity workers (Unite) strike

27 April: Teachers in England (NEU) strike

28 April: Civil servants in England and Wales (PCS) strike

2 May: Teachers in England (NEU) strike

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

Ballots

20 March-9 May: Civil servants (PCS) re-ballot to renew mandate for industrial action over pay and conditions

28 March-14 April: NHS workers in RCN and Unison vote on whether to accept the government’s pay offer

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

From 31 March, “for several weeks”: Amazon workers at warehouses in Mansfield, Coalville, Kegworth, Rugeley, and Rugby (GMB) conduct consultative ballot for strikes

31 March-28 April: NHS workers in Unite vote on whether to accept the government’s pay offer

3 April-28 April: NHS workers in GMB vote on whether to accept the government’s pay offer

6 April-4 May: Workers at mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) re-ballot to renew mandate for industrial action

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

The Morning Star, Ireland and Brexit



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

According to the front page of the *Morning Star* (8-9 April): "Unions are warning that stability in Ireland could be threatened if workers' rights are 'ripped up' under the Retained EU Law Bill."

The piece continues: "The TUC and NIC-ICTU (Northern Ireland Committee in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions) issued a statement ahead of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement ... warn(ing) that under the Bill workplace rights such as holiday pay, rest breaks, health and safety rules and protections from discrimination will disappear."

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak was quoted, saying that "the TUC were almost alone in [Britain] in 2016 when they warned about the possible threat Brexit posed to the stability of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement."

Now this is odd. For many years (and as recently as 2 March just gone), the *Morning Star* has been telling its readers that "the mirage of a 'social Europe' deceived enough trade unionists to abandon their class instincts" in favour of embracing the non-existent (according to the *Morning Star*) benefits of EU membership.

Good Friday agreement

And the Communist Parties of Britain (CPB) and of Ireland (CPI) have not valued "stability" for the Good Friday Agreement. In fact, the CPI has denounced events marking the 25th anniversary of the Agreement as obscuring the role of "British imperialism" in Ireland, and it denounced Sunak's Windsor Framework as confirming "the life experience of many colonised and dominated peoples."

The Irish Republic is not a "colony" of the UK, but an advanced capitalist country, and as "independent" as any small state can be. The idea that the central conflict in Northern Ireland is a struggle between Irish independence and British imperialism (rather than

about ways of reconciling the rights of two communities with conflicting national loyalties), is preposterous.

EU

Even more bizarre was the case put forward in the *Morning Star* of 3 April by the CPI's national chairman, Eoin O Murchu (in response to the Windsor Framework passing through the UK parliament) that: "Sinn Féin, too, like the SDLP and the Alliance Party in the so-called centre ground, has been reduced to celebrating an EU triumph, even as that triumph ties the whole of Ireland more and more into subservience to foreign rule, in this case that of Europe", as if he thinks that economic links with neighbouring countries amount to "foreign rule".

Ireland and the EU (especially when combined) bring out nothing but incoherent nonsense from the *Morning Star* and the CPB / CPI: they simply cannot



bring themselves to face the reality that British and Irish membership of the EU (eventually) drew some of the poison out of the sectarian dispute between nationalists and loyalists. Brexit reignites old disputes, setting back the cause of Irish reunification – unless you believe, as these people seem to, that Irish national unity can be achieved by autarky and without working-class unity. □

Musk, Twitter, and the far right

By Matt McGowan

It is now nearly six months since Elon Musk was forced to honour his pledge to buy the social media platform Twitter. Musk parted with \$44 billion for the loss-making platform: some Schadenfreude for us there. But the potential political damage of Musk's "free-speech absolutism" is real.

Twitter is one of the smaller social media platforms. It does have its niche, being described by one (cynical) online media editor as "a medium for people with high opinions about themselves [and for] pseudo-elites and their supporters." More generously, it is the first stop for politicians, journalists and political activists of all sorts. Often Tweets are the news, rather than Twitter posts reporting news stories from elsewhere.

This can be amusing, as with Greta Thunberg's take down of Andrew Tate last year. More importantly, Twitter was President Trump's main platform until he was banned in the wake of 6 January 2021. Elements of the Trumpian and far right sought to use Twitter and other platforms to foment political violence in the real world. In that context Musk sought to buy



Twitter in April 2022, linking it with allowing Trump back onto the platform and a more general promise of "free speech absolutism"

Forces far to the right of Trump took Musk's plans as a signal that the way was open to move into the mainstream via Twitter. A recent [report](#) from the Rutgers University Network Contagion Research Institute *#Twittertakeover: How the Musk Acquisition Became a Launchpad for Gen-Z Neo-Nazis, Ye, and Widespread Antisemitism* shows how when the takeover was announced, the neo-Nazi right saw an opening to establish a foothold in alliance with the rapper Ye's (Kanye West) antisemitism. The report also demonstrates that such online hatred is followed by real-world antisemitic attacks.

Musk's takeover of Twitter in October 2022 was so chaotic

that he was forced to back-track on the "free-speech absolutism". Staffing levels, never high, fell from 7,500 to 1,500. As much as 50% of the platform's advertising revenue was lost as major brands looked to avoid reputational damage. Ye and some of the higher profile neo-Nazis have been banned from Twitter, but the company no longer has the capacity for any greater content moderation.

Still, the commercial imperatives to stop the platform becoming a toxic right-wing swamp are clear even to Musk.

The future for Twitter is now uncertain. Musk has suggested that he will use it as a platform to build "X", an "everything app" including social media, retail and finance, but it is unlikely that investors would trust him to guide this process. His short term answer has been to turn Twitter into a paid subscription service, though that plan too has faltered. The most recent iteration suggests subscribers will have their Tweets pushed to the top of feeds and have likes and retweets given greater weight within the platform's algorithms.

Free speech? If you have the cash. □

TUC youth conference rejects solidarity

By Ben Tausz

Delegates at the TUC's Young Workers' Conference on 2 April narrowly voted down a motion for migrants' rights and freedom of movement.

The motion (bit.ly/tuc-y) opposed the Rwanda deportation plan and its demands included free movement for all; an end to the Hostile Environment, raids and deportations; and safe and legal routes for refugees to reach the UK and claim asylum. Against xenophobia, it counterposed unionisation and a united fight for decent jobs, homes and public services for all.

PCS Young Members – whose members include Home Office workers – proposed it. Supporters of PCS Independent Left and the Labour Campaign for Free Movement were central in drafting it, as they were for last year's similar defeated motion.

The margin was close enough to require a card vote. When records are confirmed (this may require



some pressure), activists will need to hold delegates and union leaders accountable. Social media reports allege that votes against included not only Community, but unions with "left" leaderships such as RMT and Unite.

This should spur us to redouble the fight for internationalism and solidarity in our unions. Activists can start at the grassroots, by raising issues for discussion and proposals for action in branches. Motion texts from Labour Campaign for Free Movement: bit.ly/LCFMMotions1222 □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/tuc-y

Putin moves to demonise feminism



Women's Fightback

By Michael Baker

A new bill has been brought to the Russian Duma that would recognise feminism as an “extremist ideology”. Oleg Matveychev, who drafted the bill, stated in his speech introducing the bill that “the network of feminist organisations in our country are soil in which extremist actions will grow.”

In one sense, Matveychev has a point – if the anti-war movement is “extremist”, then it is certainly the case that feminist organisations have been leading that movement since the very first days of the war – most notably, Feminist Antiwar Resistance (FAR), now the largest anti-war organisation in the country, formed within the first week of the full-scale invasion. From helping soldiers’ mothers and wives protest against conscription, to producing underground newspapers disguised as regional dailies, to peaceful protests in local town centres, FAR has been instrumental in coordinating opposition to the war



Darya Serenko

beyond dribs and drabs of individual action.

Appeals

FAR is undoubtedly the primary target of Matveychev’s bill, but this news comes during a fortnight of increasingly worrying news for Russian feminists. First FAR, then one of its founding members, the activist and writer Darya Serenko, were both denied their appeals against their “foreign agent” status, the debilitating bureaucratic process that requires Russian activists, NGOs and journalists to either flee the country or have their every move and

detailed financial records pored over by the Russian authorities. Shortly after that, artist Yuliya Tsvetkova has had her court acquittal for charges of “pornography” put back under review by a higher court.

Tsvetkova’s case has been covered in Solidarity at multiple stages: in November 2019, she was put under house arrest for a series of stickers that she posted on a feminist Facebook group called The Vagina Monologues. The stickers were largely about body positivity, and included some cartoon depictions of the nude female body. Timur Bulatov, a St. Petersburg-based

homophobic “activist”, was largely behind the movement to have Tsvetkova arrested. In 2020, she was put in pre-trial detention for the same charges.

In late 2022, Tsvetkova was fully acquitted in court – a rare moment of optimism amid Putin’s last few years of dramatically increasing repression. The trial now being reopened is largely a demoralising move, and signals the state’s pivot to branding “feminism” as the root cause of Russia’s current crisis (rather than it being due to invasion of a neighbouring country).

In a statement on the FAR website, activist Sasha Talaver pointed out the proud history of Russian and Soviet feminism, and the sheer hypocrisy of the move to demonise feminist organisations:

“Those chanting about the vague spectre of ‘traditional values’ do not understand that feminism is something that has developed and grown in Russia over the past hundred years, even in the face of governments far scarier than themselves. Our everyday life, our laws, our urban infrastructure – all of it is permeated by a long tradition of female emancipation, and there’s nothing they can do about it.” □

Teachers go for more strikes

By David Pendleton

The first business at the National Education Union (NEU) conference, 3-6 April, was to announce that an online consultation, with a recommendation to reject, had 98% rejecting the government’s offer, with a 66% turn out.

Before conference NEU members who are teachers in English schools were already due to strike on 27 April and 2 May.

At conference, it was agreed that the union will use the period of GCSE and A level exams from 15 May to begin a re-ballot of those members, to run until the end of July. It also agreed to timetable a three-

day strike in late June or early July. 27 April and 2 May are planned to cause maximum disruption with the minimum loss of pay to our members: striking on 27th, followed by working the 28th, then the bank holiday weekend, then the strike on 2 May. The union should call regional demonstrations on 2 May and push for local May Day demonstrations to join with them where possible.

Exemptions

The union has agreed that there will be exemptions for some teachers with exam preparation classes during these strikes. These exemptions should be as tightly and narrowly defined as possible.

The three day strike at the end of June or beginning of July will be an escalation. The union should call a national demonstration on the middle day of those strikes to keep the pressure on the government.

During conference it was announced that members of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) have voted 90% to reject the government’s offer, on a 64% turnout. They are likely

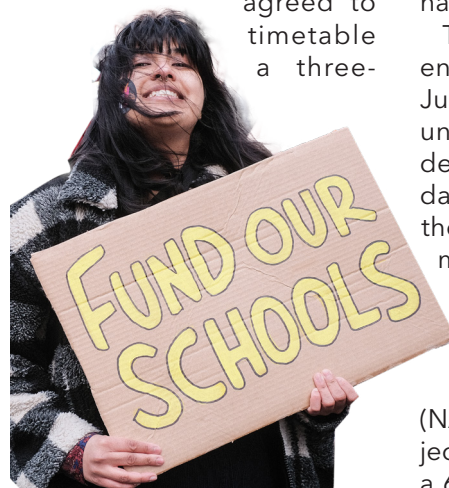
to ballot their members on industrial action. This could be a significant boost to the NEU’s strikes, particularly in primary where the NAHT is stronger. If NEU and NAHT strikes are aligned, many more schools would have to close.

General Secretary Paul Whiteman addressed NEU Conference and received a standing ovation. But the NEU should not allow the pace, intensity or any other aspect of its action to be dictated by other unions. Particularly when the union is a leadership union, as the NAHT is.

The re-ballot, if successful, will mean that we can strike after the schools return in September. It will be important to have a rapidly escalating pattern of action for that term.

It is unfortunate that the only concretely agreed plan for this period as yet is a strike and demonstration around Conservative Party conference (1-4 October).

It is vital that we re-ballot support staff as soon as possible so that they can strike alongside teachers. Unfortunately conference was not offered the opportunity to agree to that. □



PROTEST
15TH APRIL
THE UoS SPIES
ON STUDENTS

Sheffield protests against crackdown

By Eric Fileman

There has been an increased crackdown on student activism at the University of Sheffield which has culminated in management paying £40,000 to hire private security firm Intersol Global to investigate its own students.

This represents an unprecedented escalation, especially given that neither of the accused students was in the city at the time of the occupation (one was on a year abroad).

In response, Sheffield Solidarity Group (a student group which aims to foster student-worker solidarity across University of and Shef-

field Hallam campuses) has called a demonstration during the offer-holder open day on 15 April at midday on the concourse outside Sheffield Uni Student Union. In doing so, it hopes to mobilise the local trade union movement and show that the escalation by management will not have its intended isolating effect.

It has also drafted a national open letter condemning university managements’ increasing hostility to student activism more generally, as seen in Manchester with the forcible removal of occupiers using bailiffs and in Dundee with management calling the police on protestors occupying. □

Saito: making a mess of Marxist ecology



Environment

By Paul Hampton

Kohei Saito deservedly won many plaudits for his first book, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism* (2017) – reviewed in *Solidarity* 523. He made the strongest case yet for Marx as an ecological thinker, centred on the concept of metabolism, traced through Marx's published and vast, unpublished notebooks. Another of Saito's books, *Capital in the Anthropocene* (2020) sold half a million copies in Japan. His new text, *Marx in the Anthropocene*, is not a translation of the bestseller, but what Saito calls "a more rigorous and academic version of the Japanese book".

Classical Marxism

Saito at least starts in the right place. He underlines Marx's mature conception of Stoffwechsel (metabolism) as the relationship between nature and society. Marx recognised the objective and independent existence of nature, highlighted as the "substratum" in *Capital*. He saw the labour process as the fulcrum of the nature-society nexus across history, with different forms articulated in different class societies. The metabolic rift signifies Marx's expression for ecological crisis, the breakdown of the nature-society relationship. It is also the springboard into Marx's political economy, with the real subsumption of nature to capital central to capitalist ecological crises. Finally, socialism is a superior form of society not only because it abolishes exploitation and oppression, but also governs nature-society relations in a rational, planned and sustainable way.

In this new text, Saito makes a strong and convincing argument for treating Marx and Engels as ecological thinkers with some significant differences. First, in his original 1864-65 manuscript, Marx wrote:

"[In] this way [large-scale landownership] produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process between social metabolism and natural metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of the soil. The result of this is a squandering of the vitality of the soil, and trade carries this devastation far beyond the bounds of a single country (Liebig)". (MEGA II/4.2: 752-3)

However when Engels came to publish the manuscript in his edition of volume III of *Capital* (1894), it read: "In this way it produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself." The term "natural metabolism" was omitted and

"soil" changed to "life". Although Engels produced some useful ecological work, such as his *Dialectics of Nature*, unfinished and unpublished in his lifetime, some key differences were evident. Engels did not use the term "metabolism", instead pivoted around nature's "revenge". Although Engels partially took up Liebig's views, he did not adopt the concept of metabolic rift, but rather maintained the earlier scheme of the "antagonism of town and country" from earlier writings. Saito argues that Engels' view of nature "rather impoverishes the content of the realm of freedom". Marx's description of the disruption of the metabolism "avoids the 'apocalyptic' tone of nature's revenge by emphasising the active factor of resistance".

Lukács

Saito also makes a strong case for György Lukács as an ecological thinker, contrary to previous readings. In a famous footnote to *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Lukács limited the applicability of Marx's dialectical method to society, while reproaching Engels's unjustified expansion of the dialectical method to nature. Antonio Gramsci questioned Lukács's claim in his *Prison Notebooks*:

"[Lukács] seems to contend that we can deal with dialectics only about the human history but not about nature... If his claim presupposes a dualism between nature and humans it is wrong.... How can we disconnect dialectics from nature if we should grasp the history of humans as the history of nature as well (besides, through the history of sciences)?"

Saito provides an insight into the level of debate at the time, which deserves further exploration. In 1924, Ladislaus Rudas wrote a critique of Lukács, entitled *Orthodoxer Marxismus?* Rudas used the concept Stoffwechsel to criticise the separation of society and nature. He quoted Marx's *Capital*: "For in this sense industry is an eternal natural process between humans and nature in which humans mediate their metabolism with nature." According to Rudas, since the concept of metabolism is missing, laws of nature suddenly disappear in Lukács's analysis of capitalist society as if society could exist independently of them. Another critic, Abram Deborin agreed with Rudas's critique of Lukács' dualism, pointing to the pivotal role of the labour process.

Saito argues that Lukács actually had a different approach to the problem of nature, formulated as part of his theory of metabolism in his unpublished manuscript, *Tailism and the Dialectic* (1925-

26). Although the text was unknown for a long time and only published in 2002, it takes a view far closer to Marx's than his more famous book.

Critique

Sadly, after a range of important insights into classical Marxist contributions to ecology, Saito veers wildly off course when endeavouring to intervene in more recent ecological debates and to recast ecosocialism.

Saito's first mistake is to credit István Mészáros with the revival of interest in Marx's concept of metabolism. This erases the earlier contribution of Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, first published in German in 1962 and in English in 1971. While Schmidt got much wrong in his investigation, he did identify Stoffwechsel (metabolism) as central to Marx's thinking.

Saito's second mistake is his hatchet job on Marxist geography and in particular Neil Smith's "production of nature" concept, from his book *Uneven Development* (1984). Saito renders Smith as a vulgar social constructivist, despite Smith's early appreciation that human action to cause climate change was grounded in Marxist political economy. Smith utilised metabolism, while crafting a critical reading of Schmidt.

Saito's greatest error is a wholesale effort to update Marxism. He claims that towards the end of his life, "Marx abandoned his earlier scheme of historical materialism. It was not an easy task for him. His worldview was in crisis". Marx's intensive research in his last years was "a desperate attempt to reconstruct and reformulate his materialist conception of history from an entirely new perspective, resulting in a radically different conception of the alternative society". The evidence for this is exceptionally thin.

Saito falsely suggests that Marx came to recognise the "value-producing" contribution of nature in the production process and realised that he must abandon the labour theory of value. Saito then argues that "when reading *Capital*, volume III, one cannot find Marx's explanation about how 'the freely associated producers' would be able to 'govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way'."

A clue is Saito's adoption of outdated, Stalinist, third-worldist conceptions of "centre" and "periphery", which mechanically carry over the analyses of imperialism a century ago into the modern world. Without the slightest effort to evidence his case, Saito claims that "the working class in the Global North came to exploit others in the Global South, and in this way, new luxuries are adopted by the working class.

This is how the 'imperial mode of living' of the capitalist centres spreads all over the society". This flies in the face of Marxist cosmopolitanism and international solidarity.

Degrowth communism

The crescendo of Saito's efforts are to claim that in his final years, Marx adopted something called "degrowth communism". Saito refers to three texts. First, in *The Civil War in France* (1871), Marx wrote of "united co-operative societies". Saito takes this to refer to "a steady-state economy imminent to the archaic commune". Second, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), Marx refers to the "communal/common wealth" (genossenschaftlicher Reichtum). Saito believes this signifies "a non-consumerist way of life in a post-scarcity economy which realises a safe and just society in the face of global ecological crisis in the Anthropocene".

Saito puts most of the weight on Marx's letter to Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich (1881), claiming Marx called for a return to the archaic type of the Russian rural commune as a path to socialism. Saito states that "Marx in 1881 utilised this opportunity to formulate his vision of non-class society based on what he had learned through his intensive study of rural communes". Saito seems to believe that Marx at the end of his life looked to pre-capitalist societies as the basis of human "unity" with nature. In fact, the Russian commune was soon supplanted by capitalist relations of production in agriculture and industry.

Saito stretches the texts to breaking point. His reading back into Marx modern conceptions such as degrowth are both anachronistic and confounded by much else in Marx's writings. Saito claims that "Marx's last vision of post-capitalism is degrowth communism", yet admits in the conclusion that "Unfortunately, Marx did not elaborate on the idea of degrowth communism". It seems obtuse to attribute a vision to Marx that he failed to articulate.

The political conclusions Saito draws follow this twisted logic. He calls on green and red to "build a new Front Populaire in defence of the planet in the Anthropocene". Saito appears to reject any technological advances such as nuclear power and geoengineering that might provide the basis for immediate demands on bourgeois politicians to act on ecological crises. Technologies under workers' control are also spurned under socialism. Despite the engagement with Marxism, this is a long way from working class politics or even a working-class-based ecology movement. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/saito-m

The war has damaged every sphere of life

By Kateryna Maliuta-Osaulova

Kateryna Maliuta-Osaulova, International Officer of the Ukrainian Trade Union of Education and Science Workers, spoke at the Workers' Liberty fringe meeting at NEU conference on 4 April. The union organises 1.2 million workers in Ukraine.

Firstly, we want to thank you for your position and for your support. It is very important to us and to the Ukrainian people to feel your solidarity. This war has not been going on for only one year. It started in 2014. That year we lost Crimea and the Eastern part of Ukraine.

It looked like an internal war. From the outside it might have seemed like an internal conflict. But the war continued and during the whole period since 2014 we have been losing our people. This year the war in Ukraine became, quite clearly, an international war. It became an international war because if we lose the democratic world will lose too. Ukraine will cease to exist if Russia wins. And Russia will become much

more powerful. If that happens those states that have supported us will then have to multiply their military spending to meet the threat of Russia.

This is not a "normal" war. We face genocide. Torture chambers for children have been found in formerly occupied territories.

Now much of the territory of Ukraine is now mined. 174,000 square km is now mined. That's almost double the area of Portugal. Even with the help of other countries who will send us experts to help us de-mine the country it will take ten years to remove these mines.

This war had damaged every sphere of Ukrainian life. Everything will need to be rebuilt, reconstructed.

3,200 educational institutions have been damaged. 430 educational centres have been totally destroyed. 900 educational institutions exist under occupation, in Russian-occupied areas.

20,000 children have been taken by Russia from Ukraine. We have only managed to bring 300 of these chil-



dren back. What is the future of those children still in Russia? We do not know. Let me tell you about one of our colleagues, who was teaching a seven-year-old boy in an area of active fighting. Every day there were explosions. The boy felt sick and fell into a coma. The doctors say the boy's condition was caused by the continual stress of the war. Fortunately, the boy lived, thanks to the doctors, thank God. The children face trauma.

Those teachers who are in occupied areas have been put under pressure to collaborate. If they refuse to collaborate with the occupation they risk being put in prison or tortured. In occupied areas teachers are not allowed to teach in Ukrainian.

All the libraries have been "cleaned"

and books in Ukrainian have been destroyed.

In Ukraine we had about 450 schools where children were taught in Russian. But there is no school in Russia, or in Russian occupied areas of Ukraine, where Ukrainian is used or learned. My husband's parents are from Russia. At home I spoke Russian and at work I spoke Ukrainian. That was before the war. But now my husband is studying Ukrainian. That change is common now.

Our nation is now very united. This unity gives us the strength to stay, to continue to believe that we will win.

Ukraine asks for weapons so we can defend democracy and democratic principles. The terrorist country must not be allowed to defeat us and the whole civilised world. □

Putin apologism defeated at NEU

By David Pendleton

For the second year in a row those on the left who want to ignore the urgent need for solidarity with Ukraine and excuse Putin by claiming the war is NATO's fault have been defeated at National Education Union (NEU) conference

(3-6 April). Motions strongly in support of Ukraine's fight were submitted to conference, but did not get prioritised by Districts. Two Ukrainian women teacher trade unionists who came to the conference were, shamefully, not allowed to address the conference or put on

any union platforms. The main international motion at conference entitled "Peace is union business", made no overt mention of the Ukraine or Putin but finessed the issue by claiming that "trade unionists have no interest in war with China, Russia or any other country".

Ukrainian trade unionists certainly have a very real interest in winning Ukraine's war with Russia, and trade unionists elsewhere have a duty of solidarity and an "interest" in supporting them. The motion was further embellished by an amendment.

The discussion was split over several days and was heated. There were good speeches against the motion and amendment.

The supporters of the motion tried to blackmail conference, arguing if you support "peace" you should vote for them.

On the final day of conference, a number of Districts opposing the motion produced and distributed a leaflet, explaining why the motion should be defeated. Support-

ers of the motion then moved to the vote with no further discussion. It was defeated on a digi-vote, used when votes are too close to call by sight.

The Districts who produced the leaflet are setting up a network for solidarity with Ukraine. (Contact: Dennis Charman, Hammersmith and Fulham NEU).

On the second day of con-

ference Workers' Liberty held its fringe meeting "Solidarity with the Ukraine. Solidarity with Iranian women and workers" with an Ukrainian socialist speaking live from Kyiv, the two teacher trade unionists previously mentioned, and an Iranian woman speaking.

Their speeches were moving and inspiring. 40 people attended. □



Activist Agenda

The Free Our Unions website, freeourunions.org, carries a discussion article arguing that "non-compliance" with the Tories' new Minimum Service legislation can be effective only if it extends to unions defying injunctions against strikes, and against solidarity strikes.

The website also has a survey of motions tabled for union conferences this summer about anti-union laws.

Labour Left Internationalists, bit.ly/mo-int, will discuss template motions for Labour conference 2023 at its next

committee meeting on 14 April. Among the proposed subjects are anti-union laws and Brexit. LLI will surely also be backing template motions from Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Labour Campaign for Council Housing, and environmentalist left groupings.

See bit.ly/china-call for the draft call for a new umbrella campaign in solidarity with workers and oppressed peoples under Beijing rule. □

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



Our audio

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

- Public meetings – recordings of introductory speeches on topics from Ukraine to "Geoengineering" to trans rights and beyond. Campaigns, history, theory, current affairs, and more.
- Fighting racism: pamphlets, meetings, and more
- Environmental pamphlets and meetings
- Solidarity Newspaper and Women's Fightback
- Effective Trade Unionism, Sylvia, Corbyism, and many other pamphlets and short books

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



How the NHS failed on Covid control

By Stuart Jordan

In November 2022 the government's Industrial Injury Advisory Panel found that there is a "large body of consistent supporting evidence" that health and social care workers "have been exposed to significantly increased risk" of infection, illness and death due to Covid-19.

Nobody has counted, but it is thought that over 1,500 NHS and social care staff died of Covid-19. Many of these lives might have been saved by simple infection control measures.

NHS's Covid safety measures were and still remain astonishingly inadequate. Although some individuals won safety improvements in their work areas and Trusts, the general picture, reflected in national guidance, was woefully inadequate.

The NHS sets the gold standard for infection control measures in other workplaces, so the failure to adopt an evidence-based approach to infection control has had a profoundly negative impact on the UK's public health standards, especially in the social care sector.

The NHS failed to implement important evidence-based infection control on sick pay, and on clean air.

Airborne

There was and continues to be an extreme reluctance to acknowledge airborne transmission. Public Health England spent most of the pandemic insisting that Covid-19 was spread by droplet and fomite (surface) transmission, not airborne.

The science of how microscopic pathogens move through the air is complex but for infection control purposes it is fairly straightforward. Droplets are large particles that drop to the floor within about two metres of leaving the airway. Aerosols are smaller particles that remain suspended in the air like smoke.

There are different control measures for droplet and airborne transmission. Droplet precautions involve universal loose-fitting mask wearing and two-metre distancing. The mask is a form of source control, capturing infectious particles as they leave the airway.

Fomite precautions involve hand-washing and regular cleaning (but, despite much extra cleaning in lockdowns, there is little evidence Covid-19 is transmitted that way). Airborne precautions involve tight fitting respirator masks (FFP3 or similar) for all



Proper PPE would have reduced infections in hospitals

Covid-positive patient care and well-ventilated buildings.

Evidence for airborne transmission has existed since the start of the pandemic and was being discussed in SAGE reports as early as January 2020. If a precautionary approach had been taken, airborne precautions would have been introduced from the start of the pandemic, as advised in pre-pandemic Health and Safety Executive guidance.

The battle to get formal acknowledgement of airborne transmission has been long fought both in the UK and across the world. Public Health England formally accepted the possibility of airborne transmission only in autumn 2021. In my NHS Trust, airborne transmission was formally acknowledged only in March 2022.

Even where we have seen this formal acknowledgement of airborne transmission it has not led to the consistent introduction of airborne precautions.

Much evidence exists that universal FFP3 masks reduce the risk of hospital-acquired infection among healthworkers. The *Health Service Journal* reported in January 2022 that 30 Trusts were advising staff to adopt FFP3 masks for all Covid positive patient care. The rest were sending their workers into Covid infected air spaces wearing loose fitting surgical masks. National guidance is confused and now devolves responsibility to individual clinicians to decide which mask to wear.

NHS Trusts that simply repeat the national guidance fall foul of their responsibilities under the PPE at Work regulations which states employers need to provide suitable PPE for the job.

As for fresh air, NHS capital budgets are so underfunded that almost no effort has gone into upgrading ventilation systems. Short of a major U-turn from the government on NHS spending, that put adequate ventilation outside of the reach of many hospitals.

In December 2020, Addenbrookes Trust in Cambridge found that cheap Air Cleaning Units cleansed the air of airborne pathogens and reduced rates of hospital-acquired infection among staff and patients. Yet no effort has been made to roll Air Cleaning Units out to other parts of the NHS.

Meanwhile NHS bosses were sitting the pandemic out in the safety of their own homes, while essential services in our hospitals like cleaning, catering, security and portering, were being done by low-paid, insecurely employed workers who could not afford to isolate when sick. Decades of outsourcing in the NHS and broader public sector have created a low paid, hyper-exploited workforce with no entitlement to occupational sick pay.

If these workers needed to isolate, then the best they would get is Statutory Sick Pay which is less than £100 a week. At the start of the pandemic, then Health Secretary Matt Hancock admitted that it was not enough to live on.

It is possible that many NHS bosses were blissfully unaware of the problems or did not understand their significance for infection control. But Hancock and officials in the Department of Health were aware that lack of sick pay was a significant problem.

Early, on 2 March 2020, the Department of Health issued a directive that Trusts should ensure that outsourced

workers and bank staff could to isolate on full pay following public health advice. That was an admission by a government department that the government's Statutory Sick Pay scheme is a threat to public health.

It is one of the worst in Europe by a long way. Other European countries pay statutory sick pay at 50-100% of normal wages and many countries supplemented it with full pay for periods of Covid isolation. There were further official acknowledgements of the inadequacy of Statutory Sick Pay as the pandemic progressed. In May 2020, after around 85,000 care home residents had already died of Covid-19, the government set up an Infection Control Fund that could be used to provide the social care workforce with full sick or isolation pay. But the Infection Control Fund relied on care providers opting in to the scheme. Government figures suggest fewer than 40% of care providers bothered to access the scheme, with a majority preferring to keep their workforce caring for vulnerable adults without the means to take time off if they were infectious with a potentially-killer virus.

The early Department of Health directive, and the Infection Control Fund, were however acknowledgements that Britain's hyperexploited employment practices were undermining the public health effort. Later, the government tried to compensate by scattering a bit more isolation pay.

Financial hardship

In October 2020 Dido Harding, the head of NHS Test and Trace, told parliament that the £38 billion Test and Trace system, outsourced to a load of private contractors, was having no effect in reducing the rate of transmission. She explained that although people were testing, financial hardship was still driving people into workplaces. According to official figures fewer than one in five people were fully compliant with isolation rules.

The government responded by introducing a £500 isolation payment. But the payment was hard to access, and most low-paid key workers did not meet the stringent criteria.

In the NHS some Trusts made arrangements with some subcontractors to pay some isolation pay to their low paid staff, but there was no serious attempt to think through the infection control implications. Alongside their substantive staff, most outsourcing

firms employ a certain percentage of their staff through agencies on zero hours contracts at or near minimum wage. Workers can work for years via these agencies and for many it is the route into getting a substantive post.

So even when isolation pay arrangements were agreed with outsourcing firms, there was always a section of the workforce that could not afford to take time off. In the social care sector a majority of the workforce lacked occupational sick pay. Beyond that, in supermarkets, on public transport and elsewhere, the TUC estimates that 40% of key workers, people who had to mix socially to provide essential services during the high point of the pandemic, could not afford to isolate.

NHS leaders knew it was a problem, and a problem of their own creating, but despite professional obligations to uphold the highest levels of patient safety and escalate safety concerns, these leaders played politics rather than raise the alarm. Instead of being places of safety, our hospitals and care homes became reservoirs of infection as Covid-19 passed between staff and patients.

The hierarchy of controls which underpins good health and safety practice tells us that the most effective infection control measure is elimination. For Covid-19, that meant that the number one infection control priority was to take all reasonable measures to ensure that infectious people did not enter the workplace, i.e. for employers to provide the moral and financial support necessary to facilitate compliance with isolation rules.

Of course, people who need health or social care cannot fully isolate, so special measures are needed to controlling the risks when caring for infectious patients. But the failure of the NHS to ensure that its outsourced workers and similar could isolate substantially increased the risk of patients getting hospital acquired Covid-19.

Astonishing but true, there was no formal acknowledgement Covid-19 can be spread by an infectious individual. Our risk assessments were written by the work-from-home classes who regarded everyone as a potential source of infection. The official stance of the NHS was that no additional safety measures were required when caring for confirmed and suspected cases. Individual ward teams placed confirmed and suspected cases in isolation rooms or "red zones" within the hospital. But the workers operating in the red zones had the same level of protection as office workers sat at their desks doing twice-weekly asymptomatic testing and never going near a confirmed Covid-19 patient.

The failure to distinguish the heightened risk of infection from sharing airspace with an infected individual was reflected in the PPE advice that held sway for much of the pandemic. Tight-fitting FFP3 masks were available only where patients were undergoing "aerosol generating procedures" (intubation, ventilation etc) regardless of the patient's Covid-19 status. This had the effect that the best level of protection went to ICU staff, but it was far from an evidence-based approach. There is now a substantial body of evidence that Covid-19 laden aerosols are generated by coughing, talking and breathing, and sometimes in much greater quantities than the officially-recognised "procedures".

Many frontline clinical staff could see the flaws in our infection control measures but could not find an effective channel to voice those concerns and insist on action. Raising concerns through clinical channels did not work. Petitions, whistleblowing efforts and national trade union campaigns were blithely ignored.

At no point did any high-up official deny that the lack of sick pay for low paid workers constituted an infection control problem. But nothing was done

to introduce a comprehensive, adequate sick-pay system.

HSWA

The effective channel for challenge is given by rights in Health and Safety law. The Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) 1974 and related legislation is the distilled wisdom of a long tradition of workplace safety reps and reflects many of the values of democratic enquiry and evidence-based practice that we exercise in our clinical work. The historic movement of workplace safety reps, workers who organised around safety at work, is the only reason that we no longer work in poisonous death-traps that blighted and shortened the lives of our Victorian ancestors.

Since the earliest days of capitalism, the bosses' relentless pursuit of profit has driven down workplace safety standards as profit takes precedent over human life. But if you can identify a reasonably practicable way in which your workplace could become safer, then the HSWA gives you the tools you need to win improvements.

The law sets out that management must do everything reasonably practicable to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of employees. Management have to complete risk assessments. If you identify a workplace hazard that is missing from the risk assessment, then you can bring that to your employers attention and they are then legally bound to assess the risk more fully and introduce reasonably practicable control measures.

To make the case for workplace safety measures, you can become a workplace safety rep and gain the legal right to paid time off to inspect workplaces and make representations to management. This gives you the opportunity to speak to colleagues and gather the evidence to support your case in work time. The law also gives you the right to insist the employer forms a Health and Safety Committee that provides safety

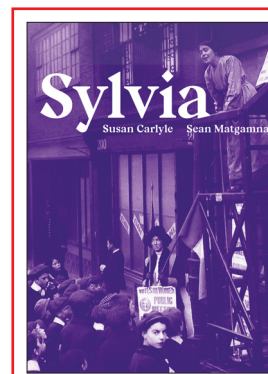
representatives with access to the most senior managers in your organisation.

In effect, the HSWA allows you to argue with your employer whilst simultaneously organising your workmates and gathering evidence to support your campaign.

But the NHS did not set a good example during the pandemic. Our infection control measures were not sufficiently evidence-based. Staff on the frontline and our families that suffered needlessly as a result. We are still suffering. The high death toll in the UK reflected the fact that NHS leaders and the government did not listen to the workers on the frontline. This culture, where those in power will not listen to the reality that their workforce is describing, is one that will make future pandemics more destructive.

The NHS is a body of 1.6 million workers, many extremely skilled and committed health professionals dedicated to evidence-based practice. But the pandemic demonstrates that our safety committees are either moribund or non-existent.

As many NHS workers joining the strike wave flood into the unions, there is an opportunity to rebuild these committees and develop a new safety culture in the NHS. If doctors, nurses, and other frontline healthworkers begin to use our rights under the HSWA then we can be a powerful bulwark against Tory plans to further degrade our NHS and our working conditions. □



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

Against ban on Corbyn, against "independent" contest

By Rhodri Evans

Since the 28 March [decision](#) by Labour's National Executive (NEC) to formalise Keir Starmer's ban on Jeremy Corbyn standing as Labour candidate in Islington North at the next election, Islington North Labour Party has [protested](#) and "Islington Friends of Jeremy Corbyn" has started a petition to back Corbyn.

More important than a petition is what can be done in the unions. At the NEC GMB, Usdaw and MU voted for the ban, and Unison abstained; Unite, CWU, Aslef, TSSA, and FBU voted against (with the disability rep and five CLP reps).

The ban motion recognised



Corbyn with local Labour councillors at a protest against bus service cuts

Corbyn as a Labour member in good standing, and cited no "offence" by him, only a (highly doubtful) opinion that his candidacy would harm Labour's

overall vote in the next general election. That would provide a precedent for banning almost any other left candidate too.

In the Islington labour move-

ment, one Labour councillor, Matt Nathan, has resigned to sit as an independent, but [quietly](#). Another, [Phil Graham](#), has said he will back Corbyn if

Corbyn stands against Labour, even at the cost of being expelled himself, and then sit as independent until 2026, when he would step down anyway because of poor health.

Mostly the local labour movement seems to be waiting to see what can be done to push back against the ban. Phil Graham says that even if Corbyn stands, "there's going to be no new party"; it will be as an independent.

Solidarity is for reversing the ban, but not for Corbyn standing against Labour. Cost: enabling Starmer to sweep out hundreds or thousands of leftists. Benefit: only a few more speeches (and some of them politically poor) by Corbyn in Parliament. □

Remembering Ahmed Rajib Haider

By Hein Htet Kyaw

The murder of activist Rajib Haider happened ten years ago, on 15 February 2013. Humanist blogger Rajib Haider, whose full name is Ahmed Rajib Haider, was brutally murdered by an Islamist terrorist group known as “Ansarullah Bangla Team,” which was later revealed to be a branch of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, a student branch of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami political party. According to government officials, the attack was planned by “Rana,” a leader in the Islamic Chhatra Shibir movement from the youth wing of Jamaat-e-Islami.

A murder attempt on an atheist who enjoys blaspheming online on blogs and social media might be the general perception of the majority of the misinformed audience. It wasn't quite that straightforward, though.

Ahmed Rajib Haider was a well-known activist during the 2013 Shahbag protests, which the locals also referred to as the Ganajagran Manch movement. Abdul Quader Mollah, the leader of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, had been condemned to life in jail and found guilty on five of six charges of war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh. A series of war crimes were committed

against moderate Bengali Muslims, secular activists, and other minorities like Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs by Abdul Quader Mollah and his Bengali Islamist group in 1971 when Pakistan invaded Bangladesh.

Shahbag

Given his misdeeds, the public thought Mollah's sentence was too mild. Progressive groups in Bangladesh urged for larger demonstrations to take place at Shahbag. The 2013 Shahbag protests were backed by the Awami League, a centre-left political party in Bangladesh, and the majority of left-wing activist groups, while they were opposed by centre-right and far-right political parties such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami party. Jamaat-e-Islami organised a counter-rally, challenging the legitimacy of the court and the protest movement while calling for the release of individuals who had been charged and found guilty. Rajib Haider was brutally murdered in such a way that most of his friends were unable to identify him from the corpse.

The murder of Haider can be thought to be part of a broader assault against secularist and atheist activists in Bangladesh. Since then, Islamic organisations have agitated for legislation on blas-

phemy that would be similar to the Pakistani blasphemy law. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission banned “somewhereinblog.net,” a blog where Ahmed Rajib Haider posts his left-leaning and secular ideas, in March 2013. At least five additional secular authors and publishers were killed by Islamists in 2015 alone. Atheist human rights activist Avijit Roy, a US-born Bengali, was killed just a few yards from the Dhaka book market. Another prominent secularist participant in the 2013 Shahbag protests, Washiqur Rahman, was assassinated in broad daylight not far from his house.

The western left has consistently failed to defend the third-world secularist movements by adopting the “anti-imperialism” line, which benefits far-right religious political parties and far-right fascist elements. As a result, more and more secular activists from the third-world left are being murdered or threatened with murder. I've recently gotten in touch with a number of far-left organisations in Bangladesh, including the Information Centre for Workers' Freedom (a classical Marxist organisation in Bangladesh), to enquire about minority politics affecting the Buddhist and Hindu religious minorities as well as the Chittagong Hill Tracts ethnic minorities. The majority



of far-left Bengali activists are reluctant to speak out against the ongoing genocides Chakma and other CHT ethnic minorities have experienced.

In the western world, it's considered politically correct and appreciated to speak out in favour of oppressed ethnic groups and religious minorities such as Palestinians, Kashmir, and Uyghur. However, in places like Bangladesh, Pakistan and other neighbouring countries, speaking out for those ethnic groups such as Chakma, as well as Buddhist and Hindu minorities might cost your life. □

Protests against Netanyahu continue

By Martin Thomas

Raids by Israeli police on the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem on 4-5 April have brought the area to the brink of full-scale war. So far [as of 11 April] only the brink.

Rockets from Gaza and (apparently fired by Hamas and Islamic Jihad rather than Hezbollah) from Lebanon followed, and then Israeli bombings of Gaza and southern Lebanon.

Qatar (which finances Hamas), Egypt, the Hezbollah-influenced government in Beirut, and the US are pushing for calm.

Standing Together, a Jewish-Arab socialist movement, has been organising anti-occupation blocs on the huge anti-government protests since early January. It is following up with protests opposing war, and proclaiming “no democracy with occupation” and “no democracy without equality”, including in Israel's second-biggest Arab city, Rahat



(in the Negev). The Palestinian minority within Israel is a critical force here, better-placed now to swing the political balance than the Palestinians in Gaza (dominated by Hamas) or in the West Bank (cooped up in 160-odd enclaves, towns and villages, with theoretical

autonomy, but surrounded by Israeli military control). It has been largely absent from the huge anti-Netanyahu protests since January, deterred by the hegemony on them of mainstream-conservative politicians.

Many of the far-right figures

in Benjamin Netanyahu's new coalition government, in office since 29 December, might well welcome war as a chance to quell the civil protests inside Israel and boost their drive for a more militarised, more repressive state. Protests continue despite Netanyahu's decision on 27 March to pause constitutional-change plans to 30 April.

Military

The Israeli military establishment is probably more cautious: it distrusts this government. Defence minister Yoav Gallant, sacked by Netanyahu on 26 March for backing the same pause that Netanyahu himself would announce the next day, has been quietly reinstated.

But the recently-retired leaders of the police and Shin Bet (equivalent of MI5) say that their organisations will follow the courts rather than the government in case of conflict.

Armed-forces reservists, in much larger numbers than the long-established trickle of

teenage refusers, have been boycotting military duties, and the military establishment has pointedly avoided disciplinary reprisals.

But, as Israeli academic Yigal Levy points out [in a new book](#), the politics of the current government are rooted in an escalated militarisation of Israeli society since the collapse in 2001 of negotiations for some “two states” settlement.

“Even if the army was the source of militarisation in the past, it was understood that there is an intractable conflict [with the Palestinians and the Arab world] and that a military response to it will not necessarily be effective for all time. The current discourse completely denies the presence of the conflict, saying, ‘The Arabs are unwilling to accept our existence and nothing can be done about it’ – other than a heavy hand against the Palestinians coupled with diplomatic deals with the Arab states.

Israel out of the West Bank! Two nations, two states! □

SNP in turmoil: chance for the left?

By Dale Street

Peter Murrell – the recently resigned CEO of the Scottish National Party (SNP), and husband of the recently resigned SNP leader and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon – was arrested on 5 April and questioned by police investigating the SNP's finances.

The family home was searched over the course of two days, as were the SNP headquarters in Edinburgh. Police took away boxloads of documents.

Police also visited the home of Murrell's 92-year-old mother, from where they seized a campervan reported to be worth £110,000.

The police investigation concerns the whereabouts of donations amounting to £660,000, raised by the SNP between 2017 and 2019 to pay for independence-related campaigning in the run-up to a second referendum. There has been no second referendum. So, where is the money?

Deficit

Apparently not in the SNP's accounts. Its 2021 accounts (the most recent to have been published) showed a deficit of £752,000 and £145,000 in cash assets.

Questions also continued to be asked about Murrell's personal loan of £107,000 to the party in June of 2021, which the SNP, in breach of election rules, failed to declare until over a year later.

Only four weeks prior to the loan being made, the SNP National Treasurer Douglas Chapman MP had resigned from his post: "I have not received the support or financial information to carry out the fiduciary duties of National Treasurer."

Although Murrell was released without charge after nearly twelve hours of questioning, the police investigation continues. And so too does the unfolding crisis into which the SNP has been plunged since Sturgeon's resignation in mid-February.

Her resignation was followed by that of Deputy First Minister John Swinney, SNP media chief Murray Foote (after having given the media false SNP membership figures), and CEO Peter Murrell (who denied having given Foote the falsified figures, but resigned anyway).

Over the past 15 months over 30,000 members have also resigned from the party. (With doubtless more to come: Most people do not resign from a political party – they simply fail to renew their membership.)

And now it turns out that the accountancy firm which audits the SNP's accounts has quit as well, although it is unclear if the decision was made before or after Murrell's arrest. The SNP has until July to find a new firm and produce accounts for 2022.

The leadership contest triggered by



Nicola Sturgeon and Peter Murrell

Sturgeon's resignation revealed the deeply divided, deeply undemocratic, and deeply conservative nature of the SNP.

The ban on SNP elected representatives voicing public criticism – adopted by the party's 2015 conference: "No member shall within or outwith the parliament publicly criticise a group decision, policy or another member of the group" – collapsed.

Leadership candidate Kate Forbes criticised the SNP's record in power at Holyrood ("continuity won't cut it") and denounced fellow candidate Humza Yousaf's record of failure as Minister for Transport, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, and Cabinet Secretary for Health.

The SNP machine mobilised to undermine Forbes' campaign. It lied about the membership figures until it was forced to back down, it barred the media from its election hustings, it made the election campaign as brief as possible, and it imposed spending restrictions of just £5,000 on election campaigning.

Even so, 48% of SNP voters backed a candidate standing on a political programme somewhere between Blairite New Labour and pre-Johnson Toryism. The Scottish Tories promised to support Forbes in Holyrood if she were to win (provided that she dropped all the stuff about Scottish independence).

The leadership contest also focused attention on the SNP's record in power at Holyrood, especially given Humza Yousaf's profile as "the continuity candidate". But what he was promising to continue was a record of unrelenting failure.

Child poverty rates have remained unchanged after 14 years of SNP rule. Drug-related deaths are at a record high, and so too is homelessness. There has been no progress in closing the education attainment gap, once described by the SNP as its "defining mission".

Waiting times for cancer treatment are at their worst level since records began. Less than two thirds of attendees at Accident and Emergency units are seen within the four-hour target waiting time. Waiting times for young people to access mental health treatment are at a record high.

Completion of the new ferries for Calmac has been further delayed. The promise to scrap the council tax was never delivered. Primary class sizes are bigger than in 2007. Recycling rates are lower than in 2014. And spending on private agency staff to cover staff shortages in the health service is running at record levels. And so on, and so forth.

Despite that dismal record the SNP has managed to survive to date by using three basic arguments to protect themselves from criticism: not as bad as the Tories; don't talk Scotland down; and if only we had independence.

The latest opinion polls suggest that even that rhetoric now counts as another SNP failure.

Independence

The unfolding crisis has even enveloped the SNP's reason for existence: the goal of Scottish independence.

In the leadership contest Ash Regan promised independence in three years. Humza Yousaf promised independence in five years. Kate Forbes refrained from naming a timescale.

But now Mike Russell, the SNP's acting CEO, has stated: "I don't think Scottish independence can be secured right now." The same Mike Russell stated only a year ago, after his appointment as SNP Independence Unit Director: "Scottish independence is now in sight."

It is the leadership contest that has been the catalyst for the SNP's crisis. Even worse for the SNP, voices within the party are demanding, with justice, that the election be rerun.

"Continuity candidate" Humza Yousaf stood on a platform of unqualified praise for Sturgeon and Murrell. But, since last week's arrest, he has backtracked on the central plank of his election platform: "It is very, very clear that the governance of the party was not as it should be."

Would the election result have been the same if Murrell's arrest, and the resignation of the party's accountants, had occurred before the election campaign? Would "the continuity candidate" have been such a popular electoral ticket in those circumstances?

Murrell's arrest also throws up fresh questions about the real reasons for Sturgeon's resignation: She claimed, when announcing her resignation, that the ongoing police investigation was not a factor in her decision.

And Sturgeon's vagueness about when she learnt of the £107,000 loan is hardly credible. She said in her resignation speech: "I can't recall exactly when I first knew that, but what he does with his resources is a matter for him."

The SNP is not about to collapse into nothingness. It remains, by far, Scotland's biggest party. In fact, in terms of per head of population, it remains Brit-

ain's biggest political party.

And despite plummeting levels of support in opinion polls, it still stands to win more Westminster and Holyrood seats than any other party – but nothing even beginning to approach an absolute majority.

In fact, the ruthless coverage of one SNP scandal after another by the media has only reinforced the loyalty of some true believers: It's all a plot by Westminster and the unionist camp to do down the SNP:

"This is a Scottish Office stitch-up, led by our colonial master (Alistair) Jack. ... I've been seeing MI5 manipulation for some time. ... The strings are being pulled by Downing Street. Police Scotland should be ashamed of themselves."

"Was yesterday the tipping point for Scottish independence? Are Scots sensing that there may be more to this than just a case of financial impropriety? Dark forces of the UK state at work? UK state putting the boot in when they think we are vulnerable?"

"We need to know why Police Scotland decided to act out this disgraceful display to deliberately draw attention to and humiliate Nicola/Peter Murrell/Scottish Government. We want to know who made the decision. Where did the decision come from? Who did they tip off?"

"Many of us have been saying for years that the British Establishment will go to any lengths to destroy the SNP and the Yes movement in general. Ongoing farcical scenes provide concrete evidence that we are right. Don't be browbeaten. Join the only party that can deliver freedom!"

But the SNP does face a very real crisis of credibility. And socialists can only welcome that fact.

Class politics

The years of SNP domination of Scottish politics have been years of the domination of nationalist populism at the expense of class politics. The SNP was able to project itself as pseudo-radical alternative to Blairite New Labour and discredited Toryism.

It was even able to sell to its backward-looking and inward-looking call for Scottish independence as radical politics, with sections of the far left only too willing to jump on the bandwagon in the name of a spurious "anti-imperialism".

The bedrock of support which the SNP continues to enjoy, along with the bleakness of the alternatives offered by Starmer and the Tories, means that the party may eventually be able to stabilise itself.

But socialists should exploit its current difficulties to try to minimise the chances of that happening. The SNP is in a crisis? Good! □



Why Socialist Appeal



Eye on the Left

By Mohan Sen

In the 1938 article [“Learn to think”](#), Leon Trotsky argued that if fascist Italy sent weapons to aid – for its own malign reasons – nationalist rebels against France in Algeria, socialists in Italy should not oppose and even help that. Opposing such military aid would, he argued, mean betraying the Algerians’ liberation struggle.

The relevance to Ukraine now is clear. The [Socialist Appeal](#) group, consistent opponents of Ukraine’s war of self-defence and consistent though not uncritical [apologists](#) for Russia, have objected to this comparison – at length and with theatrical rhetoric. What are the issues?

In fact Joe Attard’s November 2022 [polemic](#), hotly denying the relevance of this argument in “Learn to think” to the Ukraine conflict, recapitulates exactly the kind of position Trotsky was criticising – opposing aid to a just struggle against imperialist violence on grounds of opposing the ruling class in one’s own country.

The argument in “Learn to think”

Trotsky: *Let us assume that rebellion breaks out tomorrow in the French colony of Algeria under the banner of national independence and that the Italian government, motivated by its own imperialist interests, prepares to send weapons to the rebels. What should the attitude of the Italian workers be in this case? I have purposely taken an example of rebellion against a democratic imperialism with intervention on the side of the rebels from a fascist imperialism. Should the Italian workers prevent the shipping of arms to the Algerians? Let any ultra-leftists dare answer this question in the affirmative. Every revolutionist, together with the Italian workers and the rebellious Algerians, would spurn such an answer with indignation. Even if a general maritime strike broke out in fascist Italy at the same time, even in this case the strikers should make an exception in favour of those ships carrying aid to the colonial slaves in revolt; otherwise they would be no more than wretched trade unionists – not proletarian revolutionists.*

At the same time, the French maritime workers, even though not faced with any strike whatsoever, would be compelled to exert every effort to block the shipment of ammunition intended for use against the rebels. Only such



a policy on the part of the Italian and French workers constitutes the policy of revolutionary internationalism.

Does this not signify, however, that the Italian workers moderate their struggle in this case against the fascist regime? Not in the slightest. Fascism renders “aid” to the Algerians only in order to weaken its enemy, France, and to lay its rapacious hand on her colonies. The revolutionary Italian workers do not forget this for a single moment. They call upon the Algerians not to trust their treacherous “ally” and at the same time continue their own irreconcilable struggle against fascism, “the main enemy in their own country”. Only in this way can they gain the confidence of the rebels, help the rebellion and strengthen their own revolutionary position.

Note that Trotsky advocates a coherent and consistent internationalist policy for workers’ movements around the world – not the idea that the only or dominating task in every given situation, at every given moment, is opposing action by the government of one’s own country.

The whole [article](#) is valuable reading. This is how Trotsky explains its fundamental idea:

In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases however they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must each time orient itself independently in the internal as well as the external situation, arriving at those decisions which corre-

spond best to the interests of the proletariat. This rule applies just as much to the war period as to the period of peace.

Attard

The quality of Joe Attard’s polemic can be measured by the claim at the start of his article that US socialist John Reimann (who has cited “Learn to think”) “says socialists should support strengthening NATO”. The [article](#) by Reimann Attard quotes – but doesn’t link to – says nothing even vaguely like that.

Attard tries at some length to tar all those who support Ukraine with supporting NATO, increased UK military spending and so on. He evidently found doing that easier than tackling the arguments of those who oppose Western militarism while supporting Ukraine.

He dismisses the issue of “the right of nations to self-determination” in connection with Ukraine on the grounds that “this democratic right should always be contingent on the wider interests of the working class”. His explanation why this invalidates the need to defend Ukraine’s right to self-determination hinges on declaring, in defiance of facts, that this is an “inter-imperialist war” – and suggesting that the bloodshed and wider global misery caused by the conflict are therefore somehow Ukraine’s responsibility as much as Russia’s.

“... we would point out that choosing not to block arms shipments is not the same as calling on one’s own reactionary government to send arms.” The difference, when what is involved is weapons being sent to a national-rights or democratic struggle rather than direct military action by an outside imperialist state, is hardly one of principle. Moreover demands for military aid to,

e.g., the UK of today are not quite the same as demands on the Italian (or UK) regimes of the 30s, ruling over colonial empires they were seeking to expand in the world of colonial empires. The UK and other big states allied to Ukraine are capitalist and imperialist and rapacious – but they are not trying to “lay their hands” on Ukraine in the same sense as Russia.

Attard falsely claims that socialists supporting arms for Ukraine refuse to talk about the fact that the Western powers are (of course) supporting Ukraine for their own self-interested reasons.

“.. the imperialists have not required any encouragement from the left and labour movement to send” arms, he claims. In fact Ukraine’s imperialist allies – even the most eager – have consistently dragged their feet over providing it with the kind of weapons and equipment it needs to win, because they do not want Russia to win but fear how Putin might respond and are nervous about a clear-cut Ukrainian victory. This reality disappears beneath Attard’s puffing about “war-mongering hysteria”.

When Attard accuses Ukraine’s allies of “dragging out this conflict”, his implication is that without support for Ukraine there would have been some sort of preferable situation of peace – as opposed to the establishment of “peace” because Putin had successfully subordinated Ukraine (as a prelude to new wars in Ukraine and elsewhere).

Zelenskyy

He makes great play of the fact Trotsky also imagines a Belgian workers’ state receiving weapons from capitalist France because of a threat from Germany. But the Algerian example Trotsky starts with makes it clear he was very much not only considering military aid to working-class regimes.

Attard then blurs it all together: “What is happening in Ukraine is not a revolutionary uprising by an oppressed colony or a case of self-defence by a proletarian regime.” So there seems to be a broad, inclusive “good” category, into which however Ukraine does not fall.

His justification for this is that Ukraine has a “reactionary bourgeois government”. Attard’s explanation of why it is reactionary is larded with misrepresentation and exaggeration. But Zelenskyy’s government is [certainly](#) bourgeois and right-wing.

Zelenskyy is, as Attard points out, attacking Ukraine’s unions (we doubt that he or Socialist Appeal have done anything about it – AWL and other pro-

can't "learn to think"

Ukraine socialists have, in cooperation with our comrades in Ukraine). But the Algerian national liberation movement that eventually overthrew French rule created a repressive one-party regime. Should the left have not supported it against France? The Stalinist movement that led Vietnam's war of national liberation against US imperialism murdered thousands of revolutionary socialists and suppressed all working-class organisations. Was it wrong to support the Vietnamese against the US, and their arming by the Soviet Union and China?

Attard would not argue that. Such inconsistency exists for different reasons in different parts of the left. In the case of the quarter-Stalinist Socialist Appeal, it has extensive illusions in authoritarian or totalitarian "socialist" movements and regimes. Such forces were or are part of the "world revolution"; they constitute "revolutionary uprisings" even when they thoroughly suppress working-class and democratic rights and work for authoritarian dictatorships. Meanwhile Socialist Appeal paints pro-Western neo-liberal Ukraine in the grimmest possible colours, simultaneously ignoring the elements of popular organisation in the Ukrainian struggle.

Why and how Marxists pick sides

This is how Trotsky advocated military support for Spain's Republican government in the Spanish civil war:

We accuse this government of protecting the rich and starving the poor. This government must be smashed. So long as we are not strong enough to replace it, we are fighting under its command. But on every occasion we express openly our nonconfidence in

it...

"... we are fighting under its command". And this in a situation where Spain, unlike Ukraine now, had a mass revolutionary workers' movement not far off the possible conquest of power – a movement the Republican government attacked and ultimately suppressed.

Socialists should support the defence and preservation of Ukrainian independence and self-rule just as we supported the defence of even bourgeois democracy against Franco's fascism. In neither case does that imply political support for the government leading the struggle. The point is to preserve and expand the spaces in which the labour movement and its socialist wing can exist and grow and fight.

Attard admits that a reactionary and undemocratic government can lead a legitimate and liberatory struggle, citing Ethiopia in the 1930s (far more reactionary and undemocratic than Zelenskyy's Ukraine). But he dismisses out of hand, with no actual consideration of the issues, the idea that Ukrainian victory could have significant positive consequences.

The defeat of an aggressive and bloody military imperialism, and an increasingly reactionary and repressive Russian regime, one that sponsors dictatorships and far-right movements in many parts of the world, by a mobilisation of its victims could clearly have positive consequences.

Of course Ukrainian victory will not change the basic conditions of global capitalist exploitation and crisis. Yes, "only the independent struggle of the working class is capable of bringing an end to the nightmare of war, national chauvinism, and economic misery in

Ukraine, Russia, and throughout the world."

But the idea that independent working-class politics and struggles can or should advance by dismissing resistance to the kind of oppression and militarism that characterises Russia's war in Ukraine is ludicrous. And that is exactly what Attard does when he blindly declares "this is a reactionary war on both sides".

A proxy war?

Instead of thinking seriously about the consequences of various outcomes, Attard pivots to Socialist Appeal's favourite theme, that Ukraine is a proxy of US and other Western imperialisms: "Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy is entirely dictated by western – and particularly American – imperialism."

Ukrainian [socialists](#) are fighting the subordination of Ukrainian society to Western capitalist-imperialist interests, as well as fighting the Ukrainian ruling class. Unlike Socialist Appeal, they understand that the conquest or subordination of Ukraine by Russian militarism is an even greater and more immediate threat.

The fact is that Socialist Appeal is not very interested in Ukraine or its people, except as a proxy for talking about Western imperialism. Its politics are miles from Trotsky's insistence (elsewhere) that "what characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude to oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics".

Concretely, the Ukrainian struggle is less of a proxy for the US or anyone else than, say, the [Bangladeshi](#) war of independence (1971) was for the Indian government in its struggle against Pakistan (to a lesser extent the Soviet Union in its struggle against the US and China). Indira Gandhi's regime supported and helped organise the Bangladeshi resistance to Pakistan from the start, and it only finally triumphed when India invaded.

So would Socialist Appeal dismiss one of the most significant anti-imperialist struggles of the 20th century as fundamentally a proxy for Indian imperialism? If not, why not? Would it have called for India to stop its military support for the Bengalis?

Many other examples could be cited. Attard cites the Kurds; but in doing so demonstrates the opposite of what he seems to want. If he is applying his arguments about Ukraine to the Kurdish struggle, his comments would seem to imply that Kurdish alliances with – and betrayal by – Western imperialists

mean the Kurds have forfeited their right to support from the left. Or that international socialists, rather than advocating distrust in Western imperialists, should have simply opposed imperialist help for the Kurds. If he is not suggesting those things, he is not saying very much.

In 2014, when the US *bombed* Daesh (ISIS) forces besieging the Kurdish city of Kobane in northern Syria, Socialist Appeal did not oppose it or call for the US to stop – perhaps that would have been too embarrassing. In fact it [leant towards](#) implying the US was not doing enough... As with so much here, Socialist Appeal seems unfazed by inconsistencies and contradictions.

Indifference

"In the abstract", Attard declares, "ordinary Ukrainians facing Russian military aggression are indeed entitled to take weapons from whomever they want... [however] the bulk of the fighting in Ukraine is not being done by ordinary volunteers, but by the official armed forces, whose leadership has an extremely reactionary character."

I doubt Attard is very knowledgeable about the Ukrainian armed forces, but let's accept their leadership is reactionary.

"Ordinary Ukrainians... ordinary volunteers" seems like code – sloppy, confused or deliberately obscuring – for a working-class-based resistance movement. In so far as he has a clear point here, Attard seems to be suggesting defensive or liberation struggles by oppressed or vulnerable nations only have validity if they are dominated by working-class forces. Again, apply this to the Vietnamese struggle, whose leaders aimed not only to win national freedom but to create a totalitarian state without a labour movement...

Attard ignores small but real initiatives by Ukrainian socialists, anarchists and trade unionists to organise their own (not at all ordinary!) units and networks within the Ukrainian military struggle – unsurprisingly, given Socialist Appeal does not care what Ukrainian (and Russian) left-wingers think about the war. More fundamentally it suggests that, since the Ukrainian resistance is dominated by regular bourgeois armed forces, whether the Ukrainians can defend themselves against slaughter and oppression is of no real interest. The idea that it is of little interest – what Trotsky called "nose-picking" in the face of massacres – permeates Attard's whole article and Socialist Appeal's whole attitude to the war in Ukraine. □

Airbrushing anti-war Russians

Left groups in Britain which de facto side with Putin in Ukraine – by way of focusing their agitation against military aid for Ukraine – airbrush out the Ukrainian left, groups like [Sotsialnyi Rukh](#) (Social Movement).

Increasingly they also airbrush out the anti-war opposition in Russia (and among Russians living outside Russia).

[Socialist Appeal](#) comes close to saying that Russian workers support the war and are right to do so. "There is no significant anti-war movement in Russia at present and what there is is led and directed by the bourgeois-liberal elements... The workers take one look at the pro-western credentials of these elements, and turn away, curs-

ing. The war has the general support of the majority... especially the workers... [events] confirm the suspicion that Russia is being besieged by its enemies".

Socialist Worker carried some reports of anti-war agitation in Russia in early 2022, including from an affiliated group within Russia. The reports have ceased, and the group has disappeared from SW's affiliate list, as SW has described the conflict as "[more and more](#)" a "proxy" war by NATO against Russia.

The Socialist had two reports of anti-war stances inside Russia in early 2022, but we can find none since. □



Connolly and Ma

James Connolly and religion

This instalment in our series on James Connolly discusses his ideas on socialist theory and how it related to religion. In [Solidarity 664](#), [665](#), and [666](#), we carried some of Connolly's main articles on that question.



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

The idea that there are three fronts in the class struggle was formulated by Frederick Engels when he praised the German socialists in these terms: "For the first time since a workers' movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides – the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists) – in harmony and in its interconnections, and in a systematic way. It is precisely in this, as it were, concentric attack, that the strength and



Seán Mac Diarmada, a leader of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the run-up to 1916, was, like many IRB people, a devout Catholic

invincibility of the German movement lies".

This idea of "three fronts" was common in the Socialist (Second) International. It was at the heart of the work that Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) did in building up the Bolshevik Party. Its absence was at the heart of what James Connolly did in the labour movement.

It was central to his [dispute](#) with Daniel De Leon in 1904, though on one issue, Connolly's rejection of the "Iron Law of Wages", his insistence that trade unions can raise wages and that real wages are historically determined and variable, Connolly was surely right.

Catholicism

Connolly believed that the Catholic Church would adapt itself to a triumphant socialism as it had to the capitalism which it had, and for a long time, covering many centuries, opposed. He was either a Catholic or a lapsed Catholic all of his life. He died a Catholic, receiving Extreme Unction and making Confession. He died a proselytising Catholic: he persuaded Lillie, his wife, who had been a Protestant, to convert, which she did a short time after his death.

Of the 15 men killed by the British Army after the 1916 Rising (and Roger Casement was hanged in Pentonville Jail on 3 August 1916), only one refused to be reconciled to the Church. That was not Connolly, but Tom Clarke, an old Fenian, who had survived 15

years in an English jail. Yet the Catholic Church had actively opposed the Irish Transport Union in the Labour War of 1913/14, only two years earlier. Catholic thugs had attacked union members and sympathisers.

Connolly, after Jim Larkin leader then of the union, was reconcilable. In fact in a polemic against the Jesuit Fr Kane's attack on socialism, he had explained what his conception of Marxism was:

"Socialists are bound as Socialists only to the acceptance of one great principle – the ownership and control of the wealth-producing power by the State, and that, therefore, totally antagonistic interpretations of the Bible or of prophecy and revelation, theories of marriage, and of history, may be held by Socialists without in the slightest degree interfering with their activities".

And in an open letter to Archbishop Walsh he wrote:

"Your Grace, we will fight!

"But if your Grace is as solicitous about the poor bodies of those children as we know you to be about their souls, or even if you are but one tenth part as solicitous, may we suggest to you or your laymen that your duty is plain...

"If the employers reject your offer of mediation and still declare their contempt for any public opinion they cannot rig in advance, then it is your manifest duty to organise public support for the workers to defeat their

soulless employers".

This, or something even more obsequious, would be the tone of the labour movement to the priests for decades and generations to come. In fact Walsh had endorsed the lie that Dora Montefiore, the organiser for taking starving strikers' children to be cared for by sympathisers, was really a recruiter for the "white slave trade".

Earlier he had tried to explain himself to a personal friend who remained a De Leonite, John Carstairs Matheson:

"For myself tho' I have usually posed as a Catholic I have not gone to my duty for 15 years, and have not the slightest tincture of faith left. I only assumed the Catholic pose in order to query the raw freethinker whose ridiculous dogmatism did and does annoy me as much as the dogmatism of the Orthodox. In fact I respect the good Catholic more than the average freethinker".

In fact Connolly was always publicly solicitous for the Catholic Church. At the height of the 1913-14 Labour War, Connolly had written as above in an open letter to Archbishop Walsh. Jim Larkin was then in jail, and Connolly wrote on behalf of the union.

This is important for understanding James Connolly and his Marxism. He said what he thought necessary, not necessarily what he thought true. [1]

The Second International had as a central formula: "Religion is a private matter." Originally it meant a private matter as between the individual and the state, so, for example, complete separation of education from the churches.

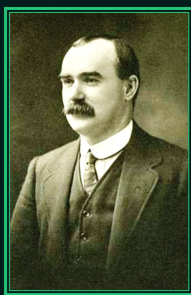
The Marxists opposed the laws of the Prussian state persecuting Catholic priests in the 1870s. The socialists argued that no laws of the state would get rid of religion. Only changing the conditions that generated religion would do that.

Marx

As Marx wrote:

"Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self consciousness and self-feeling of man, who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, a reversed world consciousness, because

Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist &
Internationalist

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

It traces his influences and influence through a transnational network of working-class activists, socialist agitators, and revolutionary nationalists. 412 pages £25

workersliberty.org/publications

Marxism, part five

they are a reversed world. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic point d'honneur, its enthusiasm; its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human essence because the human essence has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore mediately the fight against the other world, of which religion is the spiritual aroma.

"Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and a protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.

"Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man will wear the chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he may shake off the chain and cull the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusions man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve round himself and therefore round his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolved round man as long as he did not revolve round himself.

"The task of history, therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the saintly form of human self-alienation has been unmasked, is to unmask self-alienation in its unholy form. Thus the criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism

of religion into the criticism of right and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics."

And Ulianov (Lenin), in his 1909 article *The Attitude of the Workers' Party towards Religion*:

"The philosophical basis of Marxism... is dialectical materialism... a materialism which is absolutely atheistic and resolutely hostile to all religion. Let us recall that the whole of Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, which Marx read in manuscript, is an indictment of the materialist and atheist Dühring for not being a consistent materialist and for leaving loopholes for religion and religious philosophy. Let us recall that in his essay on Ludwig Feuerbach, Engels reproaches Feuerbach for combatting religion not in order to destroy it, but in order to renovate it, to create a new "exalted" religion, and so forth... Religion is the opium of the people – this dictum of Marx's is the cornerstone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion. Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches and all religious organisations as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to drug the working class."

Even to conceive of the workers taking power demands a level of conscious understanding for them which was unnecessary and anyway unattainable for the bourgeoisie. Because in the bourgeois revolution the aspirant ruling class had already a degree of wealth and control of the means of production, they were able to improvise any ideology, feeling their way from their growing economic power, adapting elements of religion to fit their needs: the revolutionary political changes followed, more or less as a reflection and extension of their developing economic control, more or less piecemeal. Their non-rational ideology was an expression of their immaturity, a mark that they were merely a link, not the end, in the chain of class societies.

By contrast, the proletariat does not develop control of a portion of the means of production within the old system: it remains in wage-slavery up to the point of taking power and expropriating the capitalists, when it must deliberately smash the old state and establish a new workers' type of state to secure its victory. The conscious workers' struggle based on science, the prelude to the conscious domination of reality, is central to the Marxist theory of the proletarian revolution, and an absolute pre-requisite for the members of the revolutionary party aiming to lead the working masses out of wage-slavery, is a consistently scientific, there-



fore materialist world outlook. Only such an outlook, rigorously pushing aside all obscurantism and reliance on imaginary "powers" other than human activity, can show the working class what its historic interests are and how it can serve them. Dialectical materialism is not an optional but an essential weapon in the struggle of the working class to remake the world.

The founders and leading contributors to the development of Marxism therefore made war on religion as superstition, dream compensation for wage-slavery and anointing oil of class society, providing some of the ideological cement for that society. In the historic Marxism there was no place for gods or for agnostic indifference.

Blanquists

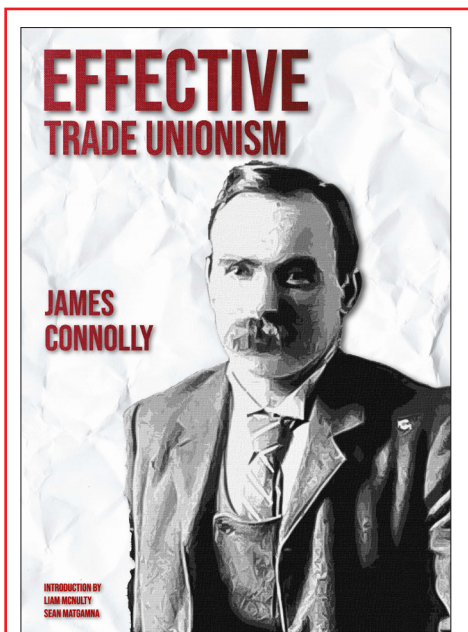
Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) recalled that "*Engels blame[d] the Blanquists for failing to understand that only the class struggle of the working-class masses could in fact, by comprehensively drawing large numbers of the proletariat into conscious revolutionary social practice, free the oppressed masses from the yoke of religion.*"

But, demanding that religion should be made "a private matter" in relation to the state – i.e. complete secularisation, no subsidies, no religious tampering with education, complete freedom of conscience and worship for all believers coupled with complete freedom for atheist propaganda – Ulianov insisted that religion was not a private matter in relation to the revolutionary party. The Marxists who founded the Communist International in 1919 criticised their predecessors as having changed "religion is a private matter" in practice to mean "religion is a private matter in relation to the Marxist party".

The shift to a softer attitude (religion a "private matter" in relation to the party, not just the state) was, as always, done for "practical" reasons, on the grounds that to do otherwise would stir up

needless religious opposition.

Connolly raised that "practical" argument in relation to De Leon and August Bebel. But James Connolly was in a class of his own on religion in the Socialist International. If the right wing interpreted the International's programme that religion was a private matter as meaning private in relation to the Marxist party, Connolly and Larkin saw nothing wrong in the central leaders of the workers being or posing as Catholics. And that in a world in which most of the industrial workers were Protestant, hating Catholics and being hated by Catholics. The Catholic Church officially forbade its supporters to be socialists. (See *Solidarity* 629 and 630 for the religiosity of Connolly and Larkin).



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

workersliberty.org/publications



Connolly interpreted separation of Church and State not only as indifference to labour-movement members being Catholics, but the leaders being or “posing” (Connolly’s self description) as Catholics. The reductio ad absurdum here was when Jim Larkin refused, during the Labour War, to speak at a prearranged meeting on the publicly stated grounds that the chairman, a member of the British Socialist Party, had been divorced. The meeting was cancelled.

After 1912 Connolly worked to build a Labour-Party political wing of the unions in Ireland. The Socialist Party of Ireland, successor of Connolly’s ISRP, was a loose propaganda society and for Connolly had no essential role. The workers would mechanically see the need for socialism when society was ready, and their awareness of the industrial union would lead them spontaneously to socialism.

In the theory Connolly had shared with De Leon in 1903-08, the party had an essential political role to play. In Connolly’s scheme when back in Ireland from 1910, the transition from capitalism to socialism involved no revolutionary party, neither the semi-redundant Socialist Party of Ireland, nor the Irish Labour Party, which reflected the unions: the revolution would occur more or less spontaneously.

Shortly before he died, Connolly wrote *Old Wine in New Bottles*, which grappled with the inescapable fact that industrial unions and general unions became bureaucratic too, perhaps more so or more quickly than the old craft unions.

Connolly posed the question of socialism and religion as “the known and the unknowable”, but that was not how he saw it. As far as Connolly, the Catholic or lapsed Catholic, was concerned, the “unknowable” was known; it was the sacred “knowledge”, the ethereal

and eternal mystic truths of the Catholic Church. When he “lapsed”, it was from that Church that he lapsed; when he rallied, it was to the dogmas of that Church that he rallied.

Connolly’s record suggests that it was in the story he told to his De Leonite friend Matheson he was not telling the truth.

There remains the fact that both Orange and Green bourgeoisies expressed their politics and their rivalry as religion. Religion is not something from the distant past that exists now only anachronistically. We are much nearer to it than that: high Stalinism was a form of religion, and whole Muslim areas of the world are in the tight grip of primitive religion.

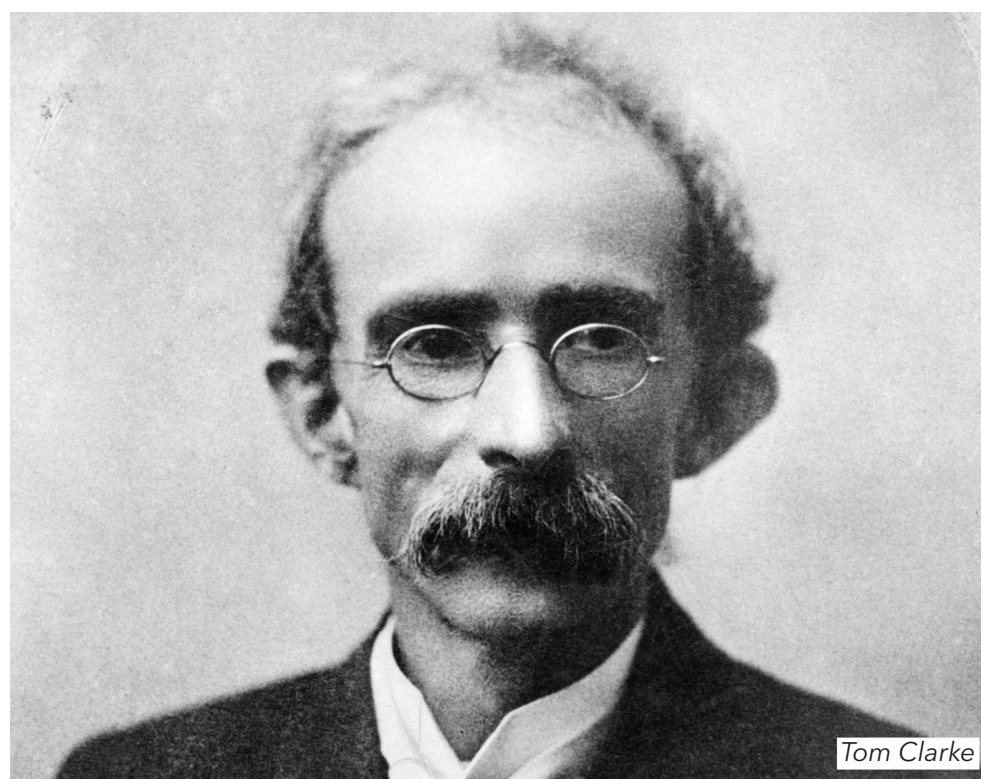
Ulianov (Lenin) in his 1909 article went on to point out that any contradiction in the Marxist attitude to religion was only apparent:

“It would be a profound mistake to think that the apparent ‘moderation’ of the Marxist attitude towards religion is due to supposed ‘tactical’ considerations, by the desire not to ‘scare away’ anybody, and so forth, On the contrary, in this question too the political line of Marxism is inseparably bound up with its philosophical principles.... We must know how to combat religion, and in order to do so we must explain the source of faith and religion among the masses materialistically. The fight against religion must not be confined to abstract ideological preaching. The fight must be linked up with the concrete practical work of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion...”

“‘Fear created the Gods’. Fear of the blind forces of capital – blind because it cannot be foreseen by the masses of the people – a force which at every step in life threatens to inflict, and does inflict, on the proletarian and small owner ‘sudden’, ‘unexpected’, ‘accidental’ destruction, ruin, pauperism, prostitution and death from starvation – such is the root of modern religion which the materialist must bear in mind first and foremost if he does not want to remain an infant-school materialist. No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of the masses, who are crushed by the grinding toil of capitalism and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until the masses themselves learn to fight this root of religion, the rule of Capital in all its forms, in a united, organised, planned and conscious way...”

“The [socialist movement’s] atheistic propaganda must be subordinated to its basic task – the development of the class struggle of the exploited masses against the exploiters...”

“A Marxist must be able to take cognisance of the concrete situation as a whole, must always be able to determine the boundary between anarchism and opportunism, (this boundary is: relative, shifting and changeable, but it exists) and must succumb neither to the abstract, verbal, and in fact empty ‘revolutionism’ of the anarchist, nor to



Tom Clarke

the philistinism and opportunism of the petty-bourgeois or liberal intellectual, who fears to fight religion, forgets that this is his duty, reconciles himself to the belief in God, and is guided not by the interests of the class struggle, but by the petty and mean conception of offending nobody, repelling nobody and scaring nobody – by the sage rule: ‘live and let live’....”

Materialism

If in general a revolutionary Marxist party can only be built on the basis of science, in Ireland there were and are extra reasons why defence of materialism was and is a vital practical question. Here religion became entwined over the centuries with the social divisions and struggles to a degree unique in Western Europe. Here the religious divisions of the divided Irish bourgeoisie bit deep. In Ireland religious bigotry, Protestant and Catholic, with its division of the workers into supporters of Orange and Green, has been one of the most reliable props of bourgeois interests. Its elimination in common working-class struggle is a pre-requisite for any serious revolutionary class politics.

And in Connolly’s time, was there anywhere else in Europe where religion was so pervasive – and so malignant and divisive – as in Ireland?

For the labour movement, militant secularism was probably the only way that the Irish workers could have been

united, if they could at all short of an agreed political programme on “The Constitutional Question”. For what it’s worth, I doubt very much that they could. □

[1] It also explains one of the mysteries of Connolly. He is reported as saying that the British would never bombard Dublin, because a capitalist government would never destroy capitalist property. On any level this was simply silly. It is impossible that he believed this nonsense. Connolly knew history. He knew what had happened in the Paris Commune of 1871. He knew that the bourgeoisie would do what they thought necessary to keep control. I traced it back to a pamphlet published in 1917 by someone I’d never heard of. But in his 1924 biography of Connolly, Desmond Ryan said it too. Desmond Ryan was in the Dublin General Post Office in 1916 as Patrick Pearse’s secretary. The son of a man driven out of Ireland by priestly disapproval, W P Ryan, who was sometimes de facto editor of George Lansbury’s *Herald*, I think Desmond Ryan joined the British Communist Party and stayed at least until the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939. Despite that, Ryan was a man to be believed. It is still impossible that Connolly believed his claim that the British would never bombard; but he may well have said it to jolly certain people along. □

Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to [our pamphlets](#) including:

- China and Trotskyism
- Women’s Fightback
- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers’ Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Shapurji Saklatvala: Socialist Rebel in Parliament
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- The story of Sylvia Pankhurst
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
- Automation and the working class □

workersliberty.org/publications/

Our videos

Watch Workers’ Liberty’s videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **Playlists include:**

- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- Black Lives Matter
- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- The struggle for LGBTIQ rights in the labour movement
- An introduction to Marx’s Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Zheng Chaolin, great Chinese revolutionary socialist

By Paul Hampton

Zheng Chaolin (1901-98), the veteran leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Trotskyist movement, devoted his entire life to the cause of the liberation of the Chinese workers and peasants. Now at last Zheng Chaolin's [Selected Writings](#) have been translated and published. Gregor Benton, who translated and edited these texts and *Prophets Unarmed* (2015), deserves huge praise for making the writings available in English. Every revolutionary socialist worth their salt should know the life and writings of Zheng Chaolin.

Life

Zheng Chaolin was born in 1901 in Fujian province. In 1919 he joined a work-study programme for young Chinese students. In 1922, Zheng was among eighteen Chinese who established the Youth Communist Party in Paris. In 1923, he was selected to study in Russia at the University for the Toilers of the East.

In 1924, Zheng was sent back to China to help the CCP. He edited party journal *Guide Weekly*, drafted educational materials, translated Bukharin's *ABC of Communism* and taught at the party school.

Zheng was active in Hubei during the 1925-27 revolution. After Chiang Kai-shek's armies massacred the CCP, Zheng participated in the party's emergency conference on 7 August 1927. He became chief editor of the new CCP paper *Bolshevik*. In 1929, he was arrested by the Guomindang, but was freed after forty days.

In 1929-30, Zheng read Trotsky's writings on China. He became a Trotskyist, together with Chen Duxiu and more than eighty veteran CCP members. In May 1931, Zheng represented the Proletariat group at the unification conference of the four Trotskyist groups. He was elected to the central committee and put in charge of its propaganda department.

Soon after the conference, Zheng was arrested by the Guomindang authorities. He was freed after seven years, when the Japanese War broke out. He translated parts of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and *History of the Russian Revolution*. In 1940 he returned to Shanghai, joining the editorial board of the Chinese Trotskyist underground paper, *Struggle*.

After 1945, Zheng wrote numerous articles for *New Banner*, a Trotskyist biweekly banned by the Guomindang government. He was a leading member



of the Internationalist Workers' Party of China (IWP) formed in 1949.

The IWP continued its activities under CCP rule. On 22 December 1952, a thousand Chinese Trotskyists and sympathisers were arrested by the Maoist political police. Zheng would spend the next 27 years in prison, finally securing his release in 1979. Unbowed but still under surveillance, he continued to write and campaign.

Early Maoist "state capitalism"

Zheng Chaolin's selected writings contain many gems, not least his analyses of the nature of Stalinism. In 1950, he wrote an essay, *State Capitalism*, rejecting Trotsky's pre-war assessment of the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state". For decades, the text was lost. It was found in China, translated and sent to Walter Daum, a US socialist. Zheng wrote:

"The state-capitalist class is composed of the industrial bureaucracy and the state bureaucracy, and sometimes includes some capitalist magnates. The state accounts for 50 to 100 per cent of the means of production within the country, but the bureaucracy controls the state, while the majority of party members and upper and middle-level officials of the ruling party within the bureaucracy (the leading elements in the military, the unions, peasant associations, students' associations, women's associations, those in charge of the state organs, paid scholars, engineers, artists, musicians, opera and movie actors, etc.) all form a class that collectively owns the means of production... The bureaucracy forms a class, and this class as a whole is entitled to most or all of the means of production, but as individuals within the bureaucracy they can't privately own any means of pro-

duction as individuals."

Zheng characterised Stalin's USSR and Maoist China as "state capitalist", sticking to the label for the rest of his life. However he recognised that it was "an old designation for a new phenomenon", which "always brings with it the possibility of misunderstanding". Zheng's description had much in common with Wang Fanxi's theory of bureaucratic collectivism, writing at the same time (see [Solidarity 656](#)). In 1950, he argued state capitalism represented a higher stage.

Later Maoist "state capitalism"

While in prison, Zheng continued to characterise Maoist China as "state capitalist". However he invented the term "cadreism" to define bureaucratic rule. He wrote a long study, which was confiscated and destroyed by his Maoist captors. After his release, he wrote further essays, such as *On Chinese Cadreism* (1985). Zheng tried to define the Stalinist system in *On Cadreism* (1992):

"The Stalinist system was a special version of state capitalism. It was special because it featured nationalised property and central planning, and because it did not develop organically from capitalism but rather from the degeneration of cadres who were originally proletarian revolutionaries. Revolution eliminated the capitalist class and a revolutionary cadre took over the administration of the state and the economy. They adopted German-style "state capitalism" as a tool to develop the productive forces and survive until the world revolution came to their rescue. But the world revolution never arrived, the masses became demoralised, and the cadre degenerated. The result was state capitalism without a capitalist class in the traditional sense

of the word. The cadres took on the role of the capitalist class."

In 1989, shortly after the Tiananmen Square massacre, Zheng relegated Stalinist-style state capitalism to a position behind "traditional" capitalism. He wrote:

"The fundamental contradiction China's rulers are dealing with right now is this: since the Stalinist model of capitalism no longer works, adaptation to traditional capitalism is unavoidable. However, once the transition to traditional capitalism goes past a certain point, that is, once the advice of economists about restoring private ownership has been followed and the people's demands for a multi-party system have been accepted, the foundations of the social class they represent will be lost. This June Revolution erupted from this fundamental contradiction."

The epoch

In his Tiananmen reflections, Zheng made some profound comments on the epoch. He wrote: "Today is the nadir between two waves of international revolution. The first international revolution began with the victory of the 1917 Russian Revolution and ended with the defeat of the Chinese revolution in 1927. The second wave of international revolution has not yet arrived and when it will arrive is unknown. But it will certainly come."

In *The October Revolution, Thermidor, and the Stalinist Mode of Capitalism* (1991), he added:

"The era of world revolution triggered by October has passed. We find ourselves somewhere between two waves of world revolution. We do not know when the second wave will arrive. But we know it will come and we must prepare for it. The first step is to draw a balance sheet of the first wave of world revolution. And while we should not minimise its successes, we must pay more attention to its failures."

Perhaps a further wave began in the 1960s, but this too has mostly dissipated. But Zheng grasped the essential importance of understanding the times we are in, learning from past struggles and working out a path through today's realities. This was authentic Trotskyism – honest, unyielding but always looking for signs of hope.

Zheng Chaolin's life and writings provide a compass for the new generation of working class fighters, in China and every theatre of struggle. We can best honour Zheng's revolutionary life by picking up the torch he carried so valiantly for some many decades. □

The Warsaw ghetto

April 19 2023 is the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

In October-November 1940 the German occupiers herded Warsaw's 400,000 to 500,000 Jews into a ghetto.

From 22 July to 12 September 1942, German SS and police units deported about 265,000 Jews from Warsaw to Treblinka. They killed approximately 35,000 Jews inside the ghetto during this operation. By early 1943, only 70,000 to 80,000 Jews survived in the ghetto.

Activists – Bundists, left and right Zionists – organised armed groups. In October 1942 they gained contact with the Polish Home Army and got a small number of weapons.

In January 1943, Jewish fighters disrupted and temporarily stalled further deportations of Jews from the ghetto.

On 19 April, they began a final uprising, which lasted 27 days. About 700 young Jewish fighters clashed with German forces.

In the end, the Germans razed the ghetto to the ground. They burned and demolished this part of Warsaw, block by block, in order to smoke out their prey.

This sixth anniversary article, by "Jacques", appeared in the US socialist paper Labor Action, 4 April 1949.

There will be no memorial meetings held in Warsaw this April [1949] to commemorate the desperate uprisings of the Jewish Ghetto that took place on April 19, 1943. The 50,000 Jewish workers still living at that time represented just ten per cent of those who had been crushed together by the Nazis into the walled-in ghetto section of Warsaw in October 1940. The rest had been hunted down in batches in the continual manhunt of the SS (Hitler's stormtroops), to be exterminated in the gas chambers of Treblinka.

The hopeless armed struggle of this remnant of Jewry was not merely an act of desperation to sell their lives dearly rather than be exterminated quietly and without resistance. It was that too. But above all it was intended as an appeal for help to the Polish workers out-



side. Then, too, it was meant to reach the outside world as a final cry from the depths of a barbaric hell such as the world had never imagined, a cry for aid in extremity.

It was meant to arouse the conscience of a war-torn world against permitting the final atrocious strangulation of an utterly helpless people.

This appeal went totally unheeded. "Civilisation" watched with incredible indifference while the Germans used long-range artillery, tanks, flame-throwers, poison gas to wipe out the ghetto fighters. The ruins were set afire until the entire enclosure was reduced to one great mass of rubble reaching three stories high. The majority of the Jewish fighters were buried in these ruins.

Bundists

The leaders of the [Jewish socialist group] Bund made a direct appeal to the underground organisation of the Polish workers for help, if not with arms in hand then at least by means of a protest strike. The Poles refused. They were divided by antisemitism. Many sympathised with the Jews, but others said outright: "Thank heavens the Germans are doing this for us."

Nor was this attitude confined to the upper class. The backwardness of layers of the Polish workers, as of many others, could be measured by the degree of antisemitism.

Representatives of the Jewish Bund had been smuggled out of the ghetto to seek help abroad. Artur Ziegelboim was in London during the uprising appealing to the Polish government-in-exile and to the Churchill government. He rendered the balance of his mission, its total and unfeeling failure, by committing suicide and indicting the "civilised" world for its lack of any humanity in his heartbroken letter. That letter speaks far more eloquently than all the mouth-

ings against genocide at the UN meetings by the diplomats on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The Poles themselves were to experience the bitterness, not merely of indifference but of outright betrayal only little more than a year later. All of Warsaw, including the last Jewish remnants, rose up as one man on August 1, 1944, against the Nazi oppressor. The Polish National Council had no doubt that this uprising, called for incessantly by the Russian radio, would be aided by the advance of the Red Army, whose artillery could be heard not far off. The uprising lasted for 63 frightful days during which the Red Army remained completely inactive on this front. The Russians would not even permit the English planes sent with a little help to land on Russian airfields! Warsaw was reduced to rubble just as had been the ghetto. The Nazis were permitted to wipe out the Armia Kryova (army of the Polish underground) and its leaders so as to save this labor for the Russians. The NKVD finished what little was left when the Red Army finally marched into the ruins in January 1945.

No, the Poles [under Stalinist rule in 1949] will not commemorate the Warsaw ghetto uprising, nor will the Russians press them to do so. The handful of Jews left in all Poland will not care to do so either, particularly with any fake Stalinist coloration given an "official" celebration. But those everywhere who take to heart the resistance of the oppressed to the oppressors will once again marvel at the incredible feat of arms of the Jewish workers of the ghetto.

All the vaunted efficiency of the Gestapo, all the barbarities of the terror unleashed by them in an abandon of sadistic cruelty, could not prevent the leaders of the Jewish working class from organising underground, from making contact with the organised

Polish workers, from smuggling in and caching arms in the ghetto bunkers. It is to the eternal credit of the Jewish [socialist group] Bund that its leaders [and others, including left and right Zionists] accomplished this seemingly impossible task.

Foremost in the ranks of this leadership stands a figure who became legendary: that of Bernard Goldstein, organiser of the Bund militia. His book *The Stars Bear Witness...* should be read by all who would understand how miracles of organisation can be achieved against overwhelming odds. Here one can find the inner meaning of leadership, a leadership of understanding, of complete selflessness and self-sacrifice, of ability to go on living and to organise resistance even in the midst of an existence that no nightmare could conjure up.

"Comrade Bernard" had behind him the experience of a generation of fighting first against czarism, then against Polish landlordism. He helped organize the most oppressed of the workers in militant trade unions. He organized the first Polish workers' militia to defend the trade unions from attack, and also to fight the pogromists. It is no accident that he was one of the leaders to organize the protest strike against the infamous ritual murder trial of Mendel Beylis in 1913.

No, it is no accident that a socialist trade union organiser, close to the people, completely steeped in their folkways, should lead the desperate armed struggle of the Jews against the Nazis and hold an entire army at bay. This man alone could secure the willing aid of the Polish workers; only he had their confidence. His exploits, known not directly from his book (he is too modest to recount them all) but from eyewitness accounts, make him the Chapayev of the ghetto. [Vasily Chapayev was a Bolshevik hero of the Civil War of 1918-21].

An epic quality marks the story of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Humanity somehow survived, not merely in the sense of existence but in all its cultural meaning, in all its humaneness. How can one think of humour under the sadistic German hunters in this ghetto-to-jungle? Yet there is the story of the Jewish pickpocket who, to amuse the inhabitants of his hideaway bunker, all trembling for their lives, demonstrates his skill for the others. And Warsaw, one may add, was famous for this skill!

Hanna Krishtal survives with her child and is now [1949] here in New York solely because of the care of Bernard in the very midst of the fighting, during which she gave birth. Somehow



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

to: 63 heroic days



he found time even for this. It was only later that he confided to Hanna how he was torn inwardly by his resolution to do away with the child in order to permit Hanna herself to escape from the ghetto alive!

Bernard Goldstein is still living [he escaped to the USA, and lived to 1959] but he has no life. The life he knew in Poland and in Warsaw is gone forever. It remains only as part of the archives in Perez, in Sholom Aleichem, in the story

of the ghetto uprising.

The last touch of irony is added by Bernard's arrest by the NKVD, dread arm of the Russian "liberators." They released him but kept him under observation in the hope that he would betray his organisation. The Stalinists fear nothing so much as honest and experienced revolutionists, particularly those with such vast experience of organising in the underground as was possessed by Comrade Bernard. He

had to flee from these new oppressors, not so much to save his own life as to avoid betraying those who might want to make contact with him.

Symbolic

Warsaw stands as a profound symbol of our times. Crushed on the one side by the forces of capitalist reaction in the shape of Nazism and on the other by the Russian counter-revolution under Stalinism, this betrayed city mirrors modern civilisation in decay. It is in this sense a vantage point from which to view the chances for survival of civilised humanity.

The indifference of the world to the fate of the Jews during the war and after bodes ill for society. The utter breakdown of all human decency in the ghetto is no mere passing phenomenon. It is rather a token of the awful speed at which decay can spread and barbarism can replace modern civilisation. Warsaw at the same time is an added and striking proof that Stalinism, far from arresting social decay, is itself the epitome of that decay.

It is impossible to study the terrible fate of Warsaw's ghetto and again of the rest of Warsaw, without a clenching

of the fists and a surge of anger and hatred against the forces that introduce such hideous vileness into life. Warsaw stands as a stark lesson of the inhumanity that flowers evilly from antisemitism and racial doctrines.

This lesson must sink deeply into the consciousness of every working class fighter against exploitation and oppression. Society is doomed to go under if it is not thoroughly cleansed of the disease that made and continues to make such brutal sadism possible.

That disease can be traced to its roots in class exploitation. Every ruling class is willing to sacrifice millions of its own people for the sake of maintaining its powers and privileges. Why not, then, people of other "races" against whom it is so much easier to kindle the fires of prejudice?

Warsaw stands as a stain on civilisation. It must never be forgotten. It can and must be avenged! The recurrence of such brutality can be prevented only by a deep-going change in society, the change from capitalism which engenders hatreds, to socialism, which engenders brotherhood and humanity, the Russian experience of counter-revolution notwithstanding. □

Montenegro: new start, maybe new divide

By Loretta Marie Perera

Bar, Montenegro: On an otherwise quiet Sunday in this coastal town, horns started to blare and soon enough, round after round of fireworks erupted in the sky. The fireworks and horns weren't entirely unusual – in the small Balkan country, bouts of celebratory explosives are common, especially for sporting events and other celebrations. But on this night, the noise and festivities continued to intensify as the news spread: Djukanovic out, Milatovic in.

The long-standing president of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, had lost a second round of votes that would decide the country's new leader (albeit a ceremonial one) and end a 32-year rule. A few days later the results were confirmed, and the new president was announced: political novice and financial expert, 37-year-old Jakov Milatovic had officially



won with 59 percent of the vote to Djukanovic's 41 percent.

First appointed Prime Minister in February 1991, Djukanovic is linked with bringing the country to independence from Serbia in 2006, as well as to become one of NATO's latest members – a move that displeased Russia and further distinguished Montenegro from Serbia, one of Russia's few remaining allies in Europe.

According to reports later on, Djukanovic conceded by saying, "Montenegro has

chosen and I respect that choice," while also pointing out what he believes caused his defeat – "the influence of certain factors from outside Montenegro" – here referencing propaganda against him from Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Meanwhile, the newly elected Milatovic's campaign had received support from parties close to Serbia, Russia, and the Orthodox Church.

As celebrations began and images spread on social media and chat channels, one only needed to look a little closer to observe a feature that linked them all: the dominance of the Serbian flag.

"There was a huge amount of people gathering at the main Church in Podgorica with Serbian flags and three fingers in the air, which means Serbian," prominent activist and board member of Montenegro Pride Nada Vojinovic said. "I didn't see a celebration of

people who wanted and voted for a better Montenegro, for prosperity, democracy and for a free Montenegro," she continued. "I feel heartbroken honestly, and I feel fear. Because [that] night, people were celebrating a pro-Serb future, and not freedom."

Caution

While there is room to celebrate the end of a rule that lasted more than three decades, there is also an urgent need to ensure that the past is not repeated. "From my perspective," Vojinovic said, "they can now get into that [position of power] and start taking everything from people, as Milo did before."

"But now, we have new people that can again take more, and more, and more," she continued.

Another cause for concern is the possibility of an increasing dominance of the Church, and the effect that may have on progress made in recent years – for LGBTQI rights and women's rights in particular.

"Jakov said that this is the victory of a peaceful Montenegro, but the celebration showed that this is anything but," Vojinovic said.

"If Jakov doesn't say anything against the hate, and the pro-Serb gatherings, it would only mean that none of the promises he made for young people, freedom, prosperity, richness of the community, and European standards were true."

"I am still hoping that my predictions come mostly from the great amount of fear that I feel and that it will all be better soon," Vojinovic concluded, "but if the new president is truly fighting for what he promised, he will have to say something."

Six days later, he still hasn't.

The outcome of this election is likely to have an impact on the early parliamentary vote set for 11 June this year, which activists and observers will be keeping a keen eye on for now. □

• Abridged. [More: bit.ly/rp-mn](https://bit.ly/rp-mn)

A conspiracy theory of Israel's protests



Eye on the Left

By Martin Thomas

Socialist Worker has presented the huge strikes and demonstrations in Israel, which have forced the far-right-infested government to pause its plans against democratic checks and balances, as no less reactionary than the government.

According to Nick Clark in SW of 27 March: "the protesters also hate Palestinians. But they fear that Netanyahu's changes will mean the state can no longer pretend to be a democracy".

This is a conspiracy theory in which Israelis don't care even about their own democracy, but will strike and fill the streets week after week about the state's cosmetics. Airbrushing out Israeli Jewish-Arab left groups like Standing Together, Clark declares: "No political force in Israel is willing to end

its occupation of Palestine. But neither are they willing to accept Palestinians as equal citizens, who they say have to remain a repressed minority for Israel to remain a Jewish state".

Probably Clark would explain this by saying that by "occupation of Palestine", he means the very existence of Israel in part of the "British Mandate" territory of 1918-48. Indeed, in Israel, as more or less everywhere, probably no political force in would want the whole country simply "ended".

In the real Israel, not Clark's imagination, in early March, demonstrators shouted "Where were you in Huwara?" at police, criticising the impunity of a Jewish-settler rampage against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Occupation

According to [Alon-Lee Green](#) of Standing Together, "at least 90%" of the anti-Netanyahu demonstrators would say they were against Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

The strikes and demonstrations are

not socialist. They have been supported by many employers. The big spike on 27 March was generated by Netanyahu's sacking of (right-wing, but prudent) defence minister Yoav Gallant for advocating a pause on constitutional changes. Most of the protesters are conservatives who for now see no way to "two states", and who think it best to make their protests "single-issue" against Netanyahu, his attacks on democracy, and what they see (so Green tells us) as his "settlers' government".

Standing Together works, in the big demonstrations and in its own smaller protests, to change the thinking. Socialists should support them, rather than dismiss the protests.

Clark describes Israel's Histadrut as the "main 'trade-union' federation", with scare-quotes. The Histadrut has an odd history, and (like many other union organisations world-wide, alas) is weak and timid.

Yet the Histadrut is a union organisation, with many Palestinian-Israeli

workers in it, and with an agreement with the Palestine General Federation of Unions to assist Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza commuting to work in Israel.

WAC-Maan, a more radical Arab-Jewish union group, [criticises](#) the Histadrut for its standing-aside from the anti-government protests until the last minute. Clark, by contrast, cites Histadrut's involvement as further reason to dismiss the protests.

Clark spells out no programme for Israel-Palestine. But what programme could follow from the condemnation of all Israelis, even the most militantly anti-government, as "hating Palestinians"? Clark's claim that all Israelis equally "hate Palestinians" proves only that... Clark detests Israelis. (Or Israeli Jews, at least: he airbrushes out Israel's 25% non-Jewish population.)

And, given that most Jews worldwide have some reflex identification with Israel and support either the protesters or (more rarely) Netanyahu, how does Clark see them? □



Buy our books

Order from workersliberty.org/publications

Browse, basket, and buy books, pamphlets, and publication bundles – and find more info, related resources, study guides, reviews and so on, from the same place. Some books are free to download or as audiobooks.

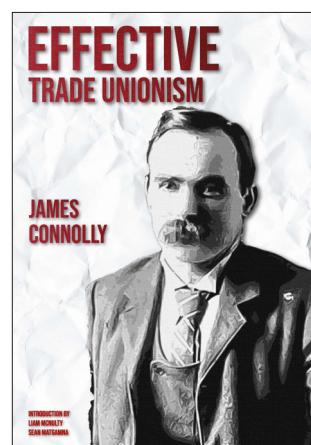
Prices listed exclude postage and packaging: £1 for small items, £3 for larger items, free over £30. Every third publication is half-price and 15% off over £50. □



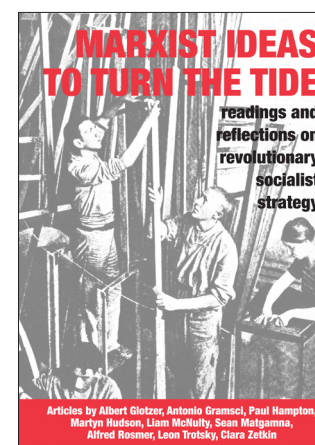
Lessons for socialist and left activists 60 pages **£4**



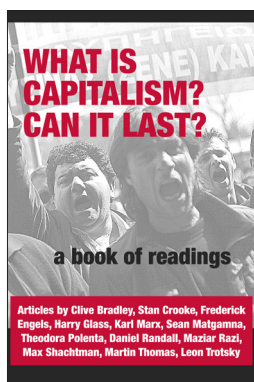
Rühle's abridgement is a good intro 131 pages **£6**



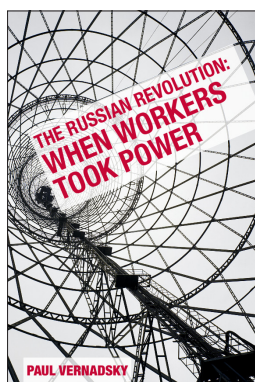
Writings by James Connolly 64 pages **£5**



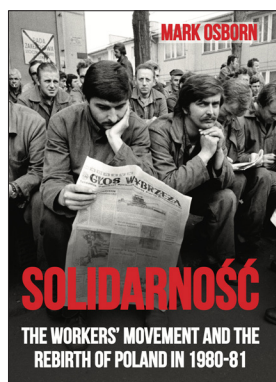
Revolutionary socialist strategy 138 pages **£5**



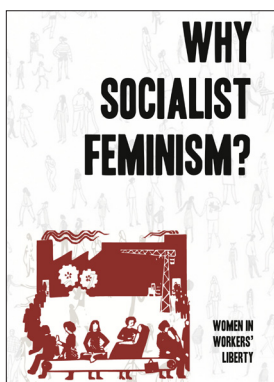
Socialist readings to understand and fight capitalism 128 pages **£5**



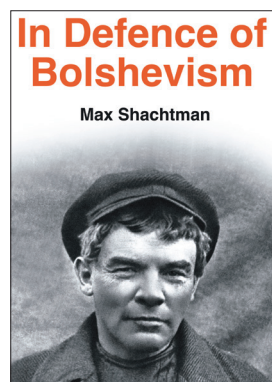
The 1917's revolution's real history, and lessons 374 pages **£12**



The history of Solidarność, from its dawn until the coup 116 pages **£5**



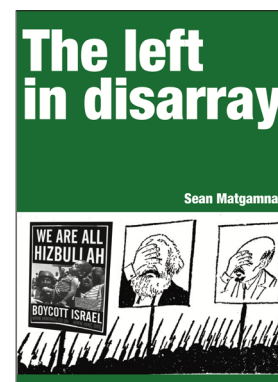
A socialist approach within recent "waves" of feminism 102 pages **£5**



Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today 312 pages **£10**



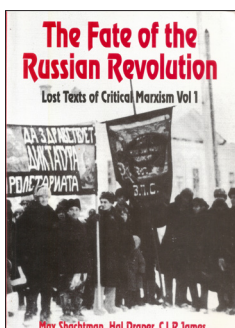
A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more 107 pages **£5**



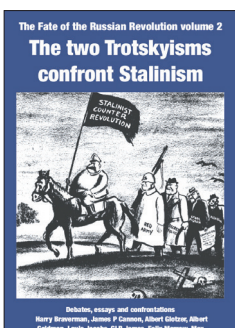
Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward 408 pages **£12**



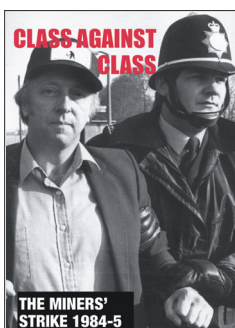
Can Socialism Make Sense? **£8**



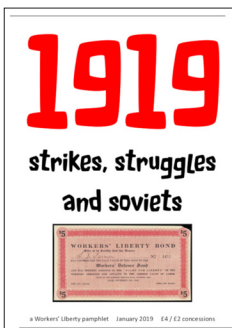
Fate of the Russian Revolution vol.1 **£8**



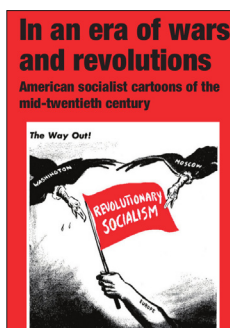
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms **£20**



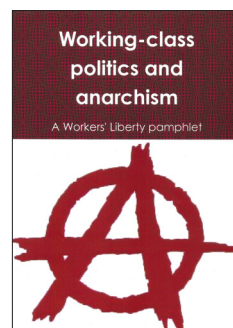
The Miners' Strike 1984-5 **£9**



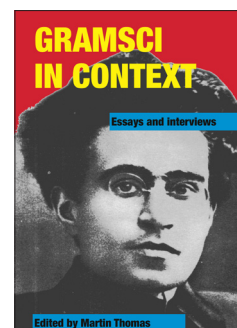
1919: Strikes, struggles, soviets **£4**



In an Era of Wars and Revolutions **£9**



Class Politics and Anarchism **£5**



Gramsci in Context **£6**



Junior doctors stand firm

By Sacha Ismail

Junior doctors, who struck for three days in March, struck for four days from 11 April.

They are demanding “pay restoration” – a clear timetable for reversal of the 26% real terms pay cut they have suffered since 2008.

For the first time in its history, the British Medical Association (BMA) has set up a [strike fund](#). Taking only her normal doctor’s salary rather than the increased payment for working for the union part-time, the deputy chair of the BMA’s Council, socialist junior doctor Emma Runswick, has [donated £22,000](#).

Grace Allport, a junior doctor in the North West, told *Solidarity*:

“The strike fund is an important move but we need much more information about it to get out to our members.

“Many people will think doctors are well off and don’t need strike support, but in the case of junior doctors at least that is now far from the truth. More generally, challenging the drip-drip-drip of misinformation suggesting junior doctors are very highly paid is itself an important form of solidarity.

“The four days action will hit doubly hard because it comes after the bank holiday weekend, when there is minimal cover and not many elective pro-

cedures take place.

“I don’t think there is any substantial constituency in the BMA for giving in at present. The Junior Doctors Committee is dominated by the Doctors Vote group, whose whole purpose was to get industrial action off the ground, and they are a substantial presence on the BMA Council too.

“There is some discussion among members about what further escalation looks like. Does it simply involve even longer chunks of strike action? There is also discussion of adding out-of-hours strikes to introduce an additional form of pressure.

“Unity between health workers re-

mains really important. I hope workers in the unions voting on the government’s terrible offer reject it. Respectfully, any union leaders who think a 6% pay cut after years of cuts is the best we can do should hand over to someone who thinks they can do better.

“If some unions accept that weakens the fight for everyone else; if we fight together it’s harder for any one group of workers to be isolated. When there are multiple different professions on strike it also makes it much clearer the bigger problem with the way our healthcare system is being run.” □

Vote TFRC in Unison election

By Dave Pannett

Unison National Executive (NEC) elections run from 17 April to 19 May against a backdrop of a ballot on whether to accept a poor offer in health, industrial action ballots in local government, and the failure so far since 2021 to transform members’ anger at real-wage cuts into large enough ballot turnouts to bring the majority of our members into action.

The left won the NEC for the

first time in 2021, but it was bound to take more than 18 months to turn round this large union with its entrenched bureaucracy. The right of the union, working with the Labour right, manufactured expulsions of Labour Party members so that the left couldn’t win control of the Labour Link committee, which controls Unison’s voice in Labour.

Ruth Cashman, elected to the London Labour Link seat, Andrea Egan, the union’s na-

tional president, and others were expelled.

Right-wing control in some regions, the way branches are “policed” by full-time union staff, show that change needs to happen faster and at grassroots level, not just in elections to the NEC.

We call for support for the whole Time for Real Change Slate (bit.ly/tfrc-e for candidates), and notably Elaine Jones (in North West region), Ed Whitby (Northern region),

Andrew Berry (disabled members), and Kath Owen (Higher Education).

In seats TFRC are not contesting against the Socialist Party we call for a vote for the SP.

TFRC is at present a loose network, mainly non-aligned activists, with many Labour left people alongside SWP, AWL, Socialist Appeal, and Socialist Alternative. Workers’ Liberty wants to build the organisation into a more grassroots organi-

sation based on local reps and activists in workplaces.

We welcome moves by the TFRC-led NEC to raise strike pay and make it available from day one. We want to go further in making use of Unison’s resources both industrially and politically, including to defeat attacks on workers’ rights and save the NHS

Get involved in the TFRC group in your region: for more info contact unison@workersliberty.org □

UCU calls for marking boycott from 20 April

By a UCU member

Despite numerous backhanded attempts by the union’s general secretary to slow down and wind down the dispute, including seizing control from elected negotiators, University and College Union (UCU) members in

higher education have returned a large majority for renewed industrial action in their latest ballots, voting by 85.6% to continue action on pay and conditions, and by 89% to continue action in a parallel dispute on pensions.

Currently (as part of the leadership’s

control-and-undermine strategy) UCU is holding a consultative e-ballot on so-called offers in those disputes. The only progress that has been made is on pensions: some commitment to restoration of benefits. Nothing more is coming on pay: a total rise of 8% between August 2022 and 2024. There has been no serious movement on casualisation – only a commitment to eleven months of talks over proposals which will be non-binding on college management.

The UCU’s Higher Education Committee has recommended that members note the position on pensions and reject the current “offers” on pay, casualisation and other disputes on conditions in the e-ballot. The result is due on Monday 17 April.

Groups of workers on temporary contracts, recognising how prevalent these contracts have become, have been campaigning (e.g with an open letter) for a reject vote on the casualisation issue. This is one response to that letter:

“I hear from senior permanent colleagues that they went through several years of casual work before becoming

permanent, so are not sure why such a fuss is being made... [but] institutions are shifting towards casual contracts as a primary way academic staff are employed. The effects [are keeping] junior colleagues throughout the country... in perpetual, stressful and expensive limbo for years.”

20 April is the first date on which the union will launch a Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB). That action will be necessary if the union is to get further in this dispute.

Unfortunately the necessary preparatory work for the MAB has yet to materialise from UCU HQ. It will be down to activists and branches to organise, share good practice and hold the line. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 12 April, 7pm: How can racism be stopped? At The Vat & Fiddle, Nottingham

Thursday 20 April, 3pm: The working-class revolt in France (Tubeworker meeting)

Sunday 23 April, 2pm: Reading group – The Politics of Emotional Life, by Alba Gotby. At Effra Social, London

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

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



More online

STUC in 1982

Shameful siding with state “unions” in Eastern Europe
bit.ly/stuc-82

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

Help us raise £35,000 by 16 July!

The Workers' Liberty office now faces monthly electricity bills in excess of £400 per month. The printing costs for our paper are now over £700 per week.

Thanks to Roxana, Stuart and Matt in the last two weeks, bringing our total so far to £5,794. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

A first test of resolve



Diary of a railworker

By Steve Allen

On the Elizabeth Line in London, barely a day goes by without delays. With the new timetable due in a few weeks, promising up to 24 trains per hour in the central section, it remains to be seen if the system can cope. Station staff will continue to take the flak and mitigate as much as possible.

Pay talks for 2023/24 on the Elizabeth Line begin in earnest in the first week of April, despite the previous settlement expiring on 1 April.

Management has offered 5% pay rise, 3% now plus 2% in October, but with terms-and-conditions changes, such as seven-day working. The union reps have rebuffed that, and the next meeting is 20 April.

Union reps have been cagey in terms of what positive demands they are negotiating for on our behalf. Save a consultative survey before Xmas, there has been no indication of what our pay claim will be. Union policy is to reject anything less than a RPI pay rise. Given the experience of the Network Rail/TOC dispute, we need to hold our reps to account before considering any compromise.

This will be the first test of our resolve, as a workforce which is younger and



less experienced than the railway average. Until now most have been happy to entrust all to the reps. But discontent is starting to grow as reps seem more bothered about protecting their own position.

We've had a rep vacancy for over three months, during which their role has been covered by an existing rep for another section. Elections are promised soon, but given the track record that may be some way down the line. Yours

truly will continue pushing the branch to speed up this process.

At the same time our existing full-time officer is seeking re-election, on the platform that continuity is required for these pay negotiations. Be that as it may, it is unfortunate that his attention may be divided at this time. Members expressed their disapproval for the incumbent's performance by nominating his challenger at a branch meeting. □

The man who hated the Oscars



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I detest the Oscars, so all praise to actor George C. Scott who once remarked; "The whole thing is a goddamn meat parade. I don't want any part of it".

Alongside *Patton*, Scott's best known film is *Doctor Strangelove* (director Stanley Kubrick, 1964), a black satire on the Cold War. Scott plays General Buck Turgidson, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A rogue B-52 bomber, is heading for the Soviet Union to drop its nu-



clear bombs and cannot be recalled because its radio has been destroyed. The reasons for this are complex but involve a deranged USAAF Commander who is obsessed by his hatred of the

Soviet Union. Meanwhile the USSR has developed a system of mutual assured destruction – Doomsday – and if the Soviet Union is attacked a series of hidden bombs will go off automatically. The system is unstoppable and the world will be destroyed.

Here is the ultimate deterrent, an idea much appreciated by ex-Nazi scientist *Doctor Strangelove* (Peter Sellers) an "adviser" to the Pentagon. Mad as it may appear, the idea of "mutually assured destruction" originated with János Neumann (John von Neumann), a Hungarian physicist and mathematician (who attended the same school as the Marxist György Lukács). □

Rail dispute: yes, more strikes are needed!



Off The Rails

Possibly in response to disquiet on the RMT members' Facebook group about the lack of union comms on the current talks with the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), and a feeling there that we've yet again been suckered into calling off strike action for no reason, on Thursday 6 April the union sent an email to members and issued a press release.

The email laments the fact that the RDG's Dispute Resolution Process document has failed to materialise, making it impossible for the union to scrutinise as part of the offer. It also laments the fact that RDG has to "seek authorisation on every offer it presents" from the Tory government. This begs the question of

how long we are going to have to wait before the union accepts that this is just an employers' delaying tactic designed to take the edge off the members' fighting spirit?

Offers

Ideally, strikes would continue until we have an offer the National Executive could recommend we accept; but at the bare minimum, wait until there is a detailed offer in writing to discuss before calling off strikes! There is also the possibility that the leadership is sticking with the talks because it feels pressured by the RDG announcing, in mid-March, the start of consultations at each individual TOC for a "Train Operators' Programme of Workforce Change". The current talks came with a promise to halt those consultations, although some of them are already recruiting managers for the programme



and preparations are surely going on behind closed doors. Prior to that announcement, the union had rightly rejected the chance of talks on this because it came with a "suspend the strikes" precondition.

Continuing with the email, it is a relief to know that the leadership sees the present deal as one "which falls way too short of members' aspirations." Also to be welcomed is their assurance that they aren't going to rush their decisions. Taken together, this sounds like a reasonable attempt to dampen any calls to immediately take any deal that is offered. But "take any deal" sentiment in the union is surely not only a product of pessimism in the face of government intransigence, but of a feeling that, given its stop-start conduct of the dispute, the union leadership doesn't have a convincing strategy for winning anything better than what's on the table right now.

Union communication on social media focused on the problems with the second year of the deal, possibly implying that year one of the deal (a 5% pay increase for 2022-23) is accept-

able, and concluded: "Be in no doubt, if further strikes are needed, RMT will not hesitate to act to ensure a negotiated settlement on jobs, pay and working conditions."

"If" further strikes are needed? Further strikes clearly are needed. How are we going to win more than a 5% pay rise for the last two-three years without them? Better to say what needs to be done – more and escalated strikes – rather than giving the impression that year one is somehow settled and that the only remaining issue is with the non-availability of a document dealing with year two. □

We need to intensify



John Moloney

The civil service is the only major part of the public sector where workers haven't been made an offer as yet. Teachers, NHS workers, local government workers have all had offers, many of which were poor but at least negotiations have happened.

We know that ministers are considering an offer but it is very frustrating that they not as yet agreed to make an offer. Therefore, we have to increase the pressure on them. There is another all-members strike planned on 28 April, and we're continuing selective action in various departments. Those strikes remain solid, but it's clear to me that we'll need to intensify the action to win an acceptable settlement.

Our dispute is not only about pay; it's also about a number of other issues, including job protection. I believe we need to emphasise this in the way we talk about the dispute. Departments will undoubtedly be looking to make cuts, as inflation eats into their fixed cash budgets, and cutting jobs is their easiest means for making the books balance. We've already seen jobs go in the DWP, linked to a programme of office closures. Plans for cuts haven't been formalised elsewhere yet, as far as we know but they're likely to be on the way.

Beyond the dispute, I'm continuing to help our reps and activists develop links with trade unionists internationally. Part of my role as Assistant General Secretary involves overseeing PCS's international work, and I've made an effort to focus this work more around forging direct links between trade unionists at rank-and-file level. Too often, trade union internationalism can be seen as a matter of making token statements (though messages of solidarity are important), or trips aboard or, worst of all, of apologism for authoritarian regimes dressed up in leftist and anti-imperialist language.

We recently held a meeting with union activists from Myanmar, who spoke to us from hiding. They're involved in courageous resistance against the repressive regime there, and want help pressuring governments internationally to sanction the regime. We've also met recently with trade unionists from Italy and Sweden, with whom we discussed what unions are doing to counter the rise of the far right; we have had meetings on abortion rights in the US and on Iran. We are meeting with an activist from the French CGT, to discuss the current strike wave against plans to raise the state pension age. As said, in my opinion this sort of direct contact is vital. □

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

Get Solidarity every week

Trial sub (6 issues) £7; Six months (22 issues) £22 waged, £11 unwaged, €30 European rate.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone 020 7394 8923. Standing order £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms online. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

Contact us

020 7394 8923

solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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



French pension strikes continue despite 49.3

By Michael Elms

On 6 April French workers staged another major day of strikes and protests against President Macron's reform to increase the pension age in France. A further day of strikes is planned for 13 April.

The 6 April action was called by union leaderships (the "Intersyndicale" committee of the general secretaries of eight confederations) after talks with Macron's prime minister Élisabeth Borne broke down after just an hour. Numbers on last week's protest were down according to the CGT, with 400,000 reported demonstrating in Paris, down from 450,000 a week earlier. But the strikes are continuing to have a major impact across many sectors: in particular in rail, air travel, schools and oil refineries.

Socialists

French socialist activists say that while numbers may be down, unrest and organisation is spreading into other parts of the country and the economy that have not yet been a part of the fight. The police reported a record number of local demonstrations on 6 April: 370 protests in towns and villages of all sizes. Students become a more important part of the movement: in the last fortnight, tens of thousands of students have started occupying universities and launching demonstrations and actions of their own. For French socialists in groups like Étincelle, the most important task remains building up local-level control of the dispute through general assemblies in workplaces and cross-industry meetings of strikers ("inter-professional" meetings).

The pension reform bill was passed into law without a vote on 16 March. This was done by Macron's prime minister Borne invoking the powers of the President laid out in Article 49.3 of the French constitution – a "nuclear option" which allows the President to bypass parliament. Note that the President's power can be exercised by the prime minister – much as the UK prime minister is the person who really wields many powers constitutionally allotted to the monarch.

The strong powers of the French President were introduced at the founding of the 5th Republic in 1958. A clique of far-right generals brought Charles de Gaulle back into politics, demanding a new political system with enough executive power to prosecute the war to keep Algeria under French rule (as well as other colonial wars).



Those generals and de Gaulle won (aided by their not-so-subtle threat of launching a civil war if they did not), and the result was anti-democratic, monarchical powers concentrated in the hands of the French President. (De Gaulle then "betrayed" the generals by negotiating Algerian independence in 1962, but that's another story).

Article 49.3

Article 49.3 has been used several times in recent years to force through unpopular attacks on French workers. But it has not always proved successful: in 2006, the CPE ("First Employment Contract") law was passed using the article. This law would have made it easier for bosses to sack young workers and was opposed by a monumental strike movement. After the government used Article 49.3 to pass it, protests intensified and the law was soon withdrawn.

The French state's authoritarian actions in support of pension reform go beyond the use of Article 49.3. The French New Anticapitalist Party reports: in Sainte-Soline, the gendarmes injured hundreds of people, two very seriously; in Pari, a railworker lost an eye after a tear-gas grenade was fired into a demonstration; in Albi, as in other towns, activists were arrested by the police in their homes, in front of their families; hundreds of others have been arrested before or during the demonstrations.

The political dimension is a problem. While these undemocratic and anti-social actions are making the government much less popular, it is not the parties of the left, not even of the "moderate", reformist, left, that are rising in the polls. Instead, it is Marine Le Pen's far-right party, Ras-

semblement National (RN, previously the Front National) which is making headway. A poll by the Elabe company found that in an election held today, 45% would back Macron and 55% would back Le Pen. Although it (quietly) opposes the strikes, the RN is a loud voice against the pension reform and is able to position itself as "anti-system". It is also able to take advantage of the lack of a coherent left-wing political alternative.

Alternatives

We have seen the far right make political gains from an ostensibly left-wing protest movement elsewhere and at other times in recent years. Although the character of the French Yellow Vests protests was complicated, it is true that the far right was able to make substantial inroads in that 2018 movement. In

Brazil's apparently left-wing protest movement of 2015-2016, the political force that was able to take the greatest advantage was the right wing, which eventually boosted the career of Bolsonaro. The French far left needs to chart out a convincing alternative route to a different government. Simply saying that "the streets will decide" is not adequate, as what happens in the streets is determined by questions of who can aim to win government and political power.

The NPA in France is divided over the question of political perspectives. Some argue for a Constituent Assembly – a national democratic assembly that would draw up a new constitution. While the Étincelle group is cautious about the idea of a Constituent Assembly, the Besancenot wing of the NPA argues for "meetings of all the organisations of the left – associations, trade unions, political parties, to discuss how to build a social and political response of the exploited and the oppressed against Macron, the boss class and their 5th Republic" and for "a big demonstration in Paris that marches on the Elysée, to go and find Macron. We got rid of Louis XVI, we stopped Charles III from visiting, we can surely kick out King Macron, Emmanuel II!"

The question is: what kind of government can the French workers' movement propose to replace Macron with if he goes? For people who want to vote in a government that is clearly radically opposed to Macron and his system, what can the French socialist movement offer? That is something that we in Workers' Liberty will seek to debate and clarify with our French comrades and co-thinkers. □



Escalate strikes to break postal deadlock!

By Ollie Moore

Royal Mail has offered postal workers a three-year pay deal, averaging just over 3% for each year of the deal. The company is still ploughing ahead with its plans to radically overhaul workers' conditions, including extending hours and tightening sickness and attendance procedures. It has guaranteed no compulsory redundancies, but only for the life of the deal.

Despite the offer clearly coming nowhere near union demands for an above-inflation pay increase and an abandonment of planned cuts, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has called no further strikes. Union leaders continue to stress their aspiration for a negotiated agreement, despite Royal Mail bosses having essentially cut off the latest round of negotiations.

Given this, postal workers' only possible means of breaking the impasse is to withdraw their labour, for a sustained period. Pinning hopes on negotiations that are deadlocked, if not entirely dead, renders postal workers themselves passive observers of a process in which only union officials are able to actively engage. CWU communications urge workers to "support [their] union", as if "the union" is an external body licensed to do things on workers' behalf, rather than the structural expression of workers' own organisation.

Union leaders including general secretary Dave Ward have said the union will "need to make some concessions" as part of any eventual settlement. Ward has also stressed the need to acknowledge Royal Mail's financial situation and accept the need for "change".

Royal Mail bosses claim that the company is on the brink of financial collapse, implying that union intransigence and any further strikes could tip it over the edge. Workers should resist their bosses' blackmail. Sustained strikes, combined with assertive political campaigning for the renationalisation of the postal service, could force concessions. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government



NHS “REJECT” CAMPAIGN DISCUSSES PLANS

By Alice Hazel

The NHS pay consultation ballots of the biggest health unions, RCN and Unison, are due to close on Friday 14 April.

The Vote Reject campaign has delivered tens of thousands of [leaflets](#) across the country, and is bringing together workers from all the health unions to organise against the offer. Places where the campaign has a good levels of activism expect a strong No vote.

However, in some areas many members will be untouched by the debate, and, without a convincing argument about how to win a better deal, may well be tempted by the unconsolidated “bribe” payment for 2022-23. RCN members, who struck across the country, are thought most likely to vote reject. In Unison, thresholds for strike were

not met in many places, and a practised bureaucracy is working harder to sell the deal than they ever did to mobilise for strike ballots.

RCN leaders are showing their fears about the potential reject vote by desperately coniving against the emergency general meeting (EGM) petition that was completed and is still up and running. The RCN has a rule that 1,000 members can call an EGM. The union leadership have repeatedly, including in the national press, accused organisers of rigging the petition with false names, and have taken the issue to the police.

The petition was circulated openly, so the organisers had no control over who signed it. They could get no gain from entering false data. Many have pointed out that the only peo-

ple who could have entered such data systematically are those holding the RCN membership records.

The RCN leaders’ fear of the petition shows they understand the high stakes and the implications of a reject vote in terms of the future strategy for the dispute. If RCN votes to reject, we will need an organised rank-and-file network to push for further strikes and a continued serious campaign to restore real-wage losses over the years.

The “vote reject” campaign is articulating ideas for an escalation of action alongside the BMA junior doctors if the offer is rejected. A further meeting will discuss the measures needed to prepare for that.

Votes run until 14 April in the RCN and Unison, and 28 April in GMB and Unite. □

