



For social ownership of the banks and industry

REVIVE THE STRIKE WAVE



» **Workers can win by stepping up strikes**

» **Bosses get 12% pay rise**

» **Defeat anti-union laws**

See inside

Amazon, rail, unis, Royal Mail

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Revive the strike wave!



Editorial

The strike wave which started in June 2022 had been sagging in recent weeks. Even now (15 April), leaders of the CWU union in Royal Mail have announced a deal with Royal Mail, ominously giving no detail but visibly pushing for union members eventually to endorse it as a *fait accompli*.

The vote by RCN members on 14 April to reject the rotten NHS pay deal, recommended by all the unions except Unite (no recommendation), has turned that round.

Nurses' strikes (1 and 2 May) will now combine with teachers (27 April, 2 May) and civil service (28 April), in a new up-tick.

The road to victory remains as *Solidarity* has argued since summer 2022: speed up the strikes. Spread them. And coordinate them. Marathon winners triumph with final sprints. And the

finishing line is in reach. Middling (median) overall pay for CEOs at the top one hundred companies on the Stock Exchange rose 12% in 2022, according to the *Financial Times*, so that the middling CEO is now on £4.15 million, as much as two hundred NHS health care assistants.

A few weeks earlier, the *Financial Times* reported that profit margins of US companies in 2022, in post-lockdown revival, hit their highest level since soon after World War 2; and the eurozone firms in 2021-2 had their biggest boost to profitability since the 2008 crash.

With Brexit, UK profits will not have risen as much. But official figures show profit rates sharply up for "UK continental shelf" (fossil-fuel) firms and for banks, and steady for others. Share prices for the top 100 firms, an index of current and expected profitability, have risen pretty steadily since dips in the early-2020 and 2021-1 lockdowns.

The Tories will pay about £100 billion this year in interest to holders of those



government IOUs (bonds) with payments linked to the Retail Price Index.

A mild wealth tax and other tweaks could [raise](#) £37 billion a year.

The cost to the government of a 10.1% pay rise across the public sector would be about [£8.5 billion](#) if we factor in the state recouping some of the rise through tax revenue. Small change by comparison with profits, payments on bonds, or bosses' revenues.

The Tories' stubbornness on public-services wages is not because the state "can't afford" wage rises. They want limit the taxes they raise on the well-off to make good spending during the heights of Covid (much of it wasted, on crony PPE contracts, ineffectual test-and-trace, never-repaid loans to business), and ratchet the overall wage-profit ratio down for the future. □

Education: capitalism warps its own work



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Over the last fifty years or so, universities have expanded hugely, in Britain and in other countries. The world average "enrolment" rate is now around 40% of the age group.

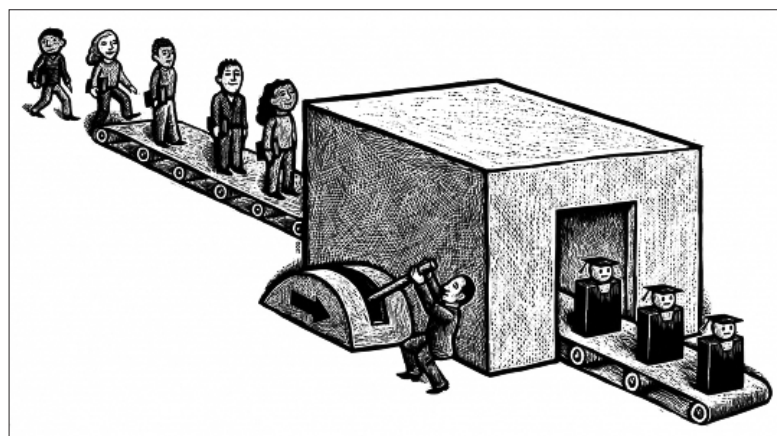
In Britain it's about 50%: it was 8% in 1970, about 2% in 1950.

The driver seems to be the thirst of capital for more versatile, ready-to-learn-further workers, rather than capital hoping that the schools and universities will turn out workers with the exact skills in demand.

Something like three-quarters of workers in richer capitalist countries use computers in their jobs, and with ever-changing software.

In many countries, anyway, the "premium", the wage advantage for workers with university degrees over those without, has risen even as degrees become more common.

As Marx put it, "large-scale



industry... necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of labour... fitness of the worker for the maximum number of different kinds of labour".

In broad terms the expansion of schools and universities is part of the work of capitalism in developing productive forces to create the technological and human basis for a society of generalised abundance and free cooperation. A [study](#) in the UK found that "achieving a university degree reduces an individual's authoritarianism and racial prejudice and makes an individual more economically right-wing". Since more students come from working-class backgrounds, even with the right-wing push

most university students remain leftish economically, so that generally more education is correlated with leftism.

But capitalism warps its own work.

Every government recognises that it cannot allow education to be allocated by free-flowing markets. Fees for secondary schools were charged in Stalin's USSR from 1940 to 1956, and are still charged in China today, but declining. A good few countries have many private secondary schools with fees (46% of secondary students in Australia, for example), but usually subsidised by the government. Where there are university fees, states usually provide loans to offset market forces.

But markets or pseudo-markets warp education in many ways.

Education serves employers for "job market [signalling](#)" – bosses hire people with degrees, or degrees from "good" universities, because the degree "signals" that the person can jump through hoops, stick at wearying tasks, and do assignments on time, as much as because it is a certificate of specific knowledge or skills.

Exam factories

As schools have become more and more "exam factories", universities have become more and more "certificate factories".

Business and management are now the most popular courses in British universities, with nursing and medicine. Medical-related courses "certify" specific knowledge and skills. Business courses "certify" very little of that.

The other most popular courses are in social sciences, design and creative arts, and psychology. Many of these give few specific job skills, or specific job skills in areas where there are many fewer jobs than students (design). Students choose them because they are interested

(good) or because they seem a convenient way to get a certificate (not so good). If they're expensive to run, universities may cut them (archeology at Sheffield) in favour of cheaper ways of providing certificates.

The education system is hugely inefficient. It gears students to passing the exam and getting the certificate, so that often they gain no fluency with adapting what they have "learned" in everyday work and life, and anyway quickly forget it.

While more and more 18-year-olds are crammed through "certificate factories" (and maybe at a stage when really they don't want to spend more years that way, but would prefer more "real-life" work), "adult" education, in the flow of life, has [shrivelled](#). Between 2010-11 and 2020-21, there was a 50% fall in spending on classroom-based adult education and the number of (mostly older) students on part-time undergraduate degrees went down almost 50%.

A socialist society will both integrate education more with productive work, and unequivocally provide for education as a lifelong "public good". More on this next week. □

The lessons about union officialdom

By Rhodri Evans

The strike wave is reviving. Why did it sag in early 2023? One big lesson is about the role of union officialdom.

After almost 35 years of low strike levels, a strike wave started in June 2022, with workers striving to match wages to prices, especially of food and energy, rising much faster than at any time since the early 1990s.

Unemployment was and is low, with bosses hiring anew for post-lockdown expansion, so workers have also sought to reverse the decline since 2008 in real median weekly wages, especially in public services.

On the rail, on the Tube, and in Royal Mail, workers have also been battling to save conditions against restructurings attempted by the bosses after losses during lockdowns.

In the private sector, a number of strikes, such as the Liverpool dockers' and some busworkers', have won sizeable rises and rejuvenated workplace organisation. With public service workers, it's been more difficult.

The public services have large, sprawling workforces in which organisation is often poor in many patches and difficult to renew. They face a stub-

born government. Most public service workers lack the capacity to make their strikes bite directly into profits.

Those difficulties have bitten harder because, while the private-sector strikes have generally been indefinite, or with large schedules of action, the public-service strike campaigns have taken a form never seen before on this scale: what CWU (post union) Deputy General Secretary Postal Terry Pullinger called "a marathon, not a sprint". And stop-start marathons at that.

Stop-start

A sally of one-day, two-day, or occasionally longer, strikes would be announced. After that sally, then a pause, sometimes explained as helping negotiations with the employers, but often just a pause. Then another small schedule. After six months, a re-ballot as mandated by anti-strike law. Then more small schedules, more pauses.

From early 2023, the pauses became longer, the sallies scantier and more subject to cancellation, the recommendations to accept poor offers more frequent. And those recommendations were often made by union leaders to members already demobilised while they waited on talks.

vonport 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

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

From early May (tba): RCN to re-ballot nurses on pay strikes

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

From a Marxist point of view, a central factor here is full-time paid union officialdom as a social layer.

Beyond a certain size, unions need some full-time paid officials to function. Over the decades, the layer of full-time paid officials (and usually of "career" full-time paid officials) has mutated into an independent social and political factor. The top officials are paid like, and live like, capitalist managers. They come to see trade-unionism as primarily as matter of their negotiating skills, and working-class action as a supplement to nudge the bosses when they're slow about negotiating.

Bureaucrats

Pat Cullen of the RCN takes £190,000 in salary and benefits; Gary Smith of the GMB, £259,000; Mick Lynch of the RMT, £149,000 (though he got the union to cut his official payment by 20%); and most others comparable amounts.

There are three union leaders who pay back to the union some of their high salaries: the General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, Matt Wrack, who takes the wage of an experienced firefighter in London; the Assistant General Secretary of PCS, John Molooney, who takes the much lower average wage of the most numerous grade in the civil service; and BMA council deputy chair Emma Runswick, who takes a junior doctor wage to match what she would have received had she not been elected. But the rule in all the sizeable unions is: high salaries and benefits.

Even the highest-paid union leaders aren't capitalist managers. They want to get a better deal for their members. They also want to avoid risk to their union machine (offices, salaries, etc) and to longer-term "collegial" negotiating relations with bosses.

The fear of risk bites especially in

times when union workplace, branch, and committee organisation is weak, as it has been in recent decades; when union democracy is weak, in terms of rules, or in terms of active engagement, or both; and when energy and strength is lacking for networks of rank-and-file activists organised specifically to put pressure on the officials, to call them to account, to surveil them, and to replace where necessary (and where possible: many high-up union officials are appointed from higher-up, not elected from below).

Democracy

When they call for workers to vote for action, they often phrase it as calling on workers to "support the union", as if a workers' vote for action is back-up for skilled negotiators, rather than skilled negotiators being a back-up for workers' action, and as if "the union" is the negotiators. The idea is often not really that strikes would force bosses to make an offer, but that strikes will "nudge" bosses into reasonable negotiations, where the officials' skills will triumph.

The answer is to fight for union democracy, to organise rank-and-file networks, and to organise within those networks a nucleus of activists (Marxists) who have studied the theory and the history and learned about the logic of class struggle. As Leon Trotsky put it: to "strive not only to renew the top leadership of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists, but also to create in all possible instances independent militant organisations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society". □

• More, including links to classic texts on the issue: bit.ly/union-o

Strikes

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)

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

1-2 May: Nurses in many NHS trusts in England strike (RCN: starts 8pm 30 April)

2 May: Teachers in England (NEU) strike

Until 4 May: Serco workers at De-



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](#).

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

Friday 21 - Monday 24 April: Extinction Rebellion, The Big One

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 □



The “Global South”, “multipolarity”: what about class?



By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* used to hedge articles on the Ukraine war with a formal condemnation of the Russian invasion. Sometimes, too, there’d be a reminder to readers about the reactionary nature of Putin’s regime. No longer.

A recent (3 April) editorial contains no hint of criticism of the invasion or of Putin. In fact, it gloats over the fact that “a resolution before the United Nations calling for Russia to withdraw from Ukrainian territory failed to attract votes from all but a tiny handful of states outside the North Atlantic alliance.”

The obvious satisfaction taken in this vote (described as a “setback” for “the imperial alliance”) is strange, given that Russian withdrawal remains the official policy of both the *Morning Star* and of its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain.

The answer to this apparent contradiction lies how the editorial explains the UN vote: “Abstentions, including from a host of African, Asian and Latin

American states, and some big players like Brazil, India and South Africa, confirmed the increasingly settled views of the global South.”

The “global South” is a phrase that turns up in the pages of the *Morning Star* with increasing frequency, although it is never quite clear what exactly it means and who is included. It seems to be a less loaded term for what used to be called the “Third World”. At times it seems to mean any “non aligned” country, and sometimes the so-called BRICS group – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Multipolarity

Another concept has been cropping up in the MS with increasing frequency and evident enthusiasm: “multipolarity”. For instance China’s brokering of the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia was hailed in the paper as foreshadowing “a new period in history. One where the multipolar world is an undeniable fact, to the great benefit of the world’s population.”

None of these geopolitical concepts has anything to do with socialism or class struggle. Nor do they have anything to do with human rights – a phrase often misused by Western

powers, but positively opposed (or redefined into economic well-being) by China and other proponents of multipolarity. In *Multipolarity, the Mantra of Authoritarianism* (2022), the Indian Marxist feminist Kavita Krishnan explained how advocacy for multipolarity against a US-led unipolar order has, in effect, defended authoritarianism across the world.

In a particularly telling passage, she writes:

The Russian fascist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin (much like Putin) states that “Multipolarity [...] advocates a return to the civilizational foundations of each non-western civilization (and a rejection of) liberal democracy and human rights ideology.”

Modi has repeatedly attacked human rights defenders as anti-Indian while declaring that India is the “mother of democracy”, and India’s democracy must be viewed not through a “western” lens but as part of its “civilisational ethos.”

The influence goes both ways. Dugin favours the caste hierarchy as a social model (Dugin 2012). Directly incorporating the brahminical Manusmriti’s val-



ues with international fascism, Dugin sees “the present order of things”, represented by “human rights, anti-hierarchy, and political correctness” as “Kali Yuga”: a calamity which brings with it the blending of castes (a miscegenation which in turn is brought about by women’s freedom, also a calamitous aspect of Kali Yuga) and the dismantling of hierarchy. He has described Modi’s electoral success as representing a victory for “multipolarity”, a welcome assertion of “Indian values,” and a defeat for the hegemony of “liberal democracy and human rights ideology.”

Yet the Left continues to use “multipolarity” without betraying the slightest awareness of how fascists and authoritarians couch their own aims in the same language.

Unsurprisingly, Krishnan’s important essay has never even been mentioned by the MS or any publication associated with the CPB. It’s a safe bet that it never will be. □

Protest hits Sheffield snooping

By Tam Charles

As part of a crackdown on student activism, the University of Sheffield has hired Intersol Global, a private investigator firm, to investigate its own students for building occupations. It paid Intersol Global £40,000 in an extraordinary escalation against free expression on campus.

On 15 April, Sheffield Solidarity Group organised a protest during the university’s offer-holder open day. The goal was to rally students and the local labour movement in support of the investigated students. Student offer-holders wield economic influence, and universities try to entice them with slick marketing. The purpose was to show them the realities of campus, where the university has a history of treating its students as cash cows to exploit.

In reaction to the protest, the university relocated the open day from the concourse to the nearby Jessop West. This demonstrates how suspicious and fearful the administration



is of its own students. The protesters simply walked to the new site.

Protest

Despite the fact that it was the Easter holidays and most students were away from Sheffield, the protest drew a group of twenty who leafleted around the open day. Good discussions were had with offer-holders about the university’s methods and the university staff’s strike. Protesters carried a banner with the slogan #OneOfUsAllofUs. Several student activists

and UCU members from the University of Sheffield and the outsourced International College delivered speeches.

Solidarity is a two-way street, and student activists have worked tirelessly to support industrial action and educate students about the UCU dispute. The university’s activities are intended to create a wedge between staff and students. If this trend continues, trade union activists will be next on the university’s chopping block. □

Musk’s banning culture



Matt McGowan’s article in *Solidarity* 668, misses one side of the problem. The purported “free-speech absolutism” of twitter’s new dictator, Elon Musk, only applies to his allies. In December several journalists and other accounts who criticised Musk were suspended from Twitter. After push-back this was reversed. Facing a mass exodus the same month, Twitter blocked links to other platforms – Mastodon, Facebook, etc. – and threatened suspensions. This too was reversed following outcry.

Sustained silencing of easier targets is more concerning. Numerous accounts of USA antifascist organisers and researchers, and of anarchist organisations, have been suspended for five months now – after far-right activists requested these bans.

In January the BBC documentary was released ex-

posing India’s now-prime minister Narendra Modi’s role in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat. Within days, the Indian government announced a ban. YouTube and Musk’s Twitter were quick to enforce this ban. Pre-Musk, Twitter had pushed back against Modi’s censorship demands, albeit inconsistently, through court cases and restoring accounts. In March, over 100 prominent politicians, activists, and journalists had their accounts blocked on Twitter in India.

With the sacking of the lion’s share of Twitter’s staff, it increasingly relies on automated content moderation to deal with malicious spam and abuse. This automated systems can be gamed. The Chinese state appears to have done so to get anti-CCP dissidents suspended since November. Others have been silenced more recently in more subtle ways. Championing free speech remains a vital cause for the left. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

Women's protests in the Balkans



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

In the Serbian capital of Belgrade, protests have been held since September 2022, when a pro-government newspaper published an interview with Igor Milošević, who had served a 15-year sentence for numerous rapes and physical assaults on women. The piece instructed women on how to protect themselves during sexual assault.

"While I was raping and robbing, I felt freedom," said Milošević. He reportedly threatened the female journalist who interviewed him, telling her, "If I decide to rape you, I will."

Ženska Solidarnost (Women's Solidarity), a Belgrade-based women's collective, began calling protests. The collective began in 2018 as a Facebook group where women shared stories about domestic violence. The demonstrations helped it evolve into a real life movement.

Slogans seen on placards and banners read "no more", "rage in the streets – justice for women and girls", "these witches don't burn". People also chanted "women's revolution", "educate your sons", and "woman to woman solidarity".

Across the border to the east, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, women also took to the streets from autumn with placards saying "Enough – no more".

There is some backlash. The International Women's Day march in the

Bosnian city of Banja Luka was verbally and then physically attacked because of one of the participants was carrying a rainbow flag.

Gordana Katana, one of the organisers of the march marking International Women's Day, said four young men first verbally called out the participants before the march officially began.

Demands

The protesters are calling for a legal definition of femicide and its introduction as a criminal offence; the application of the Istanbul Convention (the Council of Europe's convention on preventing and combating violence against women); and consistent sentences for perpetrators. They also want state institutions to work together to provide better prevention and protec-

tion against violence against women.

Women support each other across the border, knowing they have the same fight a universal fight for women's rights.

Belgrade feminist Jelena Riznić said: "The problem of violence against women is a problem that transcends national borders – and we had messages at the protest that took place on the same day to support friends from Bosnia and Herzegovina," said Riznić.

And Bosnian feminist Enisa Raković: "Femicide knows no borders. It does not know age, skin colour, religion, ethnicity or nationality, place of residence. On every part of the planet, abusive men tell women – you're only good if you're dead. And we say 'No more!' We will not live in fear. We will not die in silence". □

Curbing capitalism on the high seas



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

After nearly two decades of talks, the UN has agreed a treaty to protect the high seas from overfishing, shipping and extractive industry. The High Seas Treaty is the latest and potentially the most extensive curb on maritime capitalism to date. Although the treaty is very limited due to the commitment of the world's capitalist states to the growth of fishing, mining and shipping capital, it is a significant step forward.

Until recently, the seas have been treated as both inexhaustible resource tap and infinite waste dump. But this illusion is becoming difficult to sustain as the ocean ecosystems are overwhelmed by the scale and relentless growth of capitalist activity. Various forms of waste are now causing significant problems. Farm waste is creating hypoxic dead zones. Between 2008 and 2019, the number of these zones [nearly doubled](#), from 400 to 700. It is now estimated that 200 million tonnes of plastic is in the oceans, including microplastics that enter the food web along with other anthropogenic toxins.

Oceans have absorbed 50% of historic CO2 emissions,

leading to ocean acidification, often referred to as "climate change's evil twin". Oceans also absorb 90% of the heat caused by global warming, leading to marine heatwaves. Those factors make the marine environment ever more hostile to life. Ocean acidification is already causing coral bleaching (coral reefs support 25% of marine species) and may reach tipping points that damage fragile shell-forming zooplankton that are crucial for many marine food webs.

Waste

The living organisms that live in the sea have been the victims of capitalist societies use of the ocean as an infinite waste dump. But it is the escalating capitalist plundering of the seas that is the biggest threat to marine life.

For many decades the world's governments and scientific authorities thought that the world's fisheries were inexhaustible. Then in 1992 the Canadian government was forced to impose a moratorium on cod fishing to prevent the collapse of a fishery that had sustained generations since the earliest days of European colonialism. Ever more powerful fishing vessels were chasing ever dwindling fish stocks. The illusion of inexhaustible fisheries was sustained on a global scale because Chinese [state bureaucrats](#) were systematically distorting the fisheries

statistics. When these distortions were taken into account in the early 2000s, global fish stocks were shown as in terminal decline.

Capitalist industry has responded by expanding and intensifying fishing operations and by developing systems of aquaculture. The world population now consumes more farmed fish than the entire wild fish catch. Aquaculture systems are extremely energy and resource intensive. Atlantic blue fin tuna ranches which capture young tuna and then fatten them up consume 25 kg of fish for every 1kg of tuna they produce. Aquaculture also produces a lot of waste, including hypoxic zones and antimicrobial resistance associated with terrestrial farm animals.

Conservation

There have been some successful attempts to protect marine environments from unrestrained capitalist exploitation. Scallop trawling in Lyme Bay was destroying some of the UK's richest marine habitats but local fishers and environmentalists managed to win a partial ban on dredgers and bottom trawlers, which has led to a revival in biodiversity.

Atlantic blue fin tuna appeared to be entering an "extinction vortex" in the early 2000s. Originally used as pet food, bluefin tuna became a luxury commodity with in-

creased popularity of sushi in the late 20th century. Prices for these giants soared, leading to investment in large scale fishing which outcompeted the traditional Mediterranean tonara.

Following the market signals car manufacturer Mitsubishi invested heavily in freezer capacity and now handles 35-40% of the tuna catch and has thousands of tonnes in storage. As wild tuna become increasingly rare, the prices soar. Whatever the subjective intentions of Mitsubishi bosses, they have a business interest in hunting the last wild tuna to extinction. Against those efforts, an effective campaign managed to impose restrictions on wild tuna fishing, and stocks now appear to be making a revival, with tuna being sighted off the coast of Britain and Norway for the first time in decades.

The High Seas Treaty is a further step along the path of restricting capitalist exploitation of the oceans. But it is very limited. It will allow states or groups of nation states to make proposals for "marine protected areas" (MPAs) setting out the environmental threats and how they will be regulated. But the amount of protection in currently existing MPAs is limited by the lobbying power of the large fishing corporations. 97% of MPAs in UK waters are bottom-trawled, the most ecologically destruc-

tive fishing technique.

The treaty does not prevent activities that are currently regulated by other international bodies. That means that there is no way to stop China's plan to create a shipping route through the melting Arctic Ocean. Nor is there any mechanism for stopping the mining companies that are currently exploring the Pacific seabed for metals needed to build batteries to drive the shift from fossil fuels. There are further problems about who pays to police these MPAs when they are set up.

Ownership

Despite these limitations, the treaty and associated measures demonstrate clearly that free-wheeling capitalism is incompatible with a sustainable future. Only measures that limit profit-making activity are effective. The limitations of the treaty and currently existing MPAs are due to the difficulties capitalist states have in restraining capitalist profit making, especially when its activity takes place far from human habitation.

This points to the need for public ownership and democratic control of these industrial sectors so they can be run on a rational and ecologically sound basis, rather than in ways that create ever-growing risk of catastrophe. □

Solidarity, not saviour complex

A guest article by Hein Htet Kyaw

In the last few months, I've encountered a slew of campist leftists, mostly from the West, on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other issues. The majority of them are purposefully equating the Ukrainian resistance to Nazism by emphasising the minority of right-wing nationalist elements in the Ukrainian resistance, acting as useful idiots for Putin and his Russia's colonial war.

Despite many Ukrainian socialists and anarchists speaking out about their needs for weapons and aid, and Russian soldiers whispering about the war crimes committed by the Russian military, these campist leftists are cheering for Russia by cosplaying as anti-imperialists, as if the United States and NATO were the only imperialist camps on the planet. That reminds me of a phrase by a Syrian anarchist, Leila Al-Shami: "the anti-imperialism of the idiots."

Historically speaking, such an ignorant political stand was not too foreign for most of the western leftist groups, especially those with a Stalinist, Maoist, or Trotskyist background. For example, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the organisation behind the World Socialist Web Site, has consistently refused to recognise Iran's and Russia's imperialism in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. In one of the WWSW articles, "Australia's pseudo-left covers up for US imperialism in Iraq," the author, Patrick O'Connor, claimed that "Iran is an oppressed nation that is entirely dependent on energy exports while being subjected to a US economic blockade for more than three decades and repeatedly threatened with military attack in recent years."

Apparently, a lot of Iraqi, Iranian, and Middle Eastern organic communist wings were disappointed with such Eurocentric conclusions. Rahman Bouzari, an Iranian journalist, regarded the such kind of political stance on Iran's imperialism as shallow anti-imperialism. The Worker-Communist Party of Iran, one of the most active communist groups in Iran, also stated that Iran is an imperialist country.

"The International Magazine," a Maoist magazine, used to claim "Iran as an anti-imperialist state" amidst the Iranian protests of 2022, in one of their articles, "In Defense of Iran," which was deleted but mirrored by me. The article was written by Adele Cain from Sweden. The articles stated that "Iran has good relations with China, Cuba, Venezuela, Algeria, and Russia." Moreover, the article also stated that "it is our duty to defend Iran against imperialist attempts to launch a right-wing counterrevolution."

Apparently, according to the article, "The International Magazine" chose to show its solidarity with the Iranian Islamic Republic regime despite the fact

that a lot of Iranian children, women, men, and working-class people were holding the banners "No more kings, no mullahs!" "All the powers to Shuras" amidst the inhumane suppression of the regime and its forces. While people in Iran were calling for the "workers' council," "The International Magazine" was standing in solidarity with the Islamic regime.

"Communists"

A significant number of Stalinists and Maoists all over the world still think of China, Cuba, Venezuela, Algeria, and Russia as communist regimes, just as the mainstream media portrays them. This explains how illiterate they are when it comes to socialist theory. They are betting on the side of China, Cuba, Venezuela, Algeria, and Russia against the USA and its allies.

Even in Burma, there are a lot of pro-CCP communists from the Communist Party of Burma who are silent about the Uyghur genocide but use the Rohingya genocide as a weapon against the NUG, the exiled government, to gain political points among the opposition forces. There were a lot of such Burmese Maoists and Stalinists who were currently living in the USA, Australia, and Canada on social welfare. Despite betting on the side of China, Cuba, Venezuela, Algeria, and Russia against the USA and its allies, it's irony and hypocrisy for them to choose to apply for protection visas from these imperialist countries while relying on the social welfare benefits that were gained from the taxes of working-class citizens, migrants, and other immigrants. They should be ashamed of calling themselves revolutionary vanguards while living as lumpenproletariat.

In the western world, those who want to be seen as politically correct, anti-imperialist, or left leaning tend to support the Palestinian cause. They also tend to talk, speak, or comment about complex issues such as Kashmir issues, Israel-Palestine issues, or the Russia-Ukraine war without proper knowledge of the history and theory. As a result, instead of choosing pragmatic methods to show their solidarity, they appropriate the causes to serve their own political agendas to gain power or popularity.

Instead of helping the Palestinian left-wing groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and others, most of the western left spent all of their time on the questions of a one-state or two-state solution. As a result, these groups had to rely financially on neighbouring states, such as Iran, which later led to conflicts over political values among the groups.

Consider the PFLP being reliant on the Islamic Republic and being forced to remain silent about ongoing Iranian protests. It's such a shame. Dr. Habash

wouldn't think twice about standing with the people of Iran who are fed up with the Islamic theocracy. Likewise Leila Khaled and other PFLP members who are actively advocating for secularism in Turkey's politics.

The International Socialist Alternative, a Trotskyist group that demanded two secular-democratic states, appears to be the only one with organic working-class leftists and party cells all over the region among the western left. Ironically, those western Maoist and Trotskyist groups that are hostile towards the two-state solution proposed by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the International Socialist Alternative don't even have affiliated working-class individuals or groups in both Israel and Palestine.

Nowadays, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian People's Party, the Palestinian Democratic Union, and the Palestinian National Initiative, the progressive and left-leaning political parties, are becoming weaker and less influential compared to the populist Islamist groups such as Hamas. All these progressive parties have formed the Democratic Alliance List and struggled together against both Israel's occupation and Islamist far-right fascism.

When the statement of the Palestinian National Initiative is seriously studied, this can be seen: "Only through the establishment of a sovereign, independent, viable, and democratic Palestinian state on all of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, can a just peace be achieved." Apparently, this "occupation by Israel in 1967" suggests the two-state solution by an organic left-wing Palestinian political party. PFLP had always been loyal to its one-state solution.

Regardless, it should be the Palestinian working class that gets to decide whether it's a one-state, two-state, three-state, or tiny state. In contrast, most western leftist groups appear to

be content with bossing around on university campuses, daydreaming about how Palestine and Israel will become a secular unitary state. Worse, most of the groups and individuals don't even know the differences between the PLO and Hamas, as well as the PFLP and DFLP. Furthermore, there are even some fractions of the western left that failed to inform themselves that the Palestinian working class used to demonstrate against Hamas.

Some on the western left even adopted some random Muslim fundamentalists as their recruits simply because they support Hamas and hate the idea of an Israeli state. When working-class politics are excluded, no Marxist elements remain in the political insights. It's not about Muslims and Jews. It's not about Israel's right-wing government versus Hamas. It's about the sovereignty of Palestine and the success of both the Israeli and Palestinian working classes. Let the Palestinian working class decide whether Palestine is one state, two states, three states... The solidarity between these groups can only be established when the divisive politics of religious fundamentalism are pushed back and a multicultural, pluralistic society is established. None of these can be attained by favouritism and fostering communal enmity while ignoring the needs of other communities.

Seriously, the last time the western people decided on behalf of another nation, that nation and its people suffered greatly. The western colonisers drew certain lines on the map of India. Nowadays, the country is split into multiple countries with different separatist groups. India and Pakistan have become rivals despite sharing a lot of cultural and historical roots. Kashmir is occupied by both India and Pakistan. Such a kind of history shouldn't repeat itself again in Palestine. Historically, the contemporary Israel state was there simply because of British colonialism. □

• This is part 1. Part 2 next week

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Anti-strike law: what “defiance” means

From the **Free Our Unions** blog

Fire Brigades Union leader Matt Wrack has called for a “mass movement of non-compliance” against the Minimum Service Legislation.

That’s good. But as I understand the legislation, “non-compliance” begs the question.

A union can refuse to enter into consultation about “minimum service” levels. Then, under the law, the levels are set by the government.

A union can refuse to talk with the employer about which people will be required to work on strike days to provide those levels. Then, under the law, the employer can name people unilaterally.

If the union refuses to “take reasonable steps to ensure that all members of the union who are identified in the work notice” will break the strike, then a court can grant an injunction against the whole industrial action.

And if the union can finesse it by a tongue-in-cheek “instruction” to members to comply, coupled with tacit union signals not to comply, then the boss can discipline those workers not complying. Under already-existing legislation, a court will grant an injunction

against industrial action opposing the disciplinary action. There is really no option of “non-compliance” just by folded arms.

A union can really defy the legislation only by striking in direct conflict with an injunction.

Unions’ choice is to submit to the new law, or to go for high-stakes direct defiance (not just “non-compliance”) by strikes in conflict with injunctions.

Those strikes will make the union liable to a fine, or even to having its assets seized. The only answer then is further direct defiance, i.e. the union to appeal for wildcat action against the fine or seizure.

That will be a break from union policy ever since the Thatcher laws of the 1980s. We have had many strikes, generally workplace-level, in conflict with those laws, which the bosses and the government have considered too hot to handle with those laws. But not unions directly defying the courts.

Transferring assets abroad, as the National Union of Mineworkers tried to do in 1984-5, is not really an answer. Having accounts abroad so that the union cannot pay rent on its offices, wages to its officials, or strike-pay to its members, and has difficulty getting dues from its

members, would paralyse union functioning as much as the government fining it.

In Australia, where anti-strike laws are harsher than they would be in Britain even with the Minimum Service Law, it has been fairly common for unions to strike in conflict with the law and pay the ensuing fines. But unions do that less and less. It’s not a long-term answer, because it erodes union capacities.

Defiance

Direct defiance, breaking injunctions, can work, for the same reason that the bosses and the government have chosen not to deploy the laws against strikes. Strikes could push courts into imposing only nominal fines, and thus prepare the way for the Minimum Service Law to be abandoned as unworkable.

It won’t be easy. If employers and the government are cunning, they will make the prescribed “minimum service” really minimal, at first anyway. Employers will avoid naming union activists for the “minimum service” work. When individual workers defy “minimum service” prescriptions, strategically-thinking employers will impose

only minor discipline (a written warning, say).

There will be many in the unions saying that we should box clever and find ways of effective industrial action while formally complying with “minimum service” law. In the short term it may be plausible.

Increments

Then, in the longer term, the government and employers can tighten the grip of the law, making the “minimum service” ever larger, the penalties for individual workers sharper, so that the law bites harder.

Cunning workarounds can also be counterproductive in the coming years, by giving an incoming Labour government an excuse on its promise to repeal the law – it seems to be doing little harm, Starmer can say, and in the meantime there are other priorities.

The first step is to get a proper national demonstration against the Minimum Service Law.

But the next step – and it starts now: we walk on two legs – is to commit unions to defy injunctions introduced to implement that law. □

• bit.ly/fou-msl

Sudan coup: against both factions!

By **Sacha Ismail**

In October 2021 a military coup overthrew the joint military-civilian government supposed to be leading Sudan to democracy.

Now (since 15 April 2023) two factions of the military regime are fighting each other in the streets. 144 are confirmed dead as of 18 April.

The government over-

thrown by the 2021 coup was brought about by a dramatic popular revolution in 2018-19: generally liberal-democratic but with more radical elements represented by some trade unions and local “resistance committees”. For

18 months since the coup this movement has kept up impressive resistance to the military, including strikes and regular mass demonstrations.

In the current conflict, the regular military is backing general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the armed forces and effectively of the government. The ex-paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is backing his deputy, its leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemeti).

I’ve read that Hemeti is engaging in pseudo-democratic rhetoric criticising the 2021 coup. But the RSF is an integral part of the coup regime, and was the successor of the Janjaweed militia that committed genocide in Darfur (2003 on),

killing hundreds of thousands.

Part of the conflict is no doubt the personal ambitions of Burhan and Hemeti and those around them. Part is tensions about whether, how and how fast the RSF will be integrated into the ordinary armed forces. Perhaps both sides also relish the opportunity to overthrow the plan for elections within two years that the regime made with the liberal opposition in December.

Sudan’s mass movement for democracy – particularly the grassroots working-class and popular forces within it – needs solidarity.

• More on Sudan: workersliberty.org/sudan and on menasolidaritynetwork.com



Hemeti

Ban prepayment meters outright

By **Colin Foster**

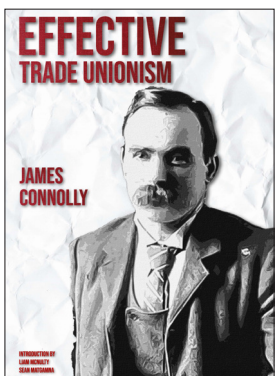
The regulator Ofgem is lifting the pause on forced installation of pre-payment energy meters (PPMs) agreed in February after an outcry over around [10,000](#) new PPM installations per month during high energy prices. Solidarity advocates:

- pre-payment meters should be banned outright (not impossible: there are [none in France](#))
- public ownership of the whole energy industry, to mop up the vast profits currently made (under the Tories’ energy subsidy scheme) by oil and gas companies, and to speed transition to renewables and nuclear.
- every household should get a basic quota of energy free (even if that means higher unit prices for above-quota energy for better-off households)
- the government should finance improved insulation, and conversion of home-heating to heat pumps and other low-carbon technologies



Ofgem proposes, and says it will make mandatory, a ban on forced PPM installation but only where all residents are aged over 85. The BBC reckons that it could be some months before forcible installations restart at all. The Tories have said they will legislate to stop households being charged more for energy via pre-payment than via direct debit.

Four million households, including 600,000 which Age UK classifies as “older”, are currently on PPMs. Record numbers of new PPMs were installed in 2022. Households on PPMs frequently “self-disconnect” because they just don’t have the cash. □



Fundamental to Connolly’s socialism was the idea of industrial unionism, workers’ solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

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James Connolly's N

Introduction



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

This is a "full-dress" rehearsal of Connolly arguing on religion, and for the monogamous form of marriage, sex and the family, against a Marxist, Daniel De Leon, and in the first part of

Connolly's life as a revolutionary militant. Connolly debated with De Leon on three subjects in 1904: on whether trade unions could make real wages rise, on the family, and on religion. He developed an important difference on the need for, nature and role of a revolutionary party, but he did not, as far as I know, explicitly argue on that with De Leon.

Two of the three subjects are dealt with here. The third, that trade unions

can raise real wages, is no longer controversial in the labour movement, and is omitted here.

It is worth remembering the account of his thinking on these questions which Connolly gave to his Scottish De Leonite friend, John Carstairs Matheson, in a letter of 30 January 1908:

"In reference to the question you ask about [an encyclical from the Pope about] Modernism. Theoretically it was not ex cathedra, therefore was not

binding. 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 free-thinker". □

Socialism or the Catholic Church

By Emil Vandervelde

This article by the Belgian socialist Emil Vandervelde, printed by De Leon in the Weekly People, started the controversy, together with the People's promotion of German Marxist August Bebel's book [Woman And Socialism](#).

In the United States, where religion is a private matter, an affair of conscience, where no religious sect dominates, or pretends to dominate others, it must be difficult indeed to realise the bitterness of the contest that rages in most of the

countries of Western Europe between the Roman Catholic Church and its opponents. It is not alone in France that this contest grows in intensity.

During the last few years throughout Western Europe there has been a marked reaction toward clericalism. The Catholics have organised themselves into powerful and well-disciplined parties. The covert authority of the convents which had been abolished by the Revolution has been developed under new forms, and religious associations have attained a greater control over education, while the political influence of the Church since the beginning of the pontificate of Leo XIII has made itself felt on all sides.

In our little Belgium the Conservative party, made up in large part of the supporters of the Church, has been a power for the last nineteen years. In the Netherlands the majority in the States-General (the two legislative houses) belongs to a truly extraordinary coalition of Catholics and Protestants – of disciples of Loyola and of Calvin. In Germany the Centre (the Catholic section of the Reichstag), though it declines in influence among the working class, appears more and more the hub of the Government majority, Protestant Conservatives pay their court to it; while the Lutheran Emperor betakes himself to Rome to bow before the Pope. In England, where frequent conversions to Catholicism are loudly advertised and where the Established Church reveals a growing disposition to imitate the Roman Church, Mr. Balfour's Ministry grants equal appropriations to all the religious sects in the Education bill and makes important concessions to Rome in order to conciliate the Irish Catholics.

In short, all the countries of Western Europe, in Germanic or Anglo-Saxon as well as in the Latin countries, clericalism gains, or at least seems to gain,

ground. When in the minority its opposition becomes more aggressive; when in the majority, or holding the balance of power, its domination waxes heavier.

But, by a natural reaction, anti-clericalism, which had been relegated to the background on account of the pressure of socio-industrial issues, has again appeared, and is spreading in every direction. In France, in Italy, and even in Catholic Spain, the old cry of "A bas la calotte!" [priest's skullcap] resounds on all sides. The veterans of former battles return to the ranks. The youth are divided again into Catholics and anti-Catholics.

But it would be an illusion to believe that nothing is changed, and that the reviving struggle between the clericals and the anti-clericals has the same meaning as had that of the epoch of Pius IX and his syllabus. First of all, it is clear that since the rise of Socialism the efforts of the Catholic Church are not directed against the same enemies as of old. From having defended the nobles and the kings of "l'Ancien Regime" against the liberal, republican, revolutionary middle class, it turns to-day to defend the middle class, which has become conservative, and even reactionary, against the assaults of the Socialist proletariat.

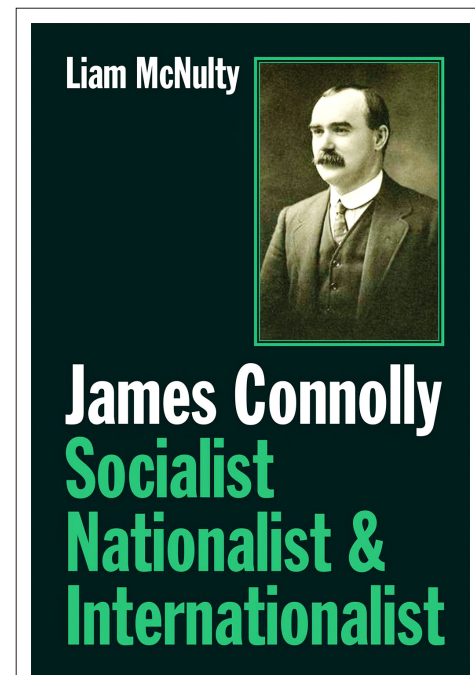
Fifty years ago Catholics denounced Liberalism as "a pest and a frenzy!" Today clericals chant the Marseillaise, since it has become, through strange vicissitudes of things, the national hymn. Clericalism calls itself liberal when, as in France, it is the minority. It disdains, or, at most, uses the Liberals when, as in Belgium and Holland, it is in the majority. But always and everywhere it attacks Socialism, and by cunningly encouraging the fears which Socialism inspires in the classes which have property to lose, it succeeds in holding its old positions,

and even advancing to further ones.

It would be a great mistake – and far-seeing Catholics have no illusions on this subject – to suppose that the present revival of clericalism means an awakening of religious faith, even among Catholics. Doubtless, a certain number of persons of conservative religious instincts, fearing the logical consequences of rationalism, return to the Church, and by interpreting symbolically the old articles of faith, construct a new creed, which contents them. But these are only superficial drifts; they are but eddies of the great tide that bears the people of Europe in a diametrically opposite direction.

One of the heads of the Belgian Catholic party, M. Woeste, acknowledged this in an article published some time ago. "The Roman Church in Europe may gain voters," he says, "but it continues to lose souls". Even in Belgium where the Church reigns through intermediaries; where the Government, in its complete subservience, chooses magistrates and functionaries, imposes a religious teaching in the schools and grants appropriations as authority and wealth command, there is no doubt that the masses reveal a growing disaffection to the ecclesiastical power.

It is an indubitable fact that, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, Europe is decatholicising herself. One might even go further with safety and say that she is dechristianising herself. Slowly but surely, with the irresistible movement of a geological subsidence, faith is waning among the industrial workers, and even among the peasants. One can safely assert that about twenty years ago nearly every one held to some religious creed. Free-thinkers were few and to be found only in the middle class. Societies for promoting secular marriages and burials existed only in the larger cities. To-day we



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

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Marxism, part six

see them spreading and multiplying throughout the industrial centres, and wherever mining and manufacturing are carried on. In Belgium, in France, in Germany, the workmen who follow no particular creed number hundreds of thousands – yes, millions – and as their hopes of a heavenly kingdom dissolve other hopes assert themselves with a growing intensity. Wherever free-thought penetrates, Socialism enters also. We know, it is true, many workmen who become Socialists without relinquishing, or without totally abandoning, their religious convictions; but aside from yellows and blacklegs, acting solely from mercenary motives, we neither know nor can conceive of any freethinking workman who is not at the same time a Socialist.

What wonder, then, that this conservative middle class, instinctively antagonistic to Socialism, should become more and more antagonistic to free thought! Just as the coming of spring in the mountains dissolves the glaciers and sends down floods of icy water, which cools the atmosphere of the lowlands, so under the sunshine of free thought the breaking up of the religious creeds of the proletariat chills the rationalistic tendencies of the middle class. Frightened by the socio-industrial consequences of free thought, an increasing section of the rich class leans toward the Church, and especially toward the Catholic Church, which is regarded by all as the strongest bulwark of the capitalists' interest. The terror of revolutionary ideas drives this section to at least the pretence of believing; and sometimes, thanks to the efforts of

the Jesuits, it succeeds in inculcating belief in its children.

It is thus that the apparent clerical reaction is explained. Far from its corresponding to general awakening of religious faith, it is, in fact, a corollary of the decline of faith among the masses. But it is, nevertheless, true that the alliance of priest and capitalist, the coalition of spiritual and temporal power, against Socialism and free thought, furnishes the conservative and reactionary parties with formidable means of action and constitutes the most redoubtable threat against the immediate future of European civilisation. Progressists have not only clericalism to fight, but also, under different forms and labels, militarism, protectionist imperialism, and, in most countries, a marked tendency on the part of the sovereigns to enlarge their personal power to the detriment of the sovereignty of the people.

What else than proletarian power can we oppose to this reactionary power? Can we depend upon the middle class as a class, or on Liberalism as a party? Facts answer. In Belgium, in Holland, in Germany, the Liberals are terribly weakened; the fear of Socialism demoralises them. It is only too often that the reactionary majority in the election is due to their votes. In England the division and melting away of the Liberal opposition made possible the South African war, and rendered possible, if not probable, the success of Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal plans.

Justice forbids, however, to reproach English Liberalism as a body with the reactionary complaisance of the right wing. In France, too, there is a distinc-

tion to be made. The Republican middle class and the radical democracy do hesitate to accept the help of the Social Democracy in the fight against the Catholic Church by enrolling Millerand in the Ministry and electing Jaurès Vice-President of the Chambers of Deputies.

France

But we must not lose sight of the fact that France is, above all, a country of bourgeois and small landholders. The industrial centres are far apart, except in the territory bordering on the Belgian and German frontiers. The organisation of the working class is, therefore, comparatively weak. Socialism itself is often in France but the idealistic expression of an advanced radicalism. It thus seems natural enough that the middle class parties should not show it, but should be anticlerical rather than anti-Socialistic. But let industry develop on a large scale, let the antagonism of the classes accentuate itself, let the French proletariat strengthen and extend its organisation, and we shall see in France, as in the rest of Western Europe, the middle class facing about and asking pardon of the Church for the ills it has suffered through her.

Thus it is, in the Old World, that two gigantic coalitions are formed by the elimination of intermediaries – the Black International and the Red International. On the one hand are all those who hold that authority should descend from above and who find in the Catholic Church the most perfect expression of their ideal, the most inflexible guardian of their class privileges; on

the other hand are those who insist that authority shall come from the people, and who, by the logic of circumstances, can found their hopes on nothing but Social Democracy.

Between these two extremes Protestantism hesitates and Liberalism shifts from place to place. One may see clearly the truth of the prediction that was made fifty years ago by the Catholic writer, Donose Cortes:

The Liberal school honours equally darkness and light. It has undertaken – extravagant and impossible undertakings – to govern without the people and without God. Its days are numbered. One sees already on the two opposite points of the horizon, the rising sun that proclaims God and the ominous cloud that announces the mad rage of the people. In the terrible day of battle, when the whole arena shall be filled with the Catholic and Socialist phalanxes, no one will know where to find the forces of liberalism.

One may welcome or deplore, the fact of this coming concentration of forces about the Catholic Church on the one side, the Social Democracy on the other. But none can deny that this concentration is inevitable, and that the future struggles will have to be fought out between these two armies. To those, therefore, who are interested in the social movement of Europe, we say: Observe, above all else, if you wish to consider only the essential factors, the political activities of the Roman Catholic Church and those of International Socialism. □

• *Weekly People*, 19 March 1904

Connolly's defence

By James Connolly

Connolly wrote a polemic, which was reprinted in *Solidarity* 624; Daniel De Leon, editor of the *Socialist Labor Party's Weekly People*, responded, and went on to have Connolly "investigated" by the SLP. The following are the sections on marriage and the Church from Connolly's "defence" in the "investigation". The whole exchange is online at bit.ly/c-del.

I stated that I believed in monogamic marriage and disagreed with Bebel who taught otherwise; also that I thought his book was too prurient to do good as a propagandist work, although there was valuable propagandist material in it. I repeat all that. Bebel not only unnecessarily introduces long drawn out tales of sexual excesses but often explicitly approves of them. It has

been said that his work is based upon that of Morgan but the most delicate minded could read Morgan without a blush and the same cannot be said of Bebel. Thus on page 65 after telling of the brutal lusts and sexual outrages of the kings and knights of the Middle Ages he speaks of them approvingly as "a healthy sensualism, that sprung from a rugged and happy native disposition among the people." A fine summing up of a period of unbridled lust and outrage! Healthy sensualism indeed; brutal animalism would be a better characterisation. On page 323, he says "The satisfaction of the sexual instinct is as much a private concern as the satisfaction of any other natural instinct." This from the man whose book is supposed to be based upon that of Morgan, although Morgan expressly teaches that the satisfaction of the sexual instinct is

a social act intimately related to and acting upon the economic conditions of society at large. On page 19 (Bebel) says: "If with monogamy paternity is often doubtful, it is impossible of proof with polygamy." What does that mean? I do not know. I have read it backwards and forwards and up and down and diagonally. I have studied it when the sun was high in the heavens at noonday and have wrestled with it through the weary watches of the night and it seems to me that if it is not absolute indecency then it must be blithering idiocy. Why should polygamy make proof of paternity impossible? Or perhaps we will be told, that like the omission of an important negative from Vandervelde's letter, this also is a typographical error. On page 37, Bebel says: "It is the custom in the Netherlands when the host has a dear guest that he lets his wife sleep

with him on faith." This is introduced out of all bearing to its intent, clarifies no obscure point and is told apropos of nothing in particular. It was probably some more "healthy sensualism." I have used the word "pruriency," let me make it stronger and say indecency, and explain what I mean by indecency in this respect. I consider that whosoever tells of the sexual act needlessly or in any other manner, but as a scientist would speak of his investigations or a surgeon of his operations, is acting indecently. Bebel declares openly and avowedly that under Socialism the modern monogamic marriage will collapse, and yet his work we are told is based upon that of Morgan, and Morgan declares as unreservedly his belief in the beauty and permanency of modern marriage. Let me quote Bebel, page 346, "Bourgeois

continued on page 10 →

→ from page 9

marriage is the result of bourgeois property relations." In future society there is nothing to bequeath. The modern form of marriage is thus devoid of foundation and collapses. He might as well say: "The concentrated tool of production is the result of bourgeois property relations; in future society these relations will have disappeared, therefore the concentrated tool of production will collapse." Comrade De Leon also believes that the monogamic marriage will remain, yet he declares that the book he disagrees with is the best aimed shot at the existing social system. Either De Leon has not much faith in his own marksmanship or else he believes the best aimed shot is that which proceeds from correct premises to wrong conclusions.

Comrade De Leon says it was superfluous for the S.L.P. to vote upon the merits of this book, one of whose most important conclusions he himself rejects. But surely we all have a right to reject as well as De Leon. If it is permissible for De Leon to reject one conclusion drawn by Bebel, surely every other member of the party has the same right, and has even the right to accept the conclusions De Leon rejects. I personally reject every attempt, no matter by whom made, to identify Socialism with any theory of marriage or sexual relations. I believe that no matter what may have been the force which gave birth to any institution, its permanency will and must be tested not by its origin but by its adaptability to the institutions – the economic institutions, of the future.

Coming next to the question of religion. I must first correct a totally wrong impression which has been sedulously fostered by *The People* and by some correspondents. This is the impression that I have stated that the S.L.P. attacked theology or religion. One correspondent puts it bluntly that the question to discuss is not whether we should attack theology or not, but, he says, whether we do; Connolly, he adds, says we do. This I most emphatically deny. I never made any such statement and would be the first to contradict such a statement if made by others. What I did say and what I repeat, is that there is a tendency in the party to attack religion when Socialism is criticised by clerics. The mere fact that some correspondents have written to *The People* saying that we should attack theology proves my point as to the tendency.

Comrade Janke of Indianapolis, and Comrade Twomey of New York City say we should. Comrade De Leon says it is never done, and Comrade Janke says it is and should be done. Comrade Twomey says I am wrong and then quotes a number of instances in which he says it was done, and finds fault with De Leon for taking up a different attitude now. Both these comrades deny my case, and then proceed to prove it by their arguments. A little more reflection on the value of a word would save our comrades a lot of blunders. If I had said in 1898 that there was a

tendency in the S.L.P. to play fast and loose with Socialist principles, our comrades would probably have said I was attacking the party and was telling a falsehood. Yet there was such a tendency, and it came to a head in the Kangaroo attempt to capture the party. To say that there is a tendency in the party to attack theology, as theology, is not declaring that the party does so, but that some of its members do, and the truth of that statement is by at least Comrades Janke, and Twomey volunteering themselves as "horrible examples" so to speak. As the three principal witnesses on my behalf I present Janke, Twomey and De Leon. In my second letter to *The People* – I mean the one Comrade De Leon thought the members could not be trusted to read – I quoted where some priest had fired off the usual foolishness about Socialism, and our comrade answered him by telling about Catholic belief in miracles. In the same letter I answered his question as to whether his attitude or the religion of Czolgosz and other anarchists was an attack upon theology by saying it certainly was, and faulty logic into the bargain, if not absolute misstatement. But as our comrade promises to lay all correspondence before the National Convention, I will not go more fully into it at this stage, except to say that the statement that I left all the questions unanswered was worthy of the spirit that inspired it.

De Leon

I now propose to wind up my defence by quoting a few of the opinions expressed by De Leon in the past, and in the present. I propose to show you that he has completely changed front, and that the head and front of my offending is that I would not change with him. In other words, to use a classic expression which he would understand, I propose to appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober.

Let us take the Vandervelde article, but for which I may say my first article in this controversy would never have been written. In that article Vandervelde quotes a string of utterances against Socialism by leading Catholic writers, and in his reply to my article, De Leon asks me triumphantly: "What about the allegations of fact?" "If the allegations of fact are 'absurd' why not expose them by counter allegations so that the reader may verify the allegations on both sides, and see on what leg the 'absurd' boot lies". Of course the thoughtful readers of *The People* were not taken in by such clap-trap as this; they realised that my allegations of "absurd" was applied not to the "fact", but to the inference Vandervelde drew from the fact. The supporters of Capitalism and Socialism have both the same set of facts to go upon, but how opposing are the inferences drawn therefrom! The inference Vandervelde drew, and I characterised as absurd, was that the Catholic Church was a barrier to Socialism and should be fought as a church. De Leon champions that in his reply.

But listen to him in *The People*, Saturday, April 26, 1902.

There is quite extensively a notion that the organised Catholic Church is a barrier to Socialism. The language of many a dignitary of the Catholic Church justifies, and the language of the Depews "The Catholic Church is the best police" tends to strengthen the notion. [Chauncey Depew was a US Republican politician]. Probably the attitude of the Catholic or clerical party in Belgium may be quoted as further confirmation. We hold otherwise. What is going on in Belgium is proof that the Catholic Church, much as it would like to, cannot for all times control the masses to their injury. The masses in Belgium now out on a general strike, and the many more in sympathy with them, have been brought up as Catholics, at least most of them. A time was when these clericals controlled all these people. Do they to-day? Obviously no priestly or other influence can for all times dominate the masses. The "police" upon which the Depews lean to scuttle Socialism will at the right moment be found by them a hollow reed to lean upon.

Thus you see that in 1902 our comrade ridiculed this very inference which he finds fault with me for styling absurd in 1904. That inference being that it is necessary to fight the Catholic Church as a church – the central idea of Vandervelde's letter. Now, take up the article written in reply to mine [*The People* 9 April 1904] and see how our comrade describes theology.

Theology or religion is a delicate and occult thing. No man of sense and surely no man of feeling will hit back at that tender vein.

Judaism

Now see how the editor of *The People*, July 5, 1903 treats that "tender vein." He speaks of Judaism as "The idea of being a preselected and sole supporter of gods and their pursuivants," and of Christianity he says, "Such a monstrous, preposterous conception as Gentile theology breeds 'semitism' as inevitably as cheese breeds maggots." In other words for the purpose of scoring a point against your humble servant he describes as "delicate," "occult" and "tender" that which he had previously branded as "monstrous" and "preposterous." But listen further:

The whole Catholic hierarchy in chorus slandered the socialists as murderers of rulers, and disturbers of the State at the time of the Czolgosz affair. They never 'hit back' by citing a long list of murderers of rulers down to the present days, including Czolgosz himself, all of whom were Catholics, and by showing that their theory of society, terrestrial society ... was, under given conditions, a natural breeder of assassins of rulers as the long list showed.

This is definite enough. Here he states that the Catholic theory, that is to say the theory taught by the Catholic creed, of terrestrial society, breeds assassins. Now, take up *The People* of October 5, 1901 and in the Letter Box

answer to 'H.R.H.', Providence, R.I., we read as follows: *True enough Czolgosz was born and brought up a Catholic. You might go further. The last four political assassinations in Europe; that of the Austrian Empress by Lucini, that of President Carnot of France by Santos, that of King Humbert by Brescia, and that of the Spanish Prime Minister Canovas Del Castilio, by a fellow whose name now escapes us – all were committed by Roman Catholics. But not for that is there any reason to impute assassination by reason of them to the Roman Catholic Creed.*

Let not the immorality of false reasoning in which Archbishop Corrigan has set the pace to so many Catholic priests, by inducing them to commit the immoral act of imputing Czolgosz to Socialism, take you off your base.

So that in October 5, 1901 our comrade declares a man would be "off his base" if he attributed the acts of the assassins mentioned to their religion and in his lectures on Anarchism and Socialism he apparently goes off his base on that very point, and again on April 9, 1904. First, he said there was no reason to attribute these assassinations to Roman Catholic teaching, then he deliberately attributes them to such teaching. I think such a change of mind as that justifies the charge of a 'tendency' to attack theology.

Now try and reconcile these two opinions on Marriage. In the translation preface to *Woman* De Leon declares as already quoted: "Bebel's work *Woman* is the best aimed shot at the existing social system, both strategically and tactically considered. The Woman Question is the weakest link in the capitalist mail." Now listen to the "best shot". "In future society there is nothing to bequeath, therefore the modern form of marriage is thus devoid of foundation and collapses," page 346. In *The Weekly People* of June 22, 1901, I find this Letter Box answer to 'F.H.', Troy, N.Y.,

Is it not queering Socialism to take the position that justifies the notion that the sexual or matrimonial question is a cardinal Socialist question, when in fact Socialism has nothing to do with it.

Here we find that a work which declares that under Socialism the modern form of marriage will collapse, is styled in 1904, "the best aimed shot at the existing social system", and this is written by the same man as he who in 1901 declared that Socialism has nothing to do with the sexual or marriage question...

Finally here are my last words. I claim that the demand of the S.L.P. for absolute unity in all things essential can only be maintained when linked with absolute freedom of opinion on all things nonessential. And if I am asked how are we to know a non-essential principle, I reply that any principle which we would not feel it to be our duty as Socialists to establish by force of arms if necessary is nonessential. Such principles are those of theories of Marriage and Religion. On these, therefore, I claim the fullest and most absolute freedom of opinion. □

Where are the International Brigades?



Debate

By WF

The Russian invasion of Ukraine enters its second year. Russian atrocities on Ukrainian soil, against the Ukrainian people, continue. The world has borne witness to the brutality of the Russian invasion: the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian homes and infrastructure, Bucha and Mariupol. In the occupied territories, there is looting, rapes, round-ups of dissidents, forced deportations, summary executions, and the separation of Ukrainian children from their parents to be raised as Russians.

We are confronted with the question: what is to be done? More specifically: what should the Western left be doing?

The people of Ukraine have the right to self-determination. It is in their defence of this right that the people of Ukraine fiercely resist the Russian invasion and defend the Ukrainian state, flawed though it may be. The Western left must support the resistance of the Ukrainian people and offer aid

wherever possible. This includes raising funds and supplies for Ukrainian refugees and aid workers, sheltering Ukrainian refugees, platforming Ukrainian left voices, providing organisational and material support to the Ukrainian left and organised labour and laying the groundwork for the inevitable fight against the post-war neoliberalisation of a Ukraine become reliant on, and vulnerable to, NATO and the EU and the depredations of their financial vultures. One slogan that Western leftists must advance is the cancellation of all Ukrainian foreign debt, which is essential if Ukraine is not to exchange the Russian yoke for that of the IMF and the World Bank.

What about NATO and Western arms to Ukraine? Ukraine has the right to receive arms from whomever it sees fit to demand them. At present, that means NATO and the West. At any rate, the hue and cry of the fractured left has no bearing whatsoever on the Ukrainian state's decision to ask for arms or the decision of NATO states to provide them. Such is the nature of toothless demands which tyrants are free to safely ignore.

Perhaps Western leftists find it distasteful that support for Ukraine against the Russian invasion means tacitly ap-

proving the enmeshment of Ukraine with NATO – and by proxy, the United States of America – and its imperialist and expansionist agenda.

But it is by necessity that Ukraine has been forced into the arms of NATO. There does not exist a strong and independent international socialist movement that can manifest its solidarity with Ukraine and pose an alternative to NATO by competing with it on the level most pertinent to the Ukrainian resistance against Russian imperialism: the provision of arms, military support and even fighters on the battlefield against the invading Russian armies.

Spain

During the Spanish Civil War, France and Britain, following a policy of non-intervention, hampered the Spanish Republican war effort while doing nothing to prevent fascist support to Franco's Nationalists. The Comintern, by then under Stalinist control, sent ample funds, arms and soldiers, and organised the International Brigades – volunteer units of communists and socialists who fought for the Republic. The non-Stalinist international socialist movement also mobilised in support of the contemporaneous Spanish Revolution, forming their own, smaller units of

international volunteers. George Orwell, then part of a contingent from the British Independent Labour Party to the Spanish anti Stalinist Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), saw action against both the Nationalists and the Stalinists.

Where are the International Brigades – not in the Stalinist sense, but in the sense that they are the ultimate praxis of anti-fascist socialist internationalism – today?

It is the weakness of the Western left that has resulted in its ceding of the Ukrainian cause to NATO, who has monopolised international solidarity with Ukraine and twisted it to further its own imperialist ends.

There will be other uprisings and wars of resistance against imperialist oppression in the future. In these crises, where the crumbling status quo presents opportunities for left-wing breakthroughs, whether the Western left can make a meaningful intervention or is relegated to the sidelines depends on their organisational strength and clarity of vision and purpose. If international working-class solidarity is to be more than just an aspiration of the Western left, it must begin the work of building it today. □

A response: “Fate la rivoluzione in casa vostra!”



Debate

By Martin Thomas

I agree with WF in their argument that we should support Ukraine's right to seek arms for its self-defence, and with WF's call for us to campaign for strings-free economic aid to Ukraine to survive the war and to reconstruct after it, and for cancellation of debt. I don't think WF's call for “International Brigades” for Ukraine could have the meaning or effect they wish, though.

The International Brigades in Spain, organised by the Communist Parties after a Comintern decision in September 1936, and with recruitment vetted by the CPs, were not an alternative to the Republic being hegemonised by its main big-power arms supplier, Stalin's USSR.

On the contrary, they were a complementary means to the same goal. See Stan Crooke's Workers' Liberty pamphlet on the International Brigades, [Lions led by Jackals](#).

In the run-up to the Civil War, the Spanish CP was weak compared to the anarchists and the social-democrats, and not that much bigger than the POUM. The International Brigades gave the Stalinists a significant military

force under their direct control. They helped the Spanish Stalinists to recruit and to gain leverage with the military commanders inherited from the established Spanish Army, a large chunk of which, outside the colonial army stationed in Morocco, sided with the Republic in June 1936. They served the Stalinists' plan of suppressing the workers' revolution which erupted from June 1936, while simultaneously trying to fend off the fascists.

Aid from the USA, UK, Poland, etc. is designed to stall Putin. It is not to suppress a workers' revolution in Ukraine. Of course the US, UK, Polish, etc. governments would want to suppress a workers' revolution in Ukraine, but there is no such revolution there.

Most of the volunteers for the International Brigades saw things differently. They thought they were going to Spain to fight fascism. They did fight the fascists, and many died. But they did that while being duped and coerced into Stalinist politics.

The International Brigades were designed to recruit workers (often unemployed workers, in the conditions of the mid-1930s) with military experience (from World War One, the Irish War of Independence, etc.) Although short of



military and other supplies, they had some military effectiveness. The Spanish Civil War was a low-tech war. The fascists, too, were short of air cover and heavy weapons.

The socialist-internationalists who went to Spain to join POUM or anarchist militias (George Orwell, Benjamin Péret...) were too few to make any military difference.

Even if we socialist-internationalists had mass parties these days, of the size of the Popular Front period Communist Parties, and large numbers of chronically-unemployed workers with military experience were at our disposal, any International Brigades we could organise would be of little military use in the relatively high-tech war now underway. And I don't see that they would have political leverage against the right-wing direction of the Zelen-

sky government that the left and labour movement in Ukraine wouldn't have. For the agency of change, we look to systematic organising among the working class where we are, not footloose military operations.

To the extent that we can send material support to Ukraine, better the sort of convoys already sent, by example, by French unions and groups of the left, focused on helping the Ukrainian left and labour movement rather than the Ukrainian government. Similar convoys were organised by British leftists via Workers' Aid to Kosova and Workers' Aid to Bosnia, and helped develop some political as well as material links with leftists in those countries.

continued on page 12 →



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→ from page 11

If Russia were to conquer large areas of Ukraine, and the war then to turn into a guerrilla war (relatively low-tech) in the occupied areas, then that might change the military calculus a bit.

Probably not, though. Generally guerrilla wars against occupiers (Ireland 1919-21, Vietnam, Algeria, Indonesia) have not sought International Brigades. Che Guevara's efforts to be the hero-from-outside of guerrilla battles in Latin America did not work even in their own terms. There has been some Islamist "international-brigade" recruitment in some recent wars (Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosova, Daesh in Iraq and Syria), but it's not clear to me that it has been militarily very effective, and besides, in any case, the political-leverage result has been reactionary, not democratic.

The Vietnamese Stalinist leader Ho Chi Minh, when asked by a visiting delegation of Italian leftists how they could help Vietnam's struggle against the USA, had enough echoes from his communist past in his head to reply: "Fate la rivoluzione in casa vostra!": make the revolution in your own coun-

try. Or, more broadly: pursue the working-class struggle in our countries, and help the Russian and Belarusian leftists fighting their governments in their own countries.

NATO

Ukraine sought to get closer to NATO right from independence in 1991. "Partnerships" and such were set up. All that was all in accord with Russia, and there was even talk in the 1990s of Russia joining NATO.

Russia signed treaties with Ukraine in 1994 and 1997 promising not only to respect Ukraine's borders but also to help Ukraine defend them against external attack! The USA and the UK also signed the 1994 treaty as "guarantors".

Russia's reneging from the treaties and its attacks on Ukraine in 2014 and 2022-3 have probably slowed the possibilities of Ukraine joining NATO rather than accelerated them. The NATO powers evidently reckon that Finland's and Sweden's borders are well-established enough that a tight NATO "tripwire" committing NATO to action if Putin invades will deter Putin rather than drawing NATO into a bigger war than they want. The NATO powers want no

such tight "tripwire" for Ukraine. They want to keep their hands free to coerce Ukraine into accepting a deal of some sort with Putin breaking the 1994 and 1997 treaties.

The more military equipment that individual NATO powers give Ukraine now, the stronger will be Ukraine's ability to resist pressure from those and other NATO powers for a rotten deal with Putin. (And it's all from individual NATO powers, not "NATO as such"; some NATO powers such as Hungary and Turkey don't want to aid Ukraine.)

More NATO aid now makes Ukraine less subjected to NATO, not more so.

As with Vietnam. Military aid that Vietnam had received from China during its war with the USA made it more, not less, able to repel the Chinese invasion of 1979.

Of course Zelenskyy uses Ukraine's UN votes and such to help sweeten NATO powers (and non-NATO powers with large military resources, like Israel) which he hopes will give Ukraine more, or some, aid. He's a neoliberal bourgeois politician: was before the 2022 Russian invasion, still is after it. But it is not the case that association with NATO compels Ukraine to support predatory

military action by NATO powers. Several major NATO powers vehemently opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Post-war Ukraine will depend heavily on foreign aid to rebuild, and surely will be subject to IMF conditions (as it is at present). We fight against the strings on aid, and to help the Ukrainian left and labour movement defend and extend social provision and workers' rights. (Obviously we can't send an "International Brigade" of "alternative", socialistic, billionaire lenders to Ukraine...)

However, we should be wary of seeing evils in Ukraine's economy as just what might follow from "post-war neo-liberalisation", as if the pre-war or even pre-2014 was somehow preferable. It wasn't. It was a corrupt, oligarchic, and very unequal economy. To the extent that Zelenskyy's government acts as one "for the millionaires, against the billionaires", we counterpose not defence of the old billionaire-dominated order, but the interests of the working-class millions. In particular, we should not corner ourselves into necessarily opposing anti-corruption measures requested by the European Union as steps towards joining the EU. □



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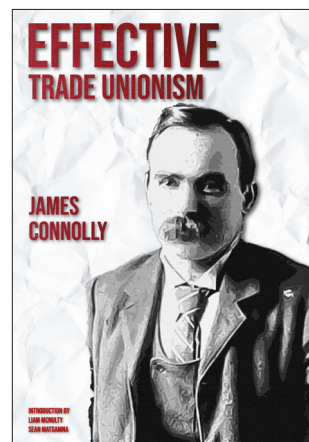
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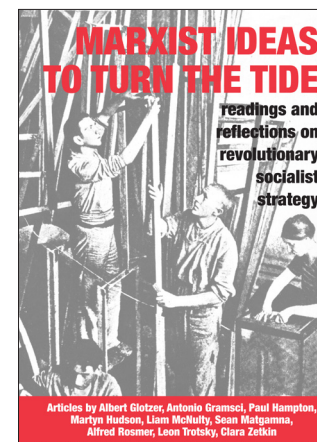
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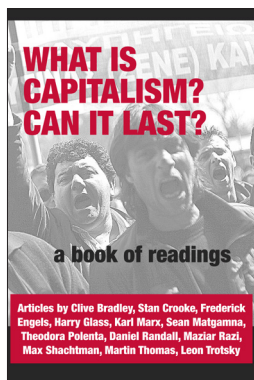
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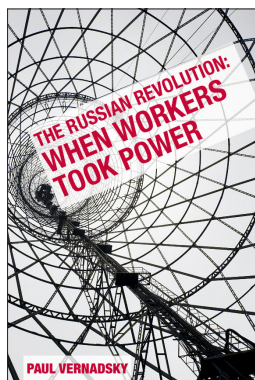
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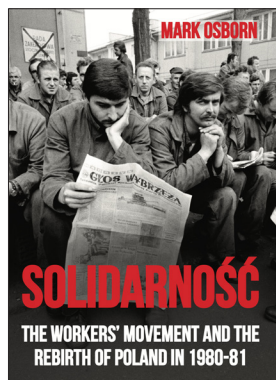
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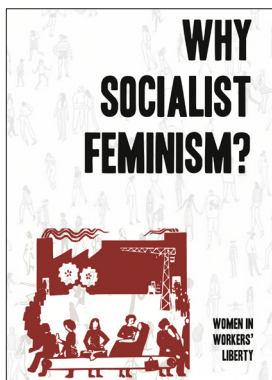
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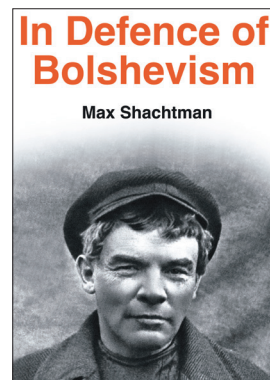
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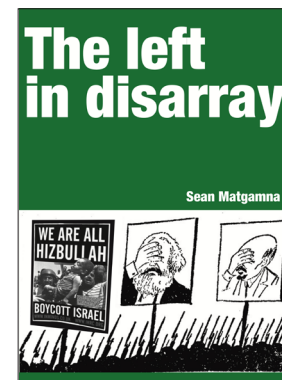
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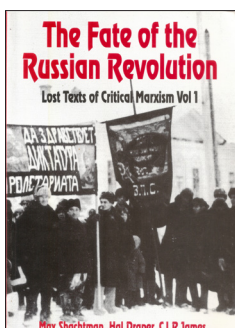
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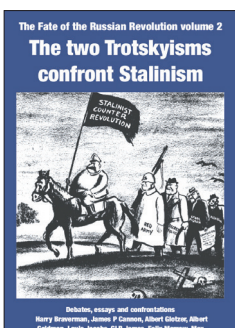
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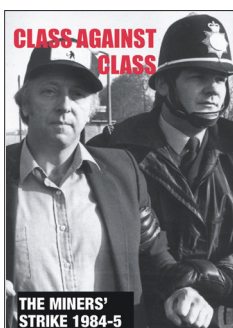
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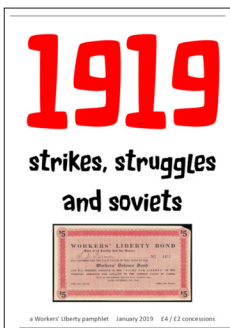
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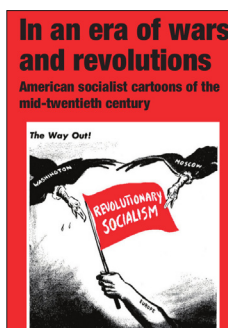
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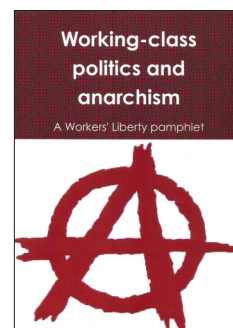
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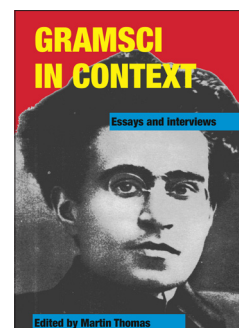
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Amazon workers step up action

By Darren Westwood

Amazon workers at Coventry's BHX4 warehouse are striking again on 16-18 and 21-23 April, following strikes on 13-17 March, 2 March, and 27 February. The workers, currently paid £10.50, are demanding a £15/hour minimum wage. Since 31 March, the GMB union has been conducting consultative ballots for industrial action at warehouses in Mansfield, Coalville, Kegworth, Rugeley, and Rugby, and hopes to move to formal ballots in due course. Amazon worker and GMB union rep Darren Westwood spoke to Solidarity.

We're feeling very optimistic. People are looking forward to striking, we feel like we're pushing forward and winning. The current round of

strikes coincide with Orthodox Easter, which is celebrated by many of our Romanian members, and with Eid, which our Muslim members are celebrating. More and more people are joining the union. We're very close now to the numbers needed for statutory recognition. Amazon are trying to contain things and buy us off with a 50p per hour increase. That has only made people more enthusiastic about the strikes.

Strategy

Spreading the action to other sites is a vital part of our strategy. The union is conducting consultative ballots in five other workplaces. I have said all along that there would be a domino effect. Once things got going at one site, others would follow. We had a Zoom call recently with workers from other sites,



which had a positive effect on our own members: prior to that, people weren't necessarily aware things were spreading in the way they are.

People are developing a sense of their own power. There's a feeling that, if we stick together, we can win. The ballots at the other sites are just consultative at this stage but the plan is to move to formal ballots soon after.

I'm going to the Coalville site on Tuesday [18th] to speak to workers there and give them some encouragement. When other sites hopefully get their mandates for industrial action, the aim will be to go for coordinated action across the sites to maximise the impact. We feel that, as the strikes continue and spread, Amazon will have to start listening. Anyone who can get to BHX4 on the strike days is welcome to come and join us. We welcome visits from supporters. And we want to organise visits to other strikers' picket lines, too. Our fight is with Amazon, but it's part of a wider workers' fightback against the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. They're becoming unbearable for many people, but seeing workers fight back and stand on the picket line is a source of hope. □

Opening for industrial unionism in schools

By Bill Davies

Four years after its first conference as a merger of the NUT and the ATL, the National Education Union (NEU) has voted to seek equal representation for its support staff members.

What tipped the balance this year on this issue was a judgment from the TUC upholding a complaint against the NEU for organising ballots of support staff members alongside the teachers' ballots in England and Wales. The judgment included a requirement on the union to seek permission from Unison, GMB and Unite before campaigning on behalf of support staff members.

The NEU would be breaching its own rules by acquiescing, and so we had an almost unanimous vote for a bold and assertive stance. Support staff

activists in the NEU are now discussing how we can push forward.

One pressing matter is to re-ballot support staff members in England on striking to demand a fully-funded, above-inflation pay rise. We still expect push-back from the leaderships of, at least, Unison and GMB. However, we also know that the beginnings of rank-and-file cross-union solidarity already exist at branch level, and that we can build on those around further teachers' strike days and the local government unions' pay ballots from late spring to summer.

The conference motion (Harrowgate, 3-6 April: submitted by the NEU's support staff sector conference) instructed the NEU's Executive to "seek, at the earliest opportunity, recognition and negotiating rights for our support staff members"

and to "end the undertaking not to actively or knowingly recruit support staff".

Support staff

The NEU now has well over 50,000 support staff members. About 6,000 have joined in the last few months of the NEU's campaign – including industrial action – on pay and funding. The big majority of the NEU's support staff members work in state-funded schools.

The NEU comes a merger of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), a union that only allowed teachers to join, and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), which included a support staff section, carried over into the merged union. Ever since the merger Workers' Liberty school workers have been arguing that the new union represents an opportunity to build a wall-to-wall

education union, representing all grades of workers in education.

At every conference since 2019 we have argued for similar motions to the one carried this year. Other groups and activists in the Education Solidarity Network have joined with us on this.

But an agreement brokered by the TUC between the NEU and the three general unions which have negotiating rights in local government (including for most school support staff who work for local authority schools), Unison, GMB and Unite, prohibits the NEU from active recruitment and seeking collective recognition for support staff in state-funded schools. The leaders of the three local government unions, in particular Unison and GMB (Unite has only a few thousand members in schools), fear that

school support staff will see the sense of a union for all workers in schools, have been determined to keep this obstacle in place.

A similar motion at last year's conference was defeated only narrowly, an electronic card vote. The leadership factions of the NEU, including the SWP and others in the "NEU Left", argued that the NEU was not yet strong enough, and did not yet have enough support staff members, to clash with the TUC agreement (and the damage to inter-union relations would be too high a price). But this year we turned it round. □

• **NEU pay campaign demonstration Tuesday 2 May, 11am from Belvedere Road, Jubilee Gardens, London SE1 to Department for Education.**

Royal Mail: what "agreement"?

By Ollie Moore

On 15 April 2023, the Communication Workers Union reported that it had reached a "negotiators' agreement" with Royal Mail.

The union said its Postal Executive would "now meet and consider the agreement on Monday and Tuesday [17-18 April] and we are putting in place plans to brief representatives across the union structures. On the basis that the negotiators' agreement is endorsed by the Postal Executive, we

will put in place a full communications plan to engage members."

Rank-and-file

Rank-and-file postal workers may feel somewhat frozen out of a negotiation process that has taken place substantially over their heads. Postal workers will have to wait, maybe for a while, for an opportunity to scrutinise the "negotiators' agreement" and to vote on it.

The union statement, which was issued in the names of general secretary Dave Ward and postal deputy general

secretary Andy Furey, concludes by thanking members for their "support and patience" which, the statement says, "has got us to this point."

"Patience" is a virtue in many areas of life; industrial disputes are rarely one of them. Workers should not have to be "patient" while union negotiators are cloistered in behind-closed-doors talks with employers. Workers should, rather, be positively impatient for full and comprehensive reports from such talks, and for a return to industrial action if they have not yielded results. □

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What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Independent working-class representation in politics
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• 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 Colin this week our total is now £5,794.

In 10 days our conference will help us put a bigger dent in that total. But we need regular donations every week to ensure we reach our goal! □

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UCU marking boycott from 20 April

By a UCU member

Straight after a ballot of higher education workers in the University and College Union (UCU) which returned comfortable majorities for continuing action on both the pay and conditions dispute and pension dispute, the union's leadership around General Secretary Jo Grady called a consultative e-ballot on "offers" in the disputes.

On pay and conditions members had been offered three working parties on proposals that may be contingent on local conditions, i.e. with an implied threat of further weakening of national bargaining. On pensions, a limited restoration of benefits is promised, but without guarantees.

Why e-ballot? Because calling plebiscites has been an effective way for Grady to slow down and disorganise the dispute. However, in line with the Higher Education Committee recommendations, members voted to note progress on pensions (85%) and reject the pay and conditions proposals



(56%). "Note" did not mean "accept", but Grady immediately [called off](#) industrial action on pensions claiming a great victory had been won. It most certainly is not!

Further, unlinking the disputes is a poor tactic. It's what the employers want.

On Wednesday 19 April a special higher education conference will formally decide whether to go ahead with a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) from 20 April. It is likely it will. Other proposals call for further industrial action on pensions, for the elected negotiators (and not just Grady) conduct negotiations, and for allowing elected bodies, Branch Delegate Meetings and the Higher Education Commit-

tee, as opposed to Grady, to determine the shape of the dispute.

A MAB is a difficult form of industrial action, requiring a lot of preparation and monitoring. It will also need to be backed up by strikes if, as seems likely, employers make punitive pay deductions. Motions to the special conference call on the union to try, for once, to get ahead of the employers, and serve notice of strikes now. □



Activist Agenda

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement (LCFM) has submitted a template motion for Labour conference 2023 on migrant and asylum rights to Momentum's consultation on what motions it will push. The text is on the [LCFM website](#).

Labour Left Internationalists, on its [website](#), has template motions on Brexit and on union rights.

The deadline for motions is 21 September, but some local Labour Parties may decide on their motions earlier, even in June. Conference is 8-11 October 2023.

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

Unison Health delegates protest

By Jayne Evans

A fringe meeting on pay, organised by "Time for Real Change", on the first day of this year's Unison Health sector conference, attracted 40 delegates (17 April).

It decided that we needed an ongoing network of health activists to continue organising on pay restoration. On 18 April the conference passed emergency motion 1 from the top table which noted the vote to accept the offer and which said the union will seek implementation. Speeches have been

made against the Service Group Exec's ballot recommendation to accept the offer, but we have been unable to get a vote on any wording about that. Conference voted for no return to the Pay Review Body.

The campaign on pay doesn't end here. We need to support the RCN in their action and begin to plan for next year's pay round.

The conference began soon after the 14 April announcement that Unison members had voted to accept the offer on NHS pay: 74% accept, 26% reject, turnout 53%. The pay offer is an unconsolidated one-off lump sum for 2021-2 and 5% for 23-24. It is below inflation, so means that continued erosion of pay.

Unison's Health Service Group Executive called for members to accept the deal and said that failure to vote for it would mean the Tories would take the deal off the table.

At the conference many delegates were unhappy about that recommendation having been made.

The first day of conference also was the start of [voting](#) by Unison members in all sectors for the union's National Executive (NEC). Voting closes on 19 May. Unison members should support the [Time for Real Change](#) slate and the Socialist Party where TFRC isn't contesting. □

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

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- 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 □

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Rail TOCs: a rotten deal



Off The Rails

The current deal on the table in RMT members' fight with the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) is called the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP). It is a two-year deal, covering 2022-3 ("Year One", last year), and 2023-4 ("Year Two", starting now).

The string attached to the 5% pay settlement for Year One is that we have to enter the Year Two process for restructuring job roles and terms and conditions. The employers want to consolidate current job roles into a single "multi-skilled" grade on stations. They also want to overhaul policies on attendance, sick pay, rostering parameters and more.

Currently, the 14 TOCs in dispute are all part of a national campaign; in Year Two it will devolve down to individual TOCs.

Year Two as it currently stands is such a complete trashing of so many of our terms and conditions that we cannot accept it. If we reject Year Two after negotiations and/or consultations (there's some argument on which one it is), they won't offer us a pay rise or any of the

guarantees on compulsory redundancies that currently form part of the DRP. We could then strike to get a better deal, but who knows how many TOCs would join the action?

Effects

The companies could also stagger the enforcement of their changes and the timing of when they declare that they are going to impose. In that way some TOCs would have to respond sooner to imposition than others, splitting us up further. There is also the possibility that when we go into TOC-by-TOC talks there may be further splits between engineering, stations, and train crew grades within each TOC.

If RMT members in a TOC don't accept the deal, they might get some derisory percentage for Year One and nothing in Year Two unless they can force the government and employer's hand by striking again. Unless forced to change course via the pressure of significantly escalated strikes, each TOC will move to impose the changes and there'll be no guarantees.

If RMT members in a TOC do accept, then companies can rig things so that we only get 5% for Year One, and nothing in Year Two. It would work like this: our re-ballot will finish on 4 May. Let's

say the member consultation on next steps takes four weeks; as that process has already started, that takes us to, say, mid-May, but could be shorter if the union gets all the regional meetings done and holds a reps' meeting. If the RMT NEC then decides to put the DRP to a vote, that would take us to the start of June.

If a majority of members in every TOC vote to accept the DRP, TOC-by-TOC talks on the Year Two process would start by mid-June. The DRP contains this clause: "These guarantees set out below are provided on the clear understanding that the three Integral Principles are successfully addressed and concluded in each TOC through their respective collective bargaining procedures within an expected three-month period following the endorsement of this Dispute Resolution Process."

The three-month limit is quite specific and is repeated a few times in other parts of the document. Its significance could lie in the ability it gives each TOC to declare all the talks over by a certain date. In the current scenario, with that limit, by mid-September, any TOC can declare that, according to the DRP the agreement to consult/negotiate has been concluded, whether we agree or not, and that they will move to impose

everything they want, and we will have forfeited the 4% and the "suite of guarantees". And hence, by accepting the DRP, we risk ending up with an average of 2.5% for both years. We could seek to improve that through more strikes further down the line, but we will no longer have the benefit of a national dispute, so strikes could be fragmented across the TOCs.

All of this leads to the conclusion that we should not accept the DRP as currently written. It should be rejected without a referendum, as it clearly does not meet the demands of our dispute. We are stronger together, and although we will have to go into TOC-by-TOC talks at some stage, it would be much better if we could force changes in the deal that increase the pay and reduce the detrimental changes it contains before we give up the power of the national dispute. Our best means of forcing further changes is through escalated national strikes. □

No to 4.5% for 2023-4!



John Moloney

The government has now imposed a pay settlement on the UK civil service for 2023-2024. Under this, departments are able to make average pay awards up to 4.5% and have the flexibility to add an additional 0.5% for lower grades.

Those figures are an improvement on the 2% that the government was considering giving us up to December last year but even the "improved" settlement is well short of our demands and gives us nothing additional for 2022.

We are told that there will be "dispute resolution" meetings with PCS but given the government's announcement, we have to assume they will refuse to discuss pay as that is settled – they will only discuss the other elements of our claim, for example around job security.

In that case, the only way we can reopen pay is by delivering escalated

strike action, and renewing our ballot mandate. We have another all-members strike set for 28 April, and I'm confident the strike will be solid. But a single day of national action will not be sufficient to force concessions from the government, so renewing our mandate and escalating the action is vital.

Beyond the national civil service dispute, we recently conducted a survey of our members in facilities management, who work for outsourced contractors in roles such as cleaning, catering, and security. They're typically paid the minimum wage, and almost none of them have any occupational sick pay, meaning they essentially can't afford to take time off from work when they're ill. The current inflation crisis has hit them particularly hard, and this impact comes across in the survey replies.

We're building up our membership amongst these workers and encouraging people to stand as reps. Relatively soon, though, we will need to decide whether to go for disputes and ballots for industrial action. I believe the process of balloting for action will ac-

celerate membership growth. Many of these workers are migrant workers from black and Asian backgrounds. PCS's view is that the practice of outsourcing, which sees an outsourced workforce that is majority-non-white subject to markedly worse terms and conditions than the directly-employed workforce, which is majority-white, represents a form of indirect racial discrimination. But we also see discriminatory practices within the directly-employed workforce, too. I instigated a research project that has shown that white civil servants are twice as likely to be promoted compared to their black colleagues.

The union often talks about putting equality at the heart of what we do; to me, that means addressing these issues and using them as the basis for organising action. Minimally, the union will be writing to the employer to raise this with them. Beyond that, we need to think about how to organise campaigns and disputes to win greater equality in the workplace. □

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

Ukraine appeal

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign is raising funds to buy a vehicle for Ukraine's 80th army brigade – which has many members of the KVPU union federation, including miners and teachers. The appeal closes 1 May. It is currently at £5,200; USC is trying to reach £7,000: bit.ly/ukrainefunds

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





By Alice Hazel

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in England have rejected the government's derisory offer on NHS pay.

Nurses recognised the offer did nothing to redress pay erosion and nothing to solve the job-vacancy crisis that is crushing the NHS. It got nowhere near the original union claim for inflation plus 5%. 54% of members, on a 61% turnout, went against the recommendation made by the union nationally.

New strike dates, without derogations, have been announced from 8pm on 30 April to 8pm on 2 May. These days will allow reignition of the dispute alongside the BMA junior doctors action, prior to the crucial rebalot (the original ballot mandate runs out after 2 May). This time the ballot will be nationally aggregated. The consultation shows that the 50% turnout threshold can be beaten, and gives an option to escalate action.

Unison members voted to accept the offer by 74%, on a 53% turnout. Unison recommended the offer and a practised bureaucracy worked far harder to get this vote than for the original pay action ballot. With no sign that union leaders would fight for anything better, it was no surprise that the majority of Unison members, concentrated in the lower NHS pay grades, voted yes. The unconsolidated payment for 2022-23 was nothing more than a bribe to hard-pressed workers to accept a shoddy deal.

Unison members have been less engaged in the dispute than RCN members. Most have not struck, because the union reached ballot thresholds only in a small number of NHS trusts, pre-

dominantly in the ambulance sector. Individual branch results, which might show this effect, are yet to be released.

Other health unions will announce their full results at the end of the week. Unite members look likely to reject. Strikes at Guys and St Thomas's NHS Trust and Yorkshire Ambulance have already been announced for 1 May.

The NHS staff council, on which Unison is the biggest union but does not hold the majority, is due to meet on 2 May. Unions are not bound by the decision of the council, and the RCN will go ahead with action irrespective of the positions of other unions, but clearly a majority for reject on that body would add pressure on the government. If the government chose not to implement the offer in response to a staff council rejection, Unison would be forced back into dispute.

In the course of the "Vote Reject" campaign, the NHS Workers Say No group grew and started to build a cross-union network of health workers across the country. We need to keep this organisation going, pushing for restored pay and effective strike action.

The priorities for activists in all unions are engaging members in the upcoming strikes, solidarity with the BMA, and preparing for the RCN rebalot. The call for members of Unison not to cross the RCN and Unite picket lines will have an even greater logic than during the last strikes.

Many engaged Unison members are talking of walking out of the union. Instead they should pull together those who supported the reject campaign to challenge the union bureaucracy at local and national levels. □

India: drone attacks on civilians

An online statement condemns drone attacks by the Indian state on its own civilian population:

Indigenous (Adivasi) people in Bijapur district of Bastar, in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, have been traumatised by yet another aerial bomb attack from the security forces which have been using drones to carry out these operations. Although the Indian Air Force is not officially deployed for combat in Chhattisgarh, the repeated use of aerial bombardment on civilian populations suggests a new dimension to the state terror being inflicted on the Adivasi population of Bastar for years. This particular bombardment was carried on 7 April 2023 on four villages that lie in the Morkemetta hills.

Immediately following the bombing, which caused panic amongst the people, the government forces deployed three helicopters to discharge heavy machine gun fire on the villagers going about their routine activities.

Fortunately, no casualties have been reported, however, one person is known to have sustained several injuries. The fact that there were no casualties may indicate that the purpose of the attack was to create terror among the Adivasi people and make them abandon their villages, thus making way for mining corporations to move in the area. As previously, the police has claimed that the allegations are false and an attempt is made to "mislead" the "native" population.

Full statement: bit.ly/drone-i □



Save the NHS! Give junior doctors their pay rise!

By Sacha Ismail

The junior doctors' strikes for "pay restoration" on 11-15 April had a huge impact, with almost 200,000 hospital appointments and procedures in England cancelled – up by 20,000 from the strike days in March. The NHS's national medical director publicly described the impact as "colossal".

This when NHS services are already desperately overstretched. But if NHS workers cannot turn the tide against a government that is determined to run down the health service, that overstretching will get worse and worse.

Junior doctor activists pushing for an escalation of strikes, and greater coordination with other NHS workers in struggle, are right to do so.

After a lot of work by activists to promote the idea of "pay restoration", the British Medical Association (BMA) is calling for a real-terms pay rise and a serious timetable to take pay above its real level of 2008, when the cuts began.

Every labour movement activist, socialist and supporter of the NHS should find ways to support the junior doctors.

We need a fight in the Labour Party to force it to back them. The Labour leadership has called the BMA's demands unaffordable, and the Tories have cited that repeatedly. □

• BMA strike fund: bmastrikefund.raisely.com

Our videos

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- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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Solidarity

For a workers' government

JOIN XR ACTION 21-24 APRIL

By Stuart Jordan

Extinction Rebellion (XR)'s "Big One" plans action and workshops across London on 21-24 April: details bit.ly/xr-prog. This is the first XR action where there are no official plans for road blockades and civil disobedience. XR activists hope that veering away from their previous "maximum arrests" tactic will broaden their appeal, and more than 200 organisations are now supporting the event including the PCS civil service union.

On Friday and Monday, XR plans "people's pickets" of all major governmental departments. These "pickets" have been billed as a way to lobby civil servants and decision-makers on the variety of campaigns activists are bringing to this event. On Saturday there will be a large demonstration for Earth Day (assemble 13:00 near Parliament).

Over the four days workshops bringing together trade unionists and environmentalists who are developing workers' plans for the ecological crisis. These include aviation workers from Safe Landing, and activists involved in developing a just transition plan with North Sea oil workers. On Sunday XR



plans to mingle with London Marathon spectators. On each day there will be an afternoon rally in Westminster.

The XR wave of climate activism has undoubtedly brought greater awareness that we face escalating ecological crises on multiple fronts, including mass extinction, as well as a climate crisis. However, XR promotes no real understanding of the social drivers of ecological crisis, and, tactically, with its focus on acts of individual sacrifice or testimony, it is a regression from some previous phases of activism more focused on mass organising and action.

Week-to-week

Without a clear analysis and strategy for revolutionary change, waves of activism will always tend to dissipate. A solution to the climate and ecological emergency will emerge only when one of the great waves of climate activism combines with

strategy and tactics that can lead to solid week-to-week organising and the revolutionary change that we need.

The ecological crises are produced by wage workers following their bosses' orders. Our bosses direct our productive activity according to the logic of capital accumulation, regardless of the human or ecological costs. Instead we must place society's productive forces under the direction of democratic organisations that are able to direct production and distribution according to human and ecological need.

Hundreds of millions of workers are already organised in trade unions and routinely take collective action in defiance of their bosses. Transforming these organisations into a movement capable of revolutionary change requires years of patient (urgent, but patient) activity, but it is possible. Activists interested in building the ecologically-conscious revolutionary workers' movement we need should check out the XRTU hub (opposite the south end of the Houses of Parliament, just past Old Palace Yard) and get in touch with Workers' Liberty to start that patient but hopeful work. □