

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND WORKERS' CONTROL



- » **Rail, mail, water, energy**
- » **Public services, publicly run**
- » **Oust the profiteers!**

See inside

RCN reballots 23 May to 23 June

Health pay battle in the balance, as BMA also ballots

Pages 9, 14

PCS: more all-out strikes now?

Reballot shows a majority for strikes: make them effective!

Page 15

Sheffield uni under pressure

Campaign slams use of private investigators against protesters

Page 7

Connolly: "un-Irish" capitalism

The theory that capitalism in Ireland is "English" and alien

Pages 10-11

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban

Public ownership and workers' control



The Tories have felt obliged to remove Trans-Pennine Express rail from its private operators and reassign the franchise as from 28 May to the public-sector “operator of last resort”. They cite “months of continual cancellations” of services.

Private water companies have been indicted for large discharges of untreated sewage into waterways and failure to fix leaks, despite paying out over £50 billion in dividends to shareholders since privatisation in 1989.

Energy companies are making vast profits while poorer households have faced enforced chill and high bills. The Tories’ Energy Bill Relief scheme safeguarded energy-company profits and helped richer households with high energy consumption, while leaving many on pre-payment meters bereft. Now the government is considering permission for new oil development in the North Sea Rosebank oilfield, and given a go-ahead for a new coal mine in Cumbria, because those fossil fuels are more profitable in the short term.

Royal Mail bosses used the threat of

declaring the whole operation bankrupt in order to scare Communication Workers’ Union leaders into recommending a poor pay-and-conditions deal to their members. The union did not feel strong or confident enough to respond by demanding that the operation be renationalised and run with good pay and conditions.

Public-ownership demands are lively in many other sectors. Social care run under private ownership has meant poor pay for workers, lots of casualisation, many care-home deaths at the height of Covid, and a shortage of provision, so that hospital space is taken by patients ready to move on but lacking care facilities.

Labour

Labour’s new National Policy Forum [document](#) drops all calls for public ownership beyond gradual renationalisation of rail as Train Operating Companies fall due for renewal, and more in-sourcing (reinstatement within public services of functions farmed out to private contractors).

Unions are more for public ownership, but weakly so. The rail unions’ longstanding joint [campaign](#) for rail renationalisation has been quiet during the rail strikes which are really about how the whole industry will be recon-

structed after the impact of Covid lockdowns.

Solidarity argues for public ownership, under democratic and workers’ control, of all large-scale economic enterprise, not just of public utilities. Of banks, high finance, Big Pharma, and much more.

Otherwise the wealth, the means of production developed by past labour and technological advance, remains in the hands of a few. They run economic life to serve their private profit, not social provision.

They have power over workers, who have to sell our labour-power (our capacity to work) daily or monthly to those who monopolise the means of employment. The owners can pay out in wages as little as they can get away with and as is compatible with having a more or less regular and stable workforce. They seize upon the extra value added by our labour (above what is paid out in wages) for their profits, their bonuses, their pay-outs to top bosses, their dividends, their rent payments to landlords, and the taxes they pass on to the capitalist state.

Inequality

That system of capitalist private ownership always tends to increase social inequality, insecurity and stress for the working-class majority, and ecological irresponsibility. In some periods, strong labour movements can push back against those trends with a bit of success. Today we see all those trends spiralling.

The general formula of state or public ownership is not enough. Public ownership under a bureaucratic, or, worse, a despotic state can bring as much exploitation and ecological destruction as private ownership, sometimes even more.

When the state which owns the economic enterprises is itself “owned” by a wealthy minority, state ownership is a formula for corruption and despoliation. More benignly, it may be a way of supplying some inputs to private industry at lower cost. That makes it only a device for transferring surplus-value produced by the labour of state-sector workers into the pockets of private capitalists.

We want public ownership with workers’ control over all the detailed operations – through election of managers



by workers, accountability, managers serving on workers’ wages – plus society-wide democratic control on the overall balance, shape, and scale of production.

Democracy

Democratically-controlled production will have to cope with limits imposed by scarcities and by difficulties of recycling and waste-management, but it will do that with social provision for all, the elimination of class inequality, and ecological sustainability as its guidelines, not the private profit of a few.

As Leon Trotsky put it, we aim for the “political overthrow of the bourgeoisie and liquidation of its economic domination”. That does not “hinder us from advancing, when the occasion warrants, the demand for the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence or of the most parasitic group of the bourgeoisie...”

“The difference between [our sectional public-ownership] demands and the muddleheaded reformist slogan... lies in the following: (1) we reject indemnification [i.e. full compensation to big capitalists for their enterprises taken into public ownership]; (2) we warn the masses against demagogues of the People’s Front who, giving lip service to nationalisation, remain in reality agents of capital; (3) we call upon the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength; (4) we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power by the workers...” □

ADHD: the big scandal is waiting lists

By Sandra Bude

A BBC Panorama program on 15 May focused on private companies offering unreliable diagnoses of ADHD (“attention deficit hyperactivity disorder”) and too-casual resort to medication.

Its misplaced focus will damage the fight of people with ADHD for recognition and against discrimination.

It is a scandal that people have to pay thousands of pounds to private companies to be assessed for ADHD. But the real scandal is that many-years-long NHS waiting lists are forcing them to do so. Of course, unscrupulous pill-pushers will thrive in this climate.

The deeper scandal is that our society pathologises a naturally-occurring

difference in attention allocation, and makes people so distressed and unwell that they have to seek diagnosis in order to get help.

Cut the waiting lists, cut off the private companies’ markets! Better still, bring the valid resources of the private companies into public ownership and into the NHS, carrying out assessments to NHS standards.

That would be much more effective than clickbait diagnosis denial, under which women, ethnic minorities, and others who are already disproportionately overlooked or disbelieved, will be pushed back further.

Demonising medication is also not helpful. Societal change is the better option, but right now, meds can help some people manage. □



For Ukraine, against “de-russification”

By Dan Katz

On 23 July last year Workers’ Liberty members and Belarussian activists protested outside the Belarussian consulate in west London. We were demanding the freeing of political prisoners and, in particular, the release of “Railway Partisans,” Belarussian anti-war protesters who had sabotaged the rail network as Russian troops invaded Ukraine from Belarus in the days after 24 February 2022.

At the protest, showing solidarity, were a group of anti-war Russians, flying the blue and white flags of the Russian opposition. The Russians were heckled by a handful of the Belarussians who hate Russians, even anti-war Russians.

Perhaps this is understandable, especially so as the Belarus dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, is backed by Russia.

But lots of bad things are understandable. This reaction to these brave young Russians is particularly unfortunate as Belarus is in the process of being swallowed up by Putin’s Russia, and the only way Belarus will get its freedom will be when Russia itself changes course. Belarussians need Russian support.

In Kyiv, a recycling centre now processes Russian language books. Works by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are ripped apart and recycled as egg cartons or toilet paper. Russian translations of

Western books and Russian academic works and textbooks are pulped too. It is difficult to see how this helps the struggle against Russian imperialism.

Books

The Syayvo bookshop collects Russian books and sells them to be recycled. The funds they raise go to buy clothes for Ukrainian troops. By February they had collected 60 tonnes of Russian language books to be destroyed.

Nadia Kibenko, who works at the bookshop, rejects the idea that book pulping is reminiscent of intolerant dictatorships, saying, “We do not destroy them, we just make them into something else.” Indeed, the books are made into something else – but by destroying them.

Kyiv Opera House has excised Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev from their bill. Serhii Skuz, the ballet director, explained, “Tchaikovsky is a symbol of Russian culture and aggression, so we cannot support it.”

Busts of Pushkin have been removed. A statue of Catherine the Great has gone in Odesa.

At the time of the full-scale invasion, last February, around 30 percent of Ukrainians spoke Russian as their first language.

In the Kharkiv Literary Museum a new society has emerged, part of a new trend across Ukraine, of Russian speak-

ers learning Ukrainian. Kharkiv is close to the Russian border and was a majority Russian-speaking city. Ukrainian speakers could be mocked as uneducated people from the countryside.

“Defence” of those Russian speakers was one of Putin’s spurious reasons for justifying his February invasion. Now many Ukrainians are turning their back not just on Putin, but on everything Russian. As late as 2021 41% of Ukrainians agreed that Russia and Ukraine were one people; now that number is 8%. That is, as previously noted, “understandable,” but is also a tragedy (a Putin-induced tragedy, but a tragedy nevertheless) and has political consequences.

Destruction

Millions of Ukrainians continued to speak Russian, and without facing discrimination. However, in many towns street names are being changed and Soviet era statues are being pulled down.

In Uzhhorod, in the west of Ukraine, stars have been removed from the graves of Red Army soldiers.

Under the Tsars, and then again under Stalinism, the Ukrainian people have been heavily repressed. Nineteenth century Russian Tsar Alexander

II prohibited teaching, staging plays or publishing in Ukrainian.

In the 1930s Stalin deliberately starved five million Ukrainians to death in a famine known as the Holodomor. In the late 1930s hundreds of novelists, journalists and playwrights were shot or sent to the gulag. Ukraine was an oppressed nation and is now, again, fighting for its existence.

Military resistance against the Russian invasion is very necessary, clearly. But cultural destruction is not.

Propaganda

The removal from Ukrainian society of Russian artistic, cultural and literary objects will inevitably and unnecessarily alarm and alienate a minority in Ukraine, as well as diminishing cultural life in Ukraine. “De-Russification” also unwittingly helps Putin whose propaganda includes the idea that Ukraine and the West are against all things Russian, and want to destroy Russia itself. And anti-Russian campaigns also break-up the possibility of unity across the borders between Ukrainian and Russian workers.

For Ukraine against Russian imperialism!

For international workers’ unity! □

Strikes

From 20 April: Higher Education workers (UCU) marking and assessment boycott

28 April-29 May: Rolling strikes by engineers at Chessington World of Adventures theme park (Unite)

15-17 May and 23-25 May: Staff at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (Unite) strike

16-18 and 23-25 May; 6-8 June: Workers at Prendergast schools in Lewisham strike against academisation (NEU and GMB)

31 May, and 3 June: Train drivers at multiple TOCs (Aslef) strike

17-20 May: Outsourced ISS cleaners at South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Trust hospitals (GMB) strike

24 May: Managerial and technical staff on Transport for London’s Elizabeth line (TSSA) strike

From 24 May: (25-26-30-31 May, 1-5-6-7-8 June) SOAS academic staff (UCU) strike

25-27 May: Heathrow Airport security workers (Unite) strike

Ballots

25 April-23 May: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballot for industrial action

12 May-9 June: Amazon workers at warehouses in Mansfield and Rugeley (GMB) ballot for strikes

15 May-27 June: Senior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay

15 May-28 July: Teachers in England (NEU) re-ballot for action over pay. Nasuwt re-ballots 15 May-12 June (in 6th form colleges) and 5 June-10 July (in schools), and NAHT 15 May-31 July. ASCL will start its ballot in June.

23 May-23 June: NHS nurses (RCN) re-ballot for industrial action

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

25 May-14 June: Royal Mail postal workers (CWU) hold referendum on employer’s offer on pay and conditions

Pro-Ukraine protest at Russian ambassador

By Michael Baker

On Thursday 11 May, Russian ambassador to the UK Andrey Kelin was invited to speak in Oxford. The event, advertised as a “Q&A”, was hosted by the Oxford Russian Club, a “society” that is not affiliated with the university but uses its prestige to garner interest.

A collection of pro-Ukrainian protesters demonstrated outside the venue – after having bookings at Magdalen College and a local church cancelled, the event was moved to the house of one of the society’s members. As Kelin left his car, protestors shouted “murderer” at him in Russian, and “Putin will fall”. He got a similar reception upon leaving. He came with a handful of personal security who were very happy to take photos of the gathered protestors, and Thames Valley Police sent six officers for a peaceful protest of no more than 20.

Kelin has been particularly outspoken in support of Russia’s crimes in Ukraine, claiming in a BBC interview that the massacre of civilians in Bucha was “staged by Ukrainians”. He stated in the event that Ukraine and Russia

are one people and the Russian army were acting with Ukrainians’ best interests at heart, and that Russia was planning its military action to ensure a “minimum of civilian deaths”. (Human Rights Watch reports precisely the [opposite](#)).

Conspiracy

I’ve protested against the Russian ambassador many times during the war – usually outside his embassy in London – but this is the first time his entourage have asked me how much I was paid to attend. Kelin put on a brave face, and was forced to do the same while a couple of attendees asked him pointed questions about the propagandistic lies he’d just told the room. But by the end he was clearly not enjoying himself, and hurried out into his car before the audience left.

The protestors were a mix of Ukrainians, Brits and antiwar Russians, all happy to be working together for a common cause; groups represented included Feminist Antiwar Resistance Oxford, the Oxford Ukrainian Student Society, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, and the Russian Democratic Society. □

The drivvel of Comrade Blimp



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Doug Nicholls is Britain's longest-serving union bureaucrat, but his name will mean nothing to most rank and file union activists. He is the outgoing general secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), a venerable organisation whose present role is unclear, though it does put on some training sessions and runs a hotel that (according to Nicholls) provides "the best food, best service [and] best accommodation."

In the course of an interview that appeared in the *Morning Star* of 13-14 May, Mr Nicholls once again lived up to the name one writer in *Solidarity* gave him a few years ago: "Comrade Blimp".

The Nicholls brand of Stalinism is a crude and nationalistic one, even by the standards of the *Morning Star*. Back in May 2020 he wrote an article the paper headed "Patriotism is good for you" in which he argued that all the attacks on democracy and the working

class of recent decades were the fault of foreign powers: The EU is to blame for neoliberalism and the USA controls "our" foreign policy. "Our political economy" became subject to "foreign control", he wrote, and we lost our "sovereign parliament".

Solidarity commented at the time: "You would think, to read Nicholls, that Thatcherism had been imposed from abroad by an alien force, or that prior to the Reagan years the Foreign Office had been pursuing some kind of ethical outreach programme".

Brexit

More recently (July 2022) in a *Morning Star* article, Nicholls praised the Tories' 2019 election platform, stating: "They won the last election because they had the bottle to reflect the democratic will of the people in the referendum. Get Brexit Done was a representative, popular and necessary slogan".

In the same piece, he suggested that Boris Johnson had been removed by unspecified "hardliners" because in the aftermath of the pandemic he "could no longer be trusted to challenge this new mood and social movement on behalf of capital. Fortunately for them he made some unseemly errors of

judgment that enabled the hardliners to pounce". Fans of the Nicholls brand of little-Englandism, conspiratorialism, factual and historical ignorance, and Maoist Stalinism, will not be disappointed by this weekend's *Morning Star* interview, conducted by the paper's editor Ben Chacko.

Highlights include Mr Nicholls claiming that there are "hundreds" of UK unions not affiliated to the Labour Party (in fact, there are 24); that the Thatcher victory over Callaghan's Labour Party in 1979 was the result of workers having illusions in "tweedle-dee Tories" (i.e. the Tories were the same as Labour) rather than "take[ing] over ourselves" (i.e. it was a revolutionary situation!); that the key task of the left is to impose "controls on the flight of capital out of the country" and to return the UK to "wealth-creating manufacturing."

But, as ever with Comrade Blimp it's what he has to say about the EU that is the most extraordinary: that the TUC dropping its opposition to EU membership in 1988 was a "derogation of national sovereignty" in exchange for "a bit more health and safety legislation"; that the TUC "turned its back on its own country and people and welcomed in



strangers to take over the shebang"; that while Thatcher was in power it was "Delors and his successors" who "never allowed state intervention, manufacturing and public services to flourish".

In his fury against European "strangers" poor Blimp even gets his basic sequence of events back to front: "Same when the miners rose rather than get behind them... the unions thought the EU could help us out." The miners' strike was in 1984-5 – more than three years before the TUC came out in support of the EU.

At one level it's laughable; but at another it's surely very worrying that Britain's self-described "socialist" daily paper can print such nationalistic (verging on racist), ignorant drivell. □

For solidarity, against antisemitism

By Kayden Jones

In Sheffield, Broomhall Social Centre hosted a discussion titled "Muslim and Jew tour: beyond Israel" on 12 May. The speakers and organisers had made repeated antisemitic remarks.

Sheffield Solidarity Group organised a protest outside the gathering. Attendance at the meeting was pitifully low, only about eight people. The protesters outnumbered the attendees twice over. Banners and placards were held stating opposition to antisemitism and solidarity with Palestine.

The meeting used the cover of promoting inter-faith unity and suggested it was about criticising Israeli state behaviour, a reasonable thing to do, of course. But tour organiser and speaker Pete Gregson had stated that Hitler admired Zionists and that Zionists aided and sabotaged Jewish rescue in order to strengthen the case for a Jewish state. These



are lies exploited by the far right and Holocaust deniers to spread antisemitism.

Zionism and Nazism

Another tour speaker, Azzam Tamimi, has claimed that Nazism and Zionism have many of the same characteristics. This depicts Holocaust survivors and their descendants as deserving military destruction like the Nazis got.

The third tour speaker, Rabbi Weiss, is from Neturei Karta, an organisation of ultra-religious Jews who have sided with Holocaust deniers and the Iranian state. They attended the Ira-

nian regime's Holocaust conference in 2006. Their opposition to Zionism is based on an assertion that only God, not humans, should create a Jewish state, rather than any solidarity with the Palestinian people.

It is necessary to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people against their terrible treatment by the Israeli state and its soldiers, its settlements on occupied land and its repressive laws. A religious belief demanding the destruction of Israel is another thing entirely.

Misinformation

Criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic. However, it is in the case of these speakers. The misinformation and hatred spread by Gregson and the other speakers do nothing to aid Palestinians. The cause of lasting peace in the region requires antisemitism be eradicated from the international Palestinian solidarity movement.

The antisemitic speakers came out to berate the protesters, continually denounced the protesters as Zionists, or as not Jewish, because they did not strictly follow the Torah.

As protesters talked to individuals on the street, and practically everyone agreed with us and opposed the speakers. Dozens of passers-by were ed-

ucated on the Israel-Palestine conflict and left antisemitism.

The protesters stated unequivocally that they support Palestine and would welcome a meeting about Palestine at the Centre with respected speakers who do not utilise myths and historical distortions to further their own agenda. □



Our audio

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

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

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



Iran's bans make illegal abortions soar



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Iran's dictatorship tightened restrictions on medical abortions and banned the free distribution of contraceptives in 2021 amid a moral panic around the birth-rate. Iranian women have been choosing fewer children in part due to economic crisis.

This has led to public health alarm about numbers of illegal abortions. Government officials have said that each year between 300,000 to 600,000 abortions are performed in the country, and over 90% are illegal. Access

to contraception and legal abortion is driving a dangerous black market. Until recently abortions could be legally performed during the first four months of pregnancy if three doctors agreed that a pregnancy threatened a woman's life, or the foetus had severe disabilities that could produce extreme hardship for the mother. But under the "rejuvenation of the population and support of the family" law passed in November 2021, abortion cases are now decided by a panel that includes a judge and two medical professionals.

UN Human Rights experts have spoken out against the law and its consequences.

"Data clearly shows that criminalising the termination of pregnancy does not reduce the number of women who re-

sort to abortion," the experts said. "Instead, it forces women to risk their lives by undergoing clandestine and unsafe procedures."

Underground abortions are not always dangerous but many are carried out in unsanitary and unsafe conditions. Free contraception could massively reduce the number of abortions carried out in Iran.

Raised concern about restrictive legislation pushing women into illegal abortion comes six months into a brave and resilient protest movement for women's rights in Iran. Recent strikes have boosted the movement.

An opinion survey of 158,000 Iranians conducted by the Dutch Gamaan institute in late December 2022 showed that 81% rejected the Islamic state, with

15% in support. Among those who rejected, 40% would prefer a democratic republic and 22% a constitutional monarchy.

Support for Iranian women and workers is high in the UK but also passive. Solidarity demonstrations have been largely made up of Iranians.

The Solidarity with the Iranian Workers' movement committee has been launched to try and build active solidarity with the Iranian protests and strikes. Chaired by John McDonnell MP, the committee aims to provide briefings and information on the people's struggle in Iran, mobilise support and solidarity with the revolutionary uprising, condemn rights violations and executions, and facilitate direct links between workers' organisations. □



Activist Agenda

On 22 May the TUC has at last called a protest against the Minimum Service Bill, but designed only as a relatively small gathering outside Parliament (6pm, Parliament Square) when the Bill comes back from the Lords to the Commons.

Unless the Lords shows unusual fight over the amendments it made to the Bill, which the Tories are likely to reverse in the Commons, the Bill will be law soon. A period of regulation-making to set "minimum service levels" will have to follow before it becomes operational.

Free Our Unions has published a [briefing](#) on combating the Bill.

[Refugee Week](#) is 19-25 June. So far all the many events planned are cultural, but activists are exploring possibilities of a political protest in that week against the Illegal Immigration Bill. Labour has promised to repeal the Minimum Service Bill, but not the Immigration Bill. □

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

US script writers face long strike

By Bruce Robinson

The Writers' Guild of America, which represents writers for film and TV studios, struck for a new contract from 2 May after 98% of members voted in favour.

The WGA strike is the first time unions have raised the issue of generative artificial intelligence (AI), new programs such as Chat-GPT that writers fear could be used to de-skill or downgrade their work by generating plot outlines or possibly even scripts. While discussion still swirls about how exactly they will or should be used, possibly for strike-breaking, the union is insisting that its use should be subject to negotiation with them and should exclude the simple replacement of its members.

"The challenge is we want to make sure that these technologies are tools used by writers and not tools used to replace writers," says one member of the WGA's 2023 negotiating committee.

The implementation and use of technology is usually defended by bosses as a management prerogative. The WGA is showing a way to challenge that which should be a part of union strategy in



Pic: Chris Gold

the face of the threat AI might pose.

The strike demands cover pay including minimum rates, "residuals" (royalties paid for repeats), pensions and healthcare; job security and the numbers employed on jobs and their contractual terms; conditions of work; and use of AI.

A whole range of television programmes are threatened with disappearing off the screen, and film production are held up at high cost, until the strike is settled.

The WGA is particularly concerned about conditions for writers at streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon being below those at the established film studios. This was a major issue in the 100-day strike in 2007-8 and has never been totally resolved. The stu-

dios, gathered in the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), made a dismal opening offer. Though they have said that they are willing to negotiate on pay, they have rejected everything else out of hand.

The WGA has been picketing the studios with centrally organised pickets in four-hour shifts. They are being supported by the Screen Actors' Guild, with many well-known TV and film personalities showing up. They have had solidarity from the

workers who are at the other end of the credits, such as electricians and set makers. The Teamsters union has told its members, particularly drivers, not to cross picket lines.

There's also been international solidarity, with the British Writers Guild telling its members not to do any work that is usually done by WGA members in the US.

All the indications are that this is going to be a long and important strike, needing maximum solidarity. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 24 May 7pm: London Forum: Revisiting Tiananmen after the "white paper". 62 Marchmont St, WC1N 1AB

Sunday 28 May, 2pm: Reading group – Betraying Big Brother by Leta Hong Fincher. At Ruskin Park, SE5 9AW.

Sunday 11 June, 11am: Socialist environmental reading group. Online.

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 □



Discussing ecology and entropy



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Workers' Liberty organises a monthly Marxist ecology reading group. This month we discussed a chapter on "Entropy and ecological economics" from [Marxism and Ecological Economics](#) by Paul Burkett.

I introduced the discussion, saying that in my view Burkett and his co-thinkers have developed metabolic rift theory and played a significant role in restoring Marx as an important ecological thinker.

Others in the reading group were more critical. Reformulating real issues of harmful waste and of resource depletion in terms of entropy, some said, blurs rather than clarifies. Some productive activities, such as agriculture, in principle reduce entropy: when they are environmentally damaging, for example by soil degradation, the damage cannot be captured by general reasoning about entropy. Even if recycling can never be 100%, as the ecological economists insist, it can get near that. Some said that Burkett, in fact, has misunderstood the basic physics of entropy.

The "ecological economists" emerged in the 1970s, but trace their roots back to earlier figures like the Ukrainian socialist and correspondent of Marx and Engels, Serhiy Podolynsky, who attempted (unsuccessfully) to apply thermodynamics to economic questions.

Burkett and his co-thinkers have written several books showing that Marx



and Engels had more sophisticated understanding of thermodynamics and arguing that there is a lot of common ground between their approach and the approach later developed by the ecological economists based on the "entropy law" or "second law of thermodynamics" (the entropy, i.e. measure of total disorder, in a closed system cannot decrease).

Ecological economists Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen and Herman Daly argue that human activity constantly draws on material and energy resources provided by nature and dissipates waste into the environment, so "matter-energy enters the economic process in a state of low entropy and comes out of it in a state of high entropy".

The biosphere as a whole is an open dissipative system that draws on low-entropy solar energy to power life's metabolisms and dissipates heat back into space. The human economy too is an "open dissipative system". Individual cells, living organisms and communities of living organisms are open dissipative systems. Biological metabolisms draw low entropy matter-energy from the environment and dissipate high entropy waste.

Human labour manipulates the materials of the earth to produce useful goods and services but only by drawing on low-entropy matter-energy and dissipating high-entropy such as material pollutants and heat from the production process and as waste from consumption by the end-user. In Georgescu-Roegen's words, the "entropy law is the taproot of economic scarcity". Eventually capitalist growth runs up against natural limits.

Expansion

Capitalism requires an ever expanding frontier of primary industries (agriculture, mining, logging/forestry, fishing) at the expense of biodiverse wilderness. This expansion leads not just to relative scarcities but to absolute scarcity. Capitalist growth leads to a general ecological degradation.

Burkett argues that Marx's labour theory of value allows us deeper insight into the social drivers of this process. Value is a measure of socially necessary labour time. So the use-values we draw from nature have no value (in the market-economy sense) and are treated as "free gifts".

Capitalism has its own efficiencies. The constant pressure to produce more for less labour hours incentivises some recycling, efficiency gains and substitutions. However, the relentless pursuit of profit means any ecological benefit tends to be offset by increases in the scale of production. By increasing the matter and energy processed per hour of labour and by maintaining or extending the working day and size of the workforce, capitalism accelerates and expands material throughput and

entropic degradation.

Arguing that low entropy use-values provided by nature are not valued in a capitalist economy, Burkett concludes: "capitalist reproduction does not depend upon any particular limit to entropy level in its matter-energy requirements" and further "short of human extinction, capitalist reproduction in no way hinges on the maintenance of natural wealth of any given entropy level. In other words, capitalistically-induced crises in the conditions of human development do not necessarily mean crises of capitalist reproduction."

To halt this escalating ecological crisis, Herman Daly proposed placing quotas on material inputs from nature.

Marx and Engels recognised such problems. In his penultimate letter to Marx, Engels remarks on the squandering of "past solar heat", "our energy, our coal, our ores, forests etc."

Capitalist speed-up creates an irreparable rift between the social metabolism and the natural metabolism. Marx also points to the need to limit and regulate material inputs: "Instead of a conscious and rational treatment of the land as permanent communal property, as the inalienable condition for the existence and reproduction of the chain of human generations, we have the exploitation and the squandering of the powers of the earth."

The reading group has also discussed Paul Hampton's book [Workers and Trade Unions for Climate Solidarity](#), Matt Huber's [Climate Change as Class War](#), and the for-and-against of nuclear power. Discussions will continue, covering more of the metabolic-rift theorists. □

Combat bad politics with good politics

By Dale Street

Bad politics should be combatted with good politics, not by bureaucratic disciplinary measures. On that basis, the suspension of GMB member Bert Schouwenberg should be lifted.

Earlier this year Schouwenberg proposed, at his branch, a motion about links between the GMB and the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM). The motion was for this year's GMB congress and was passed unanimously.

The motion is certainly whacky and factually inaccurate. It also incorporates traditional themes of left anti-

semitism. Schouwenberg used to work for the GMB as its International Officer. Given the contents of his Twitter account, it is the GMB's good fortune that he no longer holds that position.

Russia

Schouwenberg is a Putin apologist who has attacked the GMB for donating money to a financial appeal launched by Ukrainian trade unions: "What do you expect from a trade union whose foreign policy is indistinguishable from that of the Conservative government?"

Schouwenberg is pro-Brexit, an occasional contributor of

articles to the *Morning Star*, and an inveterate hater of the *Guardian* ("Julian Assange would be free today if not for the *Guardian*. Jeremy Corbyn would be PM of Britain today if not for the *Guardian*").

His Twitter account is largely a cross between obsessive denunciations of Israel and "Labour Friends of Apartheid Israel and all the other apologists for Zionism-racism" and, on the other hand, whataboutery (currently: Ukraine/Israel; imprisoned Russian journalists/ Assange; Putin/ Bush-Blair, etc.).

In fact, compared with the stream of bile poured out on his Twitter account, Schouwen-



berg's motion looks almost harmless.

But that is not sufficient justification to suspend him.

In fact, the logic of the GMB's response is that all members of Schouwenberg's branch present at the meeting which unanimously backed his motion

should also be suspended, and, however belatedly, all delegates who backed a motion on Trade Union Friends of Israel at the union's 2013 congress should likewise be suspended. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/b-schouw

Sheffield university comes under pressure

By Sara Lee

The open letter to Sheffield University (bit.ly/shef-ol), demanding that it drop its investigation of student protesters, has been signed by student groups in Sheffield such as Sheffield Labour Students and Sheffield Solidarity Group, as well as by the chair of Sheffield Hallam UCU, the secretary of Sheffield International College UCU, and Sheffield Trades Council president Bob Jeffery. The open letter was started by the [Student Cost of Living campaign](#), a cross-campus network of students around the country.

Other signatories include the NUS Vice President for Liberation and Equality, Nehaal Bajwa, branch secretaries for UCU and Unison branches around the UK, Extinction Rebellion Youth in Oxford and Liverpool, and several other campus groups across the UK.

The Student Cost of Living Campaign has a [model email](#) which people can send to the Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University. Koen Lamberts, demanding that any ongoing investigations be dropped. Emailers have now received a reply from the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Sheffield University, Rob Sykes.

He says that universities across the UK often "use third party companies

for investigations... as they offer a level of independence for all parties involved, as well as specialist regulatory knowledge." The University is writing to [The Tab](#) (a student news website) "to correct its misleading headline that £40,000 was paid to Intersol Global... to investigate student occupations."

He says "the amount paid was only in part for investigations linked to occupations – it also covered other misconduct allegations, including student complaints about other students on issues such as harassment and sexual misconduct."

All of that is besides the point. The point is that the university does investigate student occupations and that it should not be doing this. Protests and occupations are not a form of misconduct for which students should be investigated and disciplined. Protests and occupations are a use of the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly.

The reference to sexual misconduct had previously been made by Andy Winter, Director of Student Support Services at Sheffield University, at a recent Q&A event. When asked about the use of private investigator firm Intersol Global to look into student protests, Winter said that Intersol Global had also been paid to investigate cases of



sexual assault. This was a convenient attempt to use a serious issue to avoid the question. Despite being Director of Student Support Services, Winter made no comment on the *Guardian* report that one of the students under investigation said the process caused her to have suicidal thoughts.

There was a rise in reported sexual assaults among students over the lockdown and universities came under pressure to deal with it. According to *The Tab*, this was what prompted universities to engage private investigators like Intersol Global to look into cases of sexual assault. But to anyone who genuinely cares about the issue of sexual assault, the idea that universities are now also using the same investigators to suppress protests on campus is of little comfort.

Process

The way student protesters at Sheffield University have been treated casts serious doubt on the idea private investigators offer more independence and regulatory expertise. As reported in the *Guardian*, the process by which student protesters are investigated is incredibly unfair. Students are not told what the charge is and are not shown the evidence. And according to Sheffield University regulations, the investigator itself gets to pronounce judgment and decide the punishment without an independent hearing. Regulations also say that students may be required to respect the confidentiality of the investigation, i.e. not tell others about their case.

Most importantly, the COO's email says that "occupations of University buildings are different to most student protests. They are very disruptive – preventing other students from continuing their studies and University workers from delivering important teaching and research activities." Student activists should take this as validation that University occupations can be an effective form of direct action, and that the disruption will be particularly useful when done in solidarity with strikes by university workers.

But what Rob Sykes is saying is that there is nothing to see here. That it is the students who have behaved in an exceptional way and the university is acting in the normal course of business by hiring a private investigator to look into it.

Student protests and occupations have a long history. We have a long way to go to achieve greater political and economic democracy in the UK, but it is generally accepted that such protests and occupations are an expression of the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly. What Sheffield University are doing now is not normal and is not good.

Writing to *The Tab* to correct a misleading headline, having the COO write to all who sent in the model email, coming up with reasons as to why student occupations are somehow exceptional and need to be repressed – all of this is an indication that Sheffield University is feeling the pressure and that the campaign is working.

We must keep the pressure up by continuing to get university staff and students to sign the open letter, pass motions in our students' unions and trade union branches, and send emails to the Vice Chancellor. Students across campuses must spread the word about the repression of free speech at Sheffield University and at other campuses. Printable leaflets and other campaign materials are available at linktr.ee/sheffieldinvestigation. □

• Republished from the [Student Cost of Living website](#).

"Safe with me": for how long?

By Iris Renboga

The right-wing think tank Policy Exchange says schools are becoming unsafe for children because teachers ignore our safeguarding training to accommodate our LGBTQ+ students.

The report *Asleep at the wheel* states "Safeguarding principles are being routinely disregarded in many secondary schools". The report recommends that schools should call parents as soon as a child expresses that they are questioning their gender; and that chosen names and pronouns should not be used without parental consent.

The statutory guidance for schools and colleges *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (2022) states that

"The fact that a child or a young person may be LGBT is not in itself an inherent risk factor for harm". Policy Exchange wants this whole paragraph removed from the recommendation.

Current guidance goes on to say "Risks can be compounded where children who are LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open.

It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff."

If Rishi Sunak follows the Policy Exchange recommendations, no adult in the school will be a trusted adult. If school fails to be the one guaranteed safe space for all children, that is where the safeguarding issues truly lie.

So I shall wear my "You are safe with me" rainbow badge. But if we do not fight this, I may not be able to wear it for long.

Right wing extremists are calling drag-queens "paedos" and "groomers" for reading stories to young children, while debates around retaining safe spaces for women are creating division within friends and families.

The voices of J K Rowling and others have increased the volume of public discomfort around those who do not fit our binary society and led to Rishi Sunak feeling the need to appease this moral panic. □



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

Rebuilding the forces of socialism

By Martin Thomas

Workers' industrial struggle has revived in recent months on a scale not seen for decades. That is cause for great hopes. Left-wing political mobilisation, though, has failed to match it. On issues like the NHS, new anti-strike laws, asylum rights, and the environment, activity on the streets has been small in proportion to the number of people opposed to official policies.

That reflects a low ebb of socialist activity in the broadest sense. The activist socialist groups are often not very active and have little cooperation and little dialogue. Many people see themselves as socialists and yet feel no drive to join a socialist organisation, as if being a socialist without collective organisation for socialism makes more sense than being a "trade-unionist" without joining a trade union, which it doesn't.

We have seen the Sanders movement, the DSA in the USA, Syriza in its heyday, the Corbyn surge in its heyday. There will be more such surges. So far, however, those mobilisations have been too low-temperature for Marxists to generate in them an escalating process of socialist renewal.

Cause

We can list the causes of this period of recession. First, the impact of the collapse of Stalinism (even on long-time anti-Stalinists). That more or less coincided with, and thus was compounded by, successive defeats for the working class in many countries from the early or mid 1980s on; by the successful establishment from the late 1980s (though with much fumbling and trial and error) of the new capitalist world-market order called neoliberalism; by the capitalist successes of the heyday of neoliberalism, from about 1990 to 2008; and by the rapid and drastic restructurings of capitalist enterprise in the last decades, which have left workers and unions almost everywhere scrabbling to keep up.

Even for those who hated Stalinism, in the period when the Stalinist states were still reputed to be economically successful there was a strong temptation to see the realistic character of socialism as it being a matter of taking the collective ownership, the (sort of) planning, and the industrial development, typical of Stalinism in its pomp, and then at all levels in the planning replacing privileged bureaucrats by democratically elected and accountable people. Socialism would be a matter of putting together two elements already tested in practice.

Marx wrote about the Paris Commune: "The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce par décret du peuple... They



have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant". It was as if that was adapted to: we do not expect miracles, but only to set free the elements of the new society which with old disgusting Stalinist society itself is pregnant.

As long ago as 1936, Trotsky in *Revolution Betrayed* argued that the Stalinists' fully-detailed planning, with all prices and production targets (notionally) set administratively, was unworkable even in its own terms. Good planning depends on information which for a long time to come cannot be generated and coordinated without having real markets (with, of course, some of their downsides).

Actually the totally-administered economy ran into stagnation, and would be even less workable if notionally combined with democracy, because even more decisions would be delayed by the time inevitably needed for democratic wrangling at different levels.

The collapse of Stalinism brought that into focus, and the socialist organisation of economic life could no longer be seen as so simple a step forward from an already-advancing process.

Of those revolutionaries shaped in their thinking in the 1960s and 70s, many dispersed after the mid-70s in dismay at the course of Cambodia, Vietnam, and post-Mao China. Of those who stuck to their cause, many began to think after 1991 that, as the veteran French "orthodox Trotskyist" François Sabado put it recently, they had become "revolutionaries without revolution", revolutionaries whom "the revolution" had abandoned, revolutionaries denied the solace of any new socialistic-tinged revolution (as they see it) since the Sandinista overturn in Nicaragua in 1979.

From the late 1980s the old Communist Parties, often long-established as the main visible leftish force in their countries, shrivelled. The Communist

Party of Great Britain, which had over 25,000 members until the late 1970s, wound itself up in 1991. The current Communist Party of Britain, with maybe 1,000 members, mostly elderly and inactive, originates from a 1988 splinter group. The Communist Party of Italy, which had maybe a million members, dissolved in 1991; a fragment of which many revolutionary socialists had high hopes, Communist Refoundation, still exists, but wretchedly. Taking an overview of the last three decades or so, left social-democratic parties have done badly. The groups with some reference to Trotsky have not done as badly, but in general and on average they have diminished in vitality.

This is not the first period of authentic socialism receding as a political force. The ebb is comprehensible in terms of the history of the labour movement. And the grounds for confidence that the tide will turn are equally rooted in history and in our understanding of the basics of capitalism.

Climate crises add urgency and increased relevance to our socialist politics. The adversity and suffering they will inflict on our class, and humanity, will likely increase and change in the coming years and decades. Our class-struggle socialist approach does not offer the instant gratification advertised in NGOish quick "solutions" to climate change. But it will remain relevant, adapting to the changing terrain, and indeed the only hope for humanity to curb ecological catastrophes.

The working class has not disappeared. It has expanded hugely on a world scale. It has not contracted even in "post-industrialising" countries, though its composition has changed (more office and "white-collar" and service workers). Capitalist exploitation, inequality, and insecurity have increased. The working class is neither beaten down and atomised as it was under fascism and Stalinism, nor seduced into complacent acquiescence to the status quo as it was in some richer capitalist

countries in the 1950s. The working class, however much pushed onto the back foot, will over time regroup and fight back.

Despite the general recession in industrial militancy, on many issues important for the future (gender equality, anti-racism) the drift of working-class opinion is to the left. In time the workers will rise again, repeating on a bigger scale the signs of revival shown now, generating a cycle of increased struggle bringing increased confidence and organisation bringing increased struggle...

This will not happen all at once, but in spurts and sallies. The speed at which it happens will depend on the numbers, organisation, and energy which active socialists can accumulate in the quiet times and the smaller struggles; and the growth of socialists will depend on our energy, reliability, visibility, and accessibility in the struggles.

Part of our task now is rehabilitating and repopularising a vision of socialism as based in working-class struggle rather than a "world process", and as it was understood before Stalinism: workers' government, common ownership of major productive wealth, democracy both in society and in the workplace, and universal basic services. It is a difficulty that we can find no better word than "socialism", and yet that word carries a baggage of association with a variety of tyrannies or dim minimalist-reform projects miscalling themselves socialist. Maybe in time a new term will catch on which we can use.

Visibility

Young people wanting to change the world will hear nothing about socialism unless we speak out. Or, if they hear anything, it will be only the residues of the decades when the left was overshadowed by Stalinism: "socialism" as a national-developmental project, rather than an international, emancipatory, democratic one.

We can transmit and educate ourselves in the tradition of the "heterodox" Third Camp Trotskyists of the 1940s and 50s. In the pivotal time when socialist politics was swamped by Stalinist-tinged developmentalism, they upheld, and expressed through analyses and activities, the idea of socialism as working-class self-emancipation. That tradition disappeared to the margins and the archives in the 1960s, a victim of the human attrition of the activists who sustained it. We have put work into reconnecting with it. We have to make that work our collective property, and make it visible and accessible to people seeking to reorient in socialist politics.

Our task is rebuilding a culture as well as building organisation. □

Why nurses voted to reject

By Harry Eccles

Harry Eccles, who is an activist with "NHS Workers Say No", "Team Vote Reject", and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), talked to Solidarity.

I joined the RCN as a student. I was told I had to join a union to ensure I had indemnity. Five or six years ago I became an RCN "pay champion" for a couple of years. I was working at Southampton General at the time. In the role of pay champion I tried to raise awareness of the problem with pay and get people involved with the campaign. I think that campaign sowed the seeds for the more recent campaign on pay.

Last September or October I received my pay ballot. I decided to get involved in trying to get the vote out by social media.

Through my tweeting I met "NHS Workers Say No". The campaign was set up three years ago to fill the hole of a rank and file movement. It was a key factor in the RCN rejecting the pay offer.

Since the end of last year I have been campaigning with Health Workers Say No. Some of my messages were picked up by the BBC News website. This was followed by getting interviews on BBC Newsbeat, BBC Politics Live, BBC Breakfast. I contacted the RCN media office and they were really supportive and gave me a lot of good advice.

When the RCN paused the strike, I remember thinking it didn't feel like a good idea, compared to the NEU leadership who were saying "what are you offering? Until we have something concrete, we are continuing our action."

As the pause in our action grew I became more concerned. When the offer came, I couldn't understand how the leadership could recommend acceptance. We didn't take all this action for this!

The line in the mainstream media was it was a done deal. I think the rejection was won on the wards. All we need to do was provided the information on the deal because it was a bad deal. The leadership thought all they had to say

was accept and the membership would accept the deal. We gave members the information and the breakdown.

The key things for the campaign included regional WhatsApp groups. They connected people across different unions and invited them to reject the deal, work together locally and put on social media photos of the action they had taken. NHS Workers Say No's lead enabled, facilitated and nurtured that local connection.

Another key was providing resources, having a simple leaflet explaining the deal. It also had a little section on the British Medical Association's campaign on Junior Doctors, linking the struggles. The leaflet explained that: the non-consolidated lump sum meant a 0% uplift, 5% the year after would mean a real terms pay cut given inflation, how much had been lost in health workers pay since 2010, and finally the difference between the offer and the Scottish deal. The Government originally said that we would only get that offer.

Social media alone wasn't going to work. It was leafleting workplaces locally that had the most impact. Another thing that helped us was that members could re-submit their response. As the campaign wore on I think many members changed their mind and changed their vote.

On the wards we came across two responses: (1) It's a shit deal. (2) I've been told it's the best deal we're going to get.

We went through showing it was a crap deal, and making the case that we had already moved the government to this offer. If we rejected and fought we could move them again.

I didn't realise how big a deal the campaign was. Suddenly, I found myself smeared by the *Daily Mail*. The *Guardian* and *The Times* smeared the campaign. They were saying we were trying to oust the leadership. For me it was a question of democracy and putting the information and the decision in members' hands.

The media linked it with the petition for an Emergency General Meeting



(EGM), but that was not organised by NHS workers Say No or Vote Reject. Some of the people overlapped, some didn't. The media tried to link it to on-line abuse of the leadership. To me it was clear: they were two separate issues. Online abuse is wrong. We should reject the deal.

The *Daily Mail* story was actually factually correct, with facts were taken from my Twitter account, although they advertised it as revealed by their investigation and it appeared under the most ludicrously warped headline. The *Express* named one of my colleagues' workplace. That is unacceptable.

As the campaign wore on the RCN leadership's narrative changed from "Accept the offer!" to "We think you should accept the offer but you are the members and it's up to you". We were pushing them, but it was hard work going against the grain of the union, the establishment, the media and the government. We kept focus on the fact it's our fight and we are the ones who have to deal with the short staffing and the running-down of the hospitals.

Out of the 12 health unions, RCN, Unite, Podiatrists and the Society of Radiographers rejected the deal. Unison, the Royal College of Midwives, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the British Dietetic Association accepted. I hoping that the other unions who rejected re-ballot their members for industrial action.

I think we should understand that people who accepted the deal are not saying it is a fair deal or that it is a fix. The accepted because of a false pragmatism and they were bullied.

The RCN has announced that it will re-ballot all members in an aggregated ballot. I think this is the right decision. It is not a decision aimed to scupper the

action, it is a decision aimed at escalation and only escalation can win.

I am not certain that we will win the aggregated ballot. However, I am hopeful and optimistic. We are not isolated. We started the fight and we have won a better deal for everyone, no matter whether or which union you are in. The offer has been imposed; our members and others have that banked, and we fight on. The BMA are balloting too, and they are well organised. I would expect their ballot to be successful. The most critical issue in the health battle is winning the RCN ballot. Activists must put all their energy into this. □

Our pamphlets

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

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

workersliberty.org/publications/

Our videos

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

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

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

“The Conquest of Ireland”



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

In this chapter from the 1915 pamphlet *The Reconquest of Ireland*, Connolly set out a thesis that “the genius of the Irish race” had produced and continued to relatively modern times a communistic form of society, and the development of capitalism in Ireland was not so much economic evolution as a matter of “the capitalist and landlord classes” being “still saturated with the spirit of the English conquest”. This is the first instalment on “Connolly’s historiography”, in our series on “Connolly, politically unexpurgated”. The whole series is available at workersliberty.org/connolly.

Before we can talk of or develop a policy for the re-conquest of Ireland it is well that we picture clearly to our mind the essential feature of the conquest itself, how far it went, and how far it has already been reversed. Let it be remembered, then, that the conquest was two-fold – social and political. It was the imposition upon Ireland of an alien rule in political matters and of a social system equally alien and even more abhorrent.

In the picturesque phrase of Fintan Lalor it meant the “conquest of our liberties and the conquest of our lands”. The lands being the material basis

of life, alike of conquerors and conquered, whosoever held those lands was master of the lives and liberties of the nation. The full extent of that mastery, that conquest, is best seen by the record of the Cromwellian settlement in 1654. In that settlement the conquest reached its highest and completest point. Never before, and never again, were the lives and liberties of the people of Ireland so completely at the mercy of foreign masters as during the period in question.

Previously the old Gaelic culture and social system still held sway in the greater part of Ireland, and the armed force of the Gael still existed to curb the greed of the alien enemy and restrain, by the example of its greater freedom, the full exercise of his tyrannical propensities, and subsequently the gradual growth of the ideals of a softer civilisation, and the growth of democracy, contributed to weaken the iron rule of the conqueror. But the Cromwellian settlement well understood was indeed the final consummation of the conquest of Ireland. There are then three pictures we must needs conjure up before our mind’s eye in our endeavour to understand the point we have reached in the history of the Irish nation. These three pictures are successively – of Ireland as she was before the conquest; as she was at the completion of the conquest; as she will be at the re-conquest by the people of Ireland of their own country. The first is a picture of a country in which the people of the island were owners of the land upon which they lived, masters of their own lives and liberties, freely electing their rulers, and shaping their castes and conventions to permit of the closest approximation to their ideals of justice as between man and man. It is a picture of a system of society in which all were knit together as in a family, in which all were members having their definite place, and in which the highest could not infringe upon the rights of the lowest – those rights being as firmly fixed and assured as the powers of the highest, and fixed and assured by the same legal code and social convention. It is a system evolved through centuries of development out of the genius of the Irish race, safeguarded by the swords of Irishmen, and treasured in the domestic affections of Irish women.

The second picture is a picture of the destruction by force of the native system and the dispersion and enslavement of the natives. Let these few quotations from Prendergast’s *Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland* place before our eyes this picture in all its grim and agonising horror. He tells of the proclamation issued by the English Parliament directing that “by beat of drum and sound of trumpet, on some market

day within ten days after the same shall come unto them within their respective precincts”, the English governors throughout Ireland shall proclaim that “all the ancient estates and farms of the people of Ireland were to belong to the adventurers and the army of England, and that the Parliament had assigned Connaught for the habitation of the Irish nation, whither they must transplant their wives and daughters and children before the First of May following (1654) under penalty of death if found on this side of the Shannon after that day”.

In addition to this transplanting to Connacht, gangs of soldiery were despatched throughout Ireland to kidnap young boys and girls of tender years to be sold into slavery in the West Indies. Sir William Petty, ancestor of the Lansdowne family and a greedy and unscrupulous land-thief, declared that in some Irish accounts the number so sold into slavery was estimated at one hundred thousand.

William Petty

This ancestor of Lord Lansdowne, the founder of the noble Lansdowne family, Sir William Petty, landed in Ireland in 1652 with a total capital of all his fortune of £500. But he came over in the wake of Cromwell’s army, and got himself appointed “Physician to the Army of Ireland”. In 1662 he was made one of a Court of Commissioners of Irish Estates, and also Surveyor-General for Ireland. As the native Irish were then being hunted to death, or transported in slave-gangs to Barbadoes, the latter fact gave this worthy ancestor of a worthy lord excellent opportunities to “invest” his £500 to good purpose.

How this hunting of the Irish was going on whilst Sir William Petty was founding the noble Lansdowne family may be gauged from the fact that over 100,000 men, women and children were transported to the West Indies, there to be sold into slavery upon the tobacco plantations. Prendergast, in his *Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland*, gives the following illustration of the methods pursued: –

“As an instance out of many: – Captain John Vernon was employed by the Commissioners for Ireland to England, and contracted in their behalf with Mr. David Sellick and the Leader under his hand to supply them with two hundred and fifty women of the Irish nation, above twelve years and under the age of forty-five, also three hundred men above twelve years and under fifty, to be found in the country within twenty miles of Cork, Youghal and Kinsale, Waterford and Wexford, to transport them into New England.”

This Bristol firm alone was responsible for shipping over 6,400 girls and

boys, one of their agents in the County Cork being Lord Broghill, afterwards Earl of Orrery.

Every Irishman or woman not able to hide in the woods, morasses or mountains, or not able to defend themselves by force of arms, was good prey at that time, and hence, when Sir William Petty coveted a piece of land, he but required to send a party of soldiers to hunt down the owners or occupants, ship them out to the West Indies as slaves, and lo! the trick was done. The land was thenceforth the property of the Lord’s anointed. So when Sir William Petty died the original £500 with which he came to Ireland had swelled to an annual rent roll of £18,000, and from one mountain peak in the County Kerry he could look round and see no land that had not fallen into his grasp.

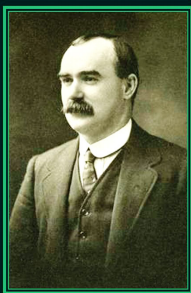
Here then is the conquest. Fix it clearly before your eyes. National liberty, personal liberty, social security all gone; the country ruled from its highest down to its meanest officer by foreigners; the Irish race landless, homeless, living by sufferance upon the mercy of their masters, or trusting alone to the greed of their conquerors to gain that toleration which even a conqueror must give to the slaves whose labour he requires to sate his avarice or minister to his wants.

This, then, is the second picture. Mastery of the lives and liberties of the people of Ireland by forces outside of and irresponsible and unresponsive to the people of Ireland – social and political slavery.

The third picture must be drawn by each, as it suits his or her fancy, who wishes to visualise to the mind’s eye the complete reversal of all that was embodied in the second. As they construct that picture of the future so they will shape their public actions. In the belief that the labour movement alone has an ideal involving the complete reversal of the social and political consequences defined in the second picture, these chapters were written to help the workers in constructing that mental picture aright.

But how far has that conquest been already reversed? As a cold historical fact that conquest fell far short of the impious wishes of its projectors. The projected removal of the entire people to within the confines of Connacht came into collision with the desires of the land-thieves for a tenantry upon whose labours they could grow rich. Land without labour is valueless; and to be an owner of confiscated land, and that land lying idle for want of labourers did not suit the desires of the new Cromwellian squire-archy. So gradually the laws were relaxed or their evasion connived at by the local rulers, and the peasantry began to re-appear

Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist &
Internationalist

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

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

workersliberty.org/publications

at or near their former homes, and eventually to gain permission to be tenants and labourers to the new masters. Into the towns the Catholic also began to find his way as a personal servant, or in some other menial way ministering to the needs of his new rulers.

Catholic women were within the forbidden territory as wives of Protestant officers or soldiers, and by rearing up their children in their own faith, whispering old legends into their ears by day, or crooning old Gaelic songs to them at night helped, consciously or unconsciously, to re-create an Irish atmosphere in the very heart of the ascendancy. Ere long, by one of those silent movements of which the superficial historian takes no account, the proscribed people were once more back from the province into which they had been hunted, heartbroken and subdued, it is true, but nevertheless back upon their own lands.

In the North the proscription had been more effectual for the reason that in that province there were Protestant settlers to occupy the lands from which the Catholics had been driven. But even there the craving for a return to the old homes and tribelands destroyed the full effect of the Cromwellian proscription.

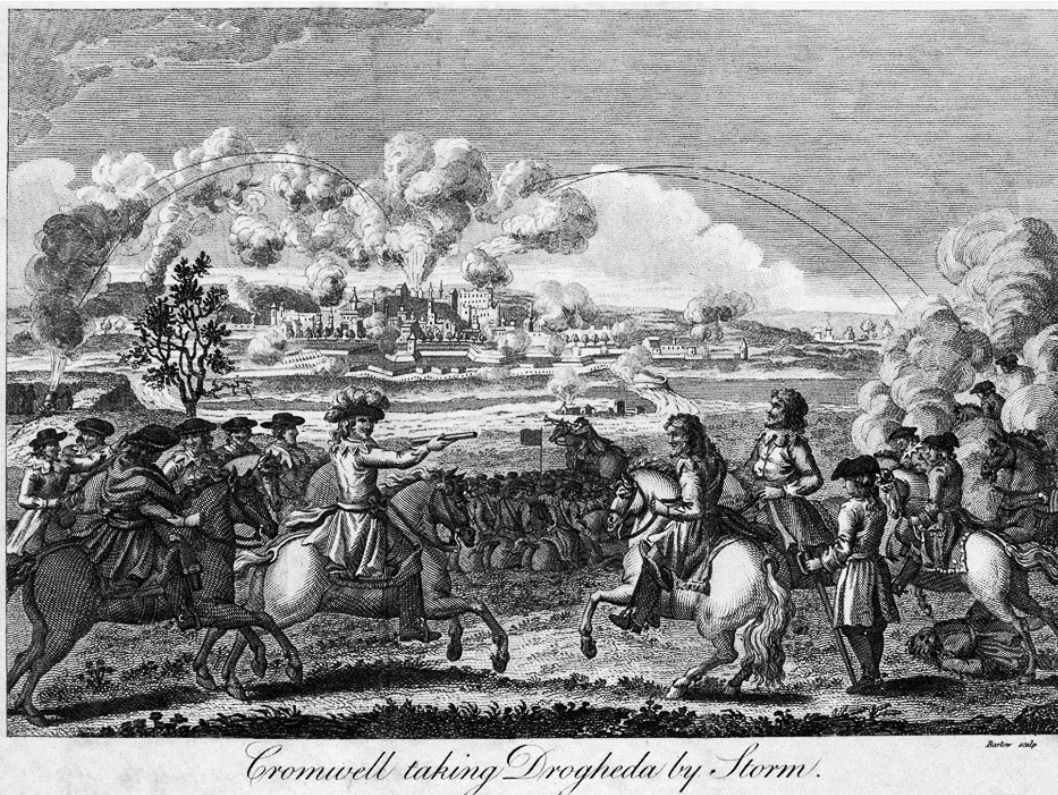
Connacht

The hunted Ulstermen and women crept back from Connacht and, unable to act like their Southern brethren and re-occupy their own lands upon any terms, they took refuge in the hills and "mountainy" land. At first we can imagine these poor people led a somewhat precarious life, ever dreading the advent of a Government force to dislodge them and drive them back to Connacht; but they persisted, built their huts, tilled with infinite toil the poor soil from which they scraped the accumulations of stones, and gradually established their families in the position of a tolerated evil. Two things helped in securing this toleration.

First, the avarice of the new land-owning aristocracy, who easily subdued their religious fanaticism sufficiently to permit Papists settling upon and paying rent for formerly worthless mountain land.

Second, the growing acuteness of the difficulties of the Government in England itself; the death of Cromwell; the fear of the owners of confiscated estates that the accession of Charles II might lead to a resumption of their property by former owners, and, arising from that fear, a disinclination to attract too much attention by further attacks upon the returning Catholics, who might retaliate, and, finally, the unrest and general uncertainty centring round the succession to the throne.

Thus, in Ulster the Celt returned to his ancient tribelands, but to its hills and stony fastnesses, from which with tear-dimmed eyes he could look down upon the fertile plains of his fathers



which he might never again hope to occupy, even on sufferance.

On the other hand, the Protestant common soldier or settler, now that the need of his sword was passed, found himself upon the lands of the Catholic, it is true, but solely as a tenant and dependant. The ownership of the province was not in his hands, but in the hands of the companies of London merchants who had supplied the sinews of war for the English armies, or, in the hands of the greedy aristocrats and legal cormorants who had schemed and intrigued while he had fought. The end of the Cromwellian settlement then found the "commonality", to use a good old word, dispossessed and defrauded of all hold upon the soil of Ireland – the Catholic dispossessed by force, the Protestant dispossessed by fraud. Each hating and blaming the other, a situation which the dominant aristocracy knew well how, as their descendants know to-day, to profit by to their own advantage.

Reversal

This, then was the Conquest. Now sit down and calmly reason out to yourself how far we have gone to the reversal of that conquest – how far we have still to go. The measure of our progress towards its reversal is the measure of the progress of democracy in this island, as measured by the upward march of the "lower classes". The insurgence of the peasantry against the landlord, the shattering of the power of the landlord, the surrender of the British Government to the demand for the abolition of landlordism, all were so many steps toward the replanting securely upon the soil of Ireland of that population which, "with sound of trumpet and beat of drumme", were ordered 300 years ago "with their women and daughters and children" to betake themselves across the Shannon into Connacht, there to remain for ever as the despised and hated helots of foreign masters.

The unsatisfactory nature of the

scheme for replanting may be admitted; the essential fact is the reversal of that part of the conquest which demanded and enforced the uprooting and expropriation and dispersion of the mere Irish. In this, as in the political and social world generally, the thing that matters most is not so much the extent of our march, but rather the direction in which we are marching.

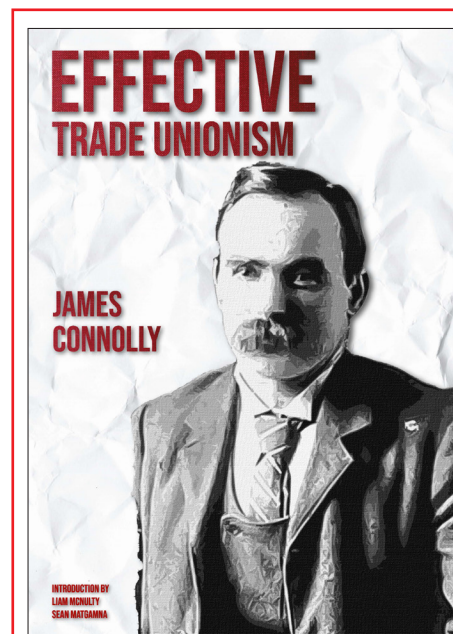
On the political side the Re-conquest of Ireland by its people has gone on even more exhaustively and rapidly. We remember sitting as delegates to the "98 Centenary Committee" in the Council Room of the City Hall of Dublin in 1898, and looking around upon the pictures of the loyal ascendancy Lord Mayors of the past which cover the walls of that room. At first we thought merely that if the dead do have cognisance of the acts of the living, surely fierce and awful must be the feelings of these old tyrants at the thought that such a room should be handed over gratuitously to the use of such rebels as were there upon that occasion. Then our thoughts took a wider range, and we went in imagination back to that period we have spoken of as the culmination of the Conquest, and forward to the following year when we were assured that under the Local Government Act the representatives of the labourers of Ireland might sit and legislate all over Ireland in such halls of local power as the Council Room of the Municipality of Dublin. What a revolution was here! At the one period banished, proscribed, and a serf even to the serfs of his masters; at the other period quietly invading all the governing boards of the land, pushing out the old aristocracy and installing in their places the sons of toil fresh from field, farm and workshop, having the legal right to grasp every position of political power, local administration and responsibility – where at the former period they were hunted animals whose lives were not accounted as valuable as foxes or hares. Truly this was, and is, a rolling back of the waves of

conquest. But how many had or have the imagination necessary to grasp the grandeur of this slow re-instatement of a nation, and how many or how few can realise that we are now witnessing another such change, chiefly portentous to us as a still further development of the grasp of the Irish democracy upon the things that matter in the life of a people.

It shall be our task in future chapters briefly to portray that development, to picture how far we have gone, to illustrate the truth that the capitalist and landlord classes in Ireland, irrespective of their political creed, are still saturated with the spirit of the conquest, and that it is only in the working class we may expect to find the true principles of action, which, developed into a theory, would furnish a real philosophy of Irish freedom.

But in this, as in many other conflicts, the philosophy of Irish freedom will probably, for the great multitude, follow the lines of battle rather than precede them. The thinking few may, and should, understand the line of march; the many will fight from day to day, and battle to battle, as their class instincts and immediate needs compel them.

For the writer, our inspiration, we confess, comes largely from the mental contemplation of these two pictures. The dispossessed Irish race dragging itself painfully along through roads, mountains and morasses, footsore and bleeding, at the behest of a merciless conqueror, and the same race in the near future marching confidently and serenely, aided by all the political and social machinery they can wrest from the hands of their masters, to the re-conquest of Ireland. □



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

workersliberty.org/publications

Behind the “crisis



Debate

By **Claureen Ryan**

In America the Republicans are trying to turn the political clock backwards on Black people and white society, on women's rights over their own bodies, and many other things.

The Republican party is no longer the more conservative of the two main political parties. It is whatever Donald Trump says it is. Trump is a fascist, and the other leading Republicans are at best people willing to accommodate to fascists.

The political drama now and since about 2015 and Donald Trump running for President, will, if events go the Republicans' way, affect world politics, including British politics, for decades to come. The approaching shadow has already had effect with Brexit and the sinister buffoonery of Boris Johnson.

In the US presidential election of November 2020, 74 million Americans voted fascist, to turn the leader of the minority in that election into dictator of the USA. It wasn't called fascist, but in terms of what its leaders said, did, wanted to do, that's what they were – American-style fascists. Something like

that number may vote fascist, support those people, in November 2024. It is possible that Trump can win that election.

In 2020 one of the two main parties opted out of the system in which they were operating. The incumbent president, Donald J Trump, and after him the Republican Party, campaigned not so much in the election as against the election. They could not possibly lose a fair election, they insisted.

Conspiracy

If they lost, that was proof that the election had been rigged. Trump prepared for that throughout the election, and, after him, nearly half the electorate said it and went on saying it. Many tried to act on it. They refused to concede defeat. By what has rightly been called an insurrection, they stopped the peaceful investiture of Biden as president.

Trump was not ex-president Trump, he was still President Trump. Joe Biden, who won the presidential election by seven million votes, was not President. He was a “fake president”.

The election had been a fake: millions and millions of votes cast for Trump had been fraudulently given to Biden. The whole election was rigged. Most of the institutions of the American republic were in the hands of anti-American plotters.

How did they know? Trump knew! His supporters knew in their guts, and because Trump knew. A cause such as theirs could not lose! God was on their side! He would not let them lose!

Dozens of local court cases were brought, and the findings said it had been an election held within the given rules. Arguably it was the fairest election ever held in the USA?

No! It was a steal insisted Trump – and his supporters, who still numbered tens of millions of Americans. Trump refused to concede to the tried, tested, investigated, court-reviewed, and very transparent bourgeois-democratic election.

It was a fake presidential election. They had officially lost it, hadn't they? That they had lost was the proof that they had won.

They lost every court case they brought (with one trivial exception)? That was evidence that there was a gigantic state conspiracy to do them down. It involved the FBI, the CIA, the whole “deep state”, the liberal media. Their enemy came to be all those who presented a more-or-less objective, factual account of reality; their friends, those, Fox News for example, who told it their way.

In fact if there was action by the “deep state” for or against a candidate, then it was by James Comey, director

of the FBI, who, close to the 2016 vote, reminded the electorate that Hillary Clinton had not yet been acquitted in a semi-nonsense court case which Trump had made central in the election.

Soon there were two distinct world views. And some of the beliefs of leading Trumpites were and are very strange indeed.

Trumpites high up in the House of Representatives believe that leading Democrats are active paedophiles, that Hillary Clinton, for instance, masks up in the flayed skin of once-living children for her rapist work on children now.

Another leading member of the Republican majority in the House of Representatives believes that Israeli lasers in outer space caused US forest fires.

President Trump could merely announce to the Republican party what its policies were, and 74 million voted for him. Winning was about assertion, and getting away with what you could get away with. It was about power. And Republicans had power in a number of states. They have begun to use it.

Anything against what you wanted was lies. It was a matter only of what you wanted to believe, and who.

At the height of Covid it became a matter of a sect's pride to treat it as a cold. Believers listened not to the public infectious-diseases official, Anthony Fauci, but to President Trump (though



Buy our books

Order from workersliberty.org/publications

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

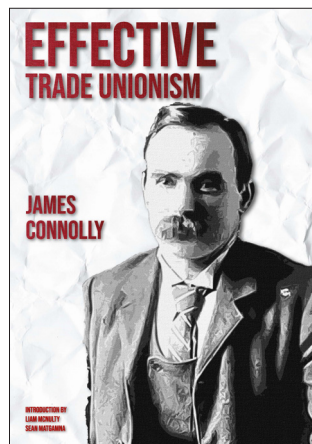
Prices listed exclude postage and packaging: £1 for small items, £3 for larger items, free over £30. Every third publication is half-price and 15% off over £50. □



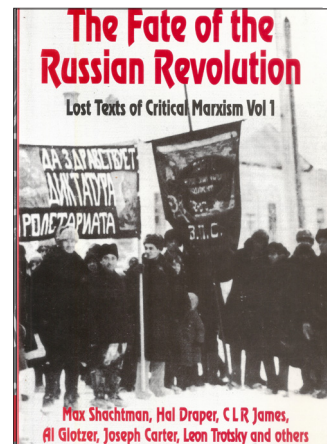
Lessons for socialist and left activists 60 pages **£4**



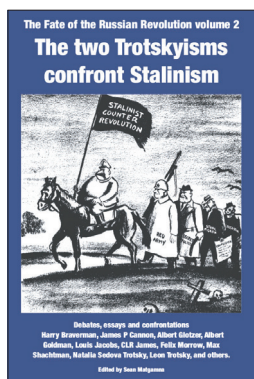
Rühle's abridgement is a good intro 131 pages **£6**



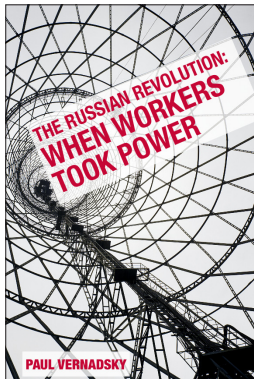
Writings by James Connolly 64 pages **£5**



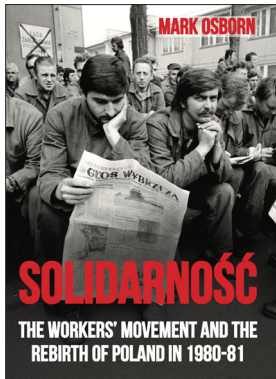
Fate of the Russian Revolution vol.1 **£8**



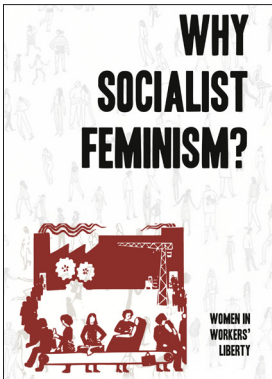
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms confront stalinism **£20**



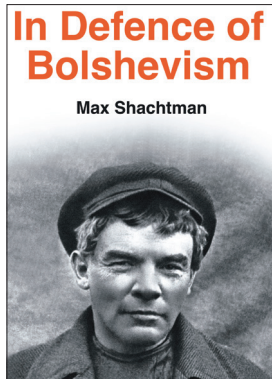
The 1917's revolution's real history, and lessons 374 pages **£12**



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



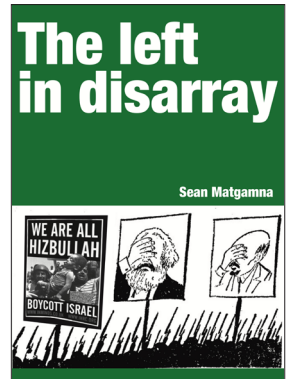
A socialist approach within recent “waves” of feminism 102 pages **£5**



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



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



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

of democracy”

Trump had had himself vaccinated).

Journalists have estimated that in four years in office Trump told 30,573 lies. For nearly half the electorate objective reality ceased to exist. Reality was whatever Trump, and those whom Trump endorsed, said it was.

Trump was singularly ignorant, and completely indifferent to what was true and untrue. He talked publicly about George Washington taking over British airfields in the USA in 1775-7, and it didn't expose him to a noticeable proportion of his "base".

The two camps in American politics live in different if parallel worlds: the Trumpites' world and the world of science, of fact-based news, of more-or-less fact-based chronicles of events, of objective and disinterested public officials such as Fauci.

Reactionary revolution

The Trumpites want a revolution, but a revolution against science, against medicine, against much of the social progress in the last 60 years. You have to go to the Cultural Revolution of Mao, 1966-9, for anything like a parallel.

They want to turn the historical clock back for people of colour, for women, for social healthcare, for much of the modern social world. They want back the official promulgation of the illusion of superiority with state suppression of Black people. They want to lock women out from controlling of their bodies according to the rules of their own religious superstitions and ignorance.

Much of the progress made by Black Americans in the last 60 years can be reversed at state level, they think, and so thinking they act where Republicans have a majority.

They call themselves Christian nationalists. This movement existed before 2016, before Trump. Before him there was George W Bush. Before the present-day right there was the Tea Party movement. Before Marjorie Taylor Greene, there was Sarah Palin.

And this movement is serious in what it does. What Trump brought it was presidential power at the political centre, naive and nihilistic indifference, asbestos-clad ignorance, infantile egotism.

Covid has killed 1,100,000 Americans so far. Trump presided over that slaughter. Trump was laugh-level foolish and, gruesomely indifferent. Millions risked their lives following his policies. Yet more people voted for Trump in 2020 (74 million) than had voted for him in 2016.

All his predictions proved untrue.



Against a background of mass death, even though Trump himself was vaccinated, millions followed his lead in scorning vaccination. Millions risked their lives following his policy.

Republicans must dread for their children as much as others do. There has been more than one berserker shooting per day this year, so far. But it is an article of faith that there is no gun control, not even of military-level rifles.

In terms of ideas, and the half-imagined USA which the Trumpites want to go back to, it is as if the social sewers were opening and vomiting their contents into the streets. A world you see in old Hollywood films, themselves so heavily censored on behalf and by the churches that they might as well not be dealing with real human beings at all. A world where women were housewives, where contraception didn't exist, abortion was unmentionable, Black people were played as idiots and shown as inferior.

The present nakedly political form is new, but believing nonsense is very old, and now it is organised. The evangelical churches are with Trump. People in some of their churches get up, speak in invented gibberish and are believed to "speak in tongues"; others deliver sermons in dog-style bark-talk and are believed to speak the language of God. Large numbers of people make vast sums out of it.

US politicians are unlikely to be elected unless they have or pretend to have, a religion. Millions insist that the Bible is the literal word of God. Millions believe, on Trump's say-so, that prayer can beat Covid.

Many Trumpites are used to believing whatever nonsense they want to believe. Trumpism is that irrationality applied to politics.

But it is not just lies on that level. Americans are told they live in a representative democracy, but they don't. They live in a system where they elect an electoral college, which elects a president. In 2016 Trump lost the popu-

lar vote to Hillary Clinton, but won in the electoral college. In his first election, in 2000, George W Bush likewise lost the popular vote but became president.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is the highest government power. It takes final decisions, as it has recently done on abortion, where many states are following up.

The nine Supreme Court justices are appointed for life. It fell to Trump in his time in office to appoint three out of nine. Nobody officially keeps an eye on the Supreme Court judges. They police themselves. This is an element of monarchy, crowning the supposed Republic.

One Supreme Court judge, Clarence Thomas, in power for a quarter century, is being shown to be spectacularly corrupt, and husband of a Trumpite activist. Power of the people? He is Black, and the outcry will not only be of pure outrage.

The 1787 Constitution supports the right to revolt against tyranny, and thus, in the age of the single-shot musket, to hold arms. It has become the right to hold very powerful military-level guns, backed by ideologists and very rich gunmakers, and thus to enable frequent eruptions of berserk mass murderers.

Free speech? It has meaning for "society", but especially for Rupert Murdoch to tell lies wholesale. Social media has changed the balance somewhat: but the social media reflects their society.

The "crisis of democracy" in the USA and in a number of European countries, is a crisis of what sort of democracy? Of "bourgeois" democracy, democracy made to be one-dimensional, political and only parts of politics at that.

People who fought for democracy in earlier days fought for the people to rule, and to be able to make society serve them. That is the sense that early socialists meant when they called themselves Social Democrats. That's what their enemies thought too: that's what they fought against.

The single greatest social achievement of the bourgeoisies in the modern world is winning the wide acceptance of their one-dimensional democracy as the only democracy, and the separation of democracy from not all but most of its social meaning. Of course Stalinism, with its bureaucracies' naked dictatorship in their own interest, helped the bourgeoisie do that.

Democracy has become rotten ripe. Perhaps more so in America where the contrasts are so great.

That is why there is a "crisis of democracy". Bourgeois democracy long ago ceased to be a crusading movement for changing society in the interests of ordinary people, and became close to being a decoration. In the USA it is a "democracy" devoted to serving the rich and powerful. It is not enough to say "it is better than airless dictatorship". Millions of electors in the USA do not think so.

Trotsky's advocacy, in face of a fascist threat in France in 1934, of a battle to revive democracy, has been printed in *Solidarity* before, but it will bear reprinting.

"We are firm partisans of a Workers' and Peasants' State, which will take the power from the exploiters. To win the majority of our working-class allies to this program is our primary aim.

"Meanwhile, as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie.

"However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic' socialism that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but of the Convention of 1793.

"Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion!

"Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!

"A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at eighteen years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker.

"This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backward. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power".□

More online

Scottish Labour

Rutherglen stitch-up may backfire:
bit.ly/r-glen

Strikes in Germany

A revival, though from a low level:
bit.ly/streik-d

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Help us raise £35,000 by 16 July!

The National Committee of Workers' Liberty raised an additional £295, bringing our total now to £20,852.

There are now plans started by several branches to do

specific fundraising events. We hope to bring you more details in the coming issues! □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

Cancer vs wet wipes



Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

E collars me at change of watch as I'm coming off duty. After a job last tour, he says, he followed the new post-fire decontamination procedure, bagging up his fire gear, hosing and wiping down his breathing apparatus (BA) set and cleaning his helmet. He wiped down the exterior and soaked the fabric interior in soapy water, scrubbing and rinsing as best he could. "The next day, my lid still smelled a bit smoky but we don't keep spares so I stuck it on the fire engine. I put it on at a shout, and when I took it off there was a black line of soot around my head."

The policy tells you to wash it as he did, with no further guidance for if it is still contaminated. E's officer in charge had to hold his ground when taking E off the run due to incomplete PPE and requesting a spare lid to be delivered to station. When sending the helmet away for proper cleaning, he was told "we only have the same size sink as you". I pass the incident up the chain to the H&S rep.

A dozen firefighters from Grenfell have been diagnosed with terminal cancer, some in their 40s. It seems most weeks we get an email that another firefighter has died just a couple of years after retirement. The policy is a step forward, but it has massive holes,

and the brigade is unable or unwilling to provide the resources for it to be properly implemented and cancer risks minimised. One station has four BA sets double bagged, still contaminated after as thorough cleaning as possible at station, but with the Operational Support Group refusing to pick them up, they've been sitting there for weeks. There's clearly no provision for through industrial cleaning above and beyond soap and glorified wet wipes. The brigade is resisting the union's demand for regular cancer screenings for operational staff, despite the firefighter mortality rate from cancer being 60% higher than the general population and up to three times higher for some cancers. At my next round of union meetings with the four watches, I tell them not to jeopardise their own health for the sake of operational readiness. "It's rightly our instinct to keep machines on the run, but we have to stop taking risks with our health to do so. And if we cut corners to make the system work, the brigade will never feel the need to actually fix the problems, plug the policy gaps and properly resource decon."

The watch murmurs in assent. "We shouldn't be able to tell the off-coming watch had a job by the smell of fire engine", says J. "If lids or BA sets are contaminated, they come off the run. If that means the machine comes off until we get spares, so be it."

R puts it succinctly. "A smoky-smelling helmet may seem trivial. But it's not. It's cancer." □

The City Without Jews



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The 1920s Austrian Expressionist film *The City Without Jews* was once thought lost but fragments turned up in an archive. A full copy (in very bad condition) was later found in a jumble sale and painstakingly restored.

The film was based on the novel of the same name by Hugo Bettauer and depicts a city (Vienna) from which the entire Jewish population is expelled. It was adapted for the screen by Hans Karl Breslauer, and first screened in Vienna in 1924.

Many thought it was a ridiculous fan-

tasy. In New York it was panned as "fatuous", yet it would be only another ten years or so before the Nazis began the process of creating many cities "without Jews".

In 1925 Bettauer was murdered in Vienna by a fascist sympathiser, Otto Rothstock. Rothstock was sent to prison but released after only 18 months.

After 1933, the film was banned in Germany and Austria and all prints were thought to have been destroyed. This beautifully restored film can now be seen on the Internet. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there is no version with English sub-titles. □

• An occasional mini-series, "Myths of Cinema", will run online as a supplement to Kino Eye. The first article discusses why we see motion on the screen even when the projected images are static: bit.ly/myth1-c

Issues in the RCN re-ballot

By Alice Hazel

The RCN rebalot will run from 23 May to 23 June. Everyone supporting a continuation of the fight on pay and to save the NHS, whatever union they are in, should do what they can to support the vote for strike.

Members will need to be convinced that escalation is possible, especially with of co-ordinated action with the BMA and Unite. Unite has a continuing mandate and is balloting in further trusts including in the ambulance sector.

We have to argue against a nurses-only strategy for the dispute. In the longer term a united scale of pay and terms and conditions across the NHS can serve us well.

The RCN's rejection of the government's offer happened because leafletting by active members and getting the vote out this time will depend on this too.

Within the RCN we should argue for Strike Committees to be reinstated. They were disbanded when RCN decided to shift to a tactic of no "derogations" That was a mistake, as we can see from the strikes on 1 May, when last-minute "mitigations" were introduced without reference to members on the ground.

Well-organised Strike Committees would give the tools to strike effectively and safely.

Strike Committees can also be the engine that organises workplaces between strikes too. We must argue for:

- A clear demand for pay restoration
- A strategy of escalating action. Single days of strike here and there were not effective
- Unity with the other health unions in dispute. Joint action with Unite and the BMA
- Open and transparent negotiations, regular input from members on decisions, local campaign and strike committees with decision making power. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □

Unite union election: who won?

By Ann Field

Turnout for the Unite the Union Executive Council elections closing 24 April was abysmally low. Voting for the regional territorial seats varied between 6.4% and 5.1%. The average was around 6%. For the industrial sector seats average turnout was also around 6%, but more erratic. It ranged from

4.6% to 9% or 10% in two seats. In the equalities seats the voting ranged from 2.7% for the youth seat to 31.2% for the retired members' seat.

In theory, some members could have cast votes for up to six different seats. But for whatever reason, this seems to have been a cause for confusion.

It is not credible, for example, that

nearly 1,000 women members entitled to vote for the women's seat deliberately returned ballot papers in which they consciously chose not to cast a vote for that seat. (Women's Seat: Number of voting papers found to be invalid – blank: 967.)

Compared with the 2020 Executive Council election, the turnout this year was pretty much the same. And there was only a slight decline – down from 17 to 14 – in the number of uncontested seats.

from outside the ranks of the Socialist Party itself and quickly died a merciful death.

The article rightly counts Suzanne Muna's election as a win for the Socialist Party.

But it omits to mention that Muna now works as a lecturer in Bristol and, in terms of her workplace, is therefore first and foremost a UCU member, albeit one who has retained her Unite membership from her previously employment with a Housing Association.

The article concludes by saying that socialists on the EC (i.e. Suzanne Muna) will now press ahead with getting Unite to disaffiliate from the Labour Party:

"There are rules amendments tabled [for the Rules Revision conference] which propose that Unite backs only those election candidates who support its policies; others call for outright disaffiliation from Labour.

"Meanwhile, an amendment has gone into the policy conference agenda calling for a referendum of Unite members on the link with Labour. Socialists on the executive will push for the strongest political lead from Unite, and for the EC to back the amendments."

This, no doubt, will enable Unite to build upon the "modest but important step towards a mass workers electoral alternative" represented by the Socialist Party/Trade Union and Socialist Coalition intervention into the May council elections, when its 256 candidates notched up 21,696 votes (i.e. less than a hundred each on average). □

Press for more all-out strikes



John Moloney

Overall, PCS is pleased with the results of our re-ballot. It was a resounding vote for continued industrial action, and we hit the thresholds in the vast majority of bargaining units in which we balloted. The big disappointment is the Department for Work Pensions (DWP), which is the biggest department in terms of union members. It's a reminder of how arbitrary and undemocratic the anti-union laws are; there was an 88% vote in favour of strikes, but if a few hundred more members had voted against striking, thereby pushing us over the threshold, DWP workers would be able to take action.

There's a strong consensus to re-ballot in the DWP as soon as possible. This time we can throw the full resources of the union into DWP as activists' workload has been enormous, having to campaign in the re-ballot as well as doing the day-to-day work of organising union activity and representation in the workplace, as well as their actual paid jobs. Most activists will also have been campaigning in the recent National Executive Committee elections, so that adds to the workload.

The NEC elections saw no major changes. The Independent Left (IL) increased its representation slightly, with two IL people getting elected. The Broad Left Network (BLN), with whom the IL stood on a joint slate, also got two people elected. The turnout was low, less than 8%, which is obviously worrying as it shows that the union has much to do to engage the mass of members with the democratic working of the PCS. On Wed 17 May, we'll know the outcome of the Group Executive Committee elections in the DWP, where there was also a IL-BLN slate.

23-25 May is our Annual Delegate Conference (ADC), where there will hopefully be multiple motions proposing different tactics for the national dispute in the period ahead.

My view remains that we need to take the maximum amount of all-members action, supplemented by selective action between national strikes.

There may also be concerns to hold back from calling all-members strikes until any re-ballot in the DWP is completed. I think that would be misguided as in my view, we need national strikes as soon as possible. Previously, when HMRC, a similarly large department, failed to meet the threshold, we still struck nationally, partially on the basis that, with the DWP on board at that time, we still had a strong base in a large, strategically significant department. We should take the same approach this time, although it's the other way around, with a mandate in HMRC but not DWP. If we wait, it could be two months until we take national action, with is a third of the length of the mandate.

The ADC will also debate multiple international issues, including Iran, Ukraine, and I hope Myanmar. The NEC motion on Ukraine proposes that the union send a delegation to link directly with Ukrainian trade unionists. If the motion passes, which I hope it does, I want to see that delegation organised as soon as possible; certainly I would like to be part of that delegation. On Myanmar, I have been told that emergency motions are being put forward. If that is the case, I hope they are passed so that we deepen our links with independent workers' organisations fighting for union rights and democracy in that country.

I'm also continuing my work to ensure that equality really is at the heart of bargaining. Accordingly, at the end of this week the union will be writing formally to the civil service to raise the issue of racial discrimination in the promotion process. White workers are twice as likely to get promoted than non-white workers. This is just one metric that shows the inequalities in the way the civil service is organised. We need to take these questions up and organise campaigns and disputes around them. □

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

Opinions

The SWP, which backed the Sharon Graham slate in the election, has yet to publish a commentary on the results. An article on the Socialist Party website argues:

"The results of Unite the Union's Executive Council (EC) elections appear to have given a slim majority to supporters of general secretary Sharon Graham's industrial programme. This includes Socialist Party member Suzanne Muna, formerly an EC member from London and Eastern, who has been elected from her new region, South West."

The United Left (UL), on the other hand, begs to disagree: "The recent Unite EC results show a majority for the United Left slate standing on a Members First platform."

Since the election the UL has also done what the UL does best: It invites independent candidates who were elected to the EC to join the UL:

"Since the result a number of independent candidates have approached us [in fact, it is the other way around] to explore ways of working together to ensure our members have a strong accountable rank and file voice on the new Executive."

Which version of who won will be clearer after the first meeting of the new EC, when it will elect its chair for the next three years.

But it is also inaccurate to reduce the composition of the EC into two sharply defined camps. The UL and the Sharon Graham slates both contained members who identify with their slates only loosely and will probably vote differently on different issues.

Curiously, and perhaps in order to avoid undermining its upbeat tone, the Socialist Party article makes no mention of the defeat of prominent EC incumbents who stood on the Sharon Graham slate, such as John Cooper, Jane Stewart, Frank Morris, Helen McFarlane and Simon Rosenthal.

Nor does the article make any mention of the fate of "Solidarity Shouts", set up by the Socialist Party after Sharon Graham's election in the hope of cashing in on her victory and establishing an alternative to the United Left. In the event, it attracted virtually no-one

Get Solidarity every week

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

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923). Standing order £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms online. □

Contact us



[020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)



solidarity@workersliberty.org



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



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



Unions: pull Starmer into line!

By Rhodri Evans

Through Labour's National Policy Forum in July and the Labour Party conference, 8-11 October in Liverpool, *Solidarity* will be pressing for activists to organise in unions and local Labour Parties to call Keir Starmer to account.

The Labour leaders' draft programme, the National Policy Forum [report](#) released on 11 May, sets up two barriers against making reality of its bland and blurred talk of social advance.

It defines everything as having to be done in concert with or for the benefit of "business". "We will make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a business by making the economy work for our entrepreneurs".

It rejects new taxes on the rich, and insists on budget-balancing with a rigidity that few orthodox bourgeois economists would endorse: "Labour will not borrow to fund day-to-day spending".

The report's warm seas of talk about improving public services and pay will freeze as they near those icy barriers, in a sort of reverse of what happens with global warming. To offset the barriers, there is only vague talk of miracles to come from "reform" (usually alias for one or another market-mechanisms drive).

No extra spending on the NHS. No abolition of tuition fees.

In Starmer's frantic pursuit of stereotype "red wall" voters, supposedly to be won over not by honest argument but by awkward mimicry of their supposed or real social conservatism and flag-waving nationalism, financially-costless policies are also dumped.

No repeal of the Public Order Act, of the Police Act 2022, of the Illegal Immigration Bill, or of the Nationality and Borders Bill. The promises to repeal the Minimum Service Bill and the Trade Union Act 2016, and to legalise electronic methods for union ballots, survive, but no repeal of Thatcher-era anti-union laws.

No reversal of Brexit, even partial (Single Market and Customs Union re-entry).

Starmer, or the Blairites in his inner circle speaking through Starmer, have taken Labour's relatively good local election results on 4 May as proof that a push to the right, scrapping previous Labour policies, being ostentatiously "pro-business" and "patriotic", and criticising the Tories mainly for being "incompetent", is a winner.

It is not, even electorally. The Tories are floundering in an impasse, scrabbling to secure their right-wing base. So on 4 May Labour got what would translate into 35% in a general election.



That's only 3% more than Labour got in the 2019 general election, often wrongly portrayed as a worst-ever, and 3% less than in the 1991 locals, before Labour's 1992 election defeat.

Since Lib Dems and Greens will probably do better in the next general election than in 2019 or 1992, Labour will probably come out ahead of the Tories. But nothing is certain. Short of banking wobbles like Silicon Valley Bank and Credit Suisse triggering an economic crash – still possible – the Tories are likely to be able to point to some economic relief by election day, if only lower inflation rates, and to make some tax cuts.

We can imagine Starmer saying that Labour will not reverse even those tax cuts, and still saying that relief for the NHS will come only through "reform". No wonder he now opens the door to coalition government with the Lib Dems. And there is a limit to how many working-class and young voters will turn out for a leader who treats them so cynically and manipulatively.

We expect no miracles in the next few months. The strike wave since June 2022 has boosted trade-union activism in many areas, but the boost has *not yet* filtered through to increased political activism: witness the smallness of recent demonstrations about the NHS, and the absence or near-absence of demonstrations against the Public Order Act, the Illegal Immigration Bill, and the Minimum Service Bill.

Not yet. We work to speed the day. Every toe-hold gained now, every small drawing-in of new young people into week-to-week labour movement activity, every sustained political battle that puts down markers, will give us a stronger base for ousting the Tories and deploying labour-movement pressure on an incoming Labour government. □

• NPF document and detailed notes to be used for CLP critical comments (before 29 May): bit.ly/npf-n

Israel/Gaza: no security without peace

By Ollie Moore

When Egypt brokered a precarious ceasefire on 13 May, 35 Palestinians, including three children, and one Israeli had been killed in the latest round of military conflict between the Israeli state and Palestinian Islamist groups in Gaza. Over a hundred Palestinians had been injured.

The latest outbreak was spurred by Israel's targeted assassinations of leading figures in Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), one of two main Islamist paramilitary groups active in Gaza, along with Hamas. Those assassinations effectively broke a ceasefire brokered by Egypt a week earlier, which brought an end to clashes (rockets into Israel, bombs into Gaza) after PIJ activist Khader Adnan died whilst on hunger strike in an Israeli prison.

Pressure

The intensification of attacks by Israel is widely seen a response to pressure from far-right elements within the government. Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer, writing in *Ha'aretz*, argues that "Netanyahu has been under intense, open pressure from Itamar Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit party for not responding more forcefully [...] Ben-Gvir and his colleagues have since refused to take part in ministerial meetings and Knesset proceedings. They even exchanged resignation threats with Likud. This wasn't damaging to Netanyahu just on a coalition level. It was a direct challenge to his 'Mr. Security' image among the wider Israeli public, at a time where he has already taken major hits in the opinion polls due to the protests [against planned judicial reform]."

In other words: Palestinian lives are seen as acceptable collateral to shore up the political power of a right-wing government.

The two sides in this conflict are militarily mismatched. The vast majority of Palestinian rockets are either intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defence system, cause some damage to buildings but no injuries to people, or fall short. (Israel says some of the Palestinians killed in the recent outbreak were killed by rockets fired within Gaza falling short).

Although Israel does not militarily occupy Gaza in the way it does in swathes of the West Bank, the conditions of life in Gaza are still fundamentally shaped by Israel's blockade, maintained in collaboration with Egypt. The blockade prevents

regular access to basic necessities, including utilities such as electricity.

Against the backdrop of desperately oppressive conditions, it is unsurprising that many Gazans support the military resistance of PIJ and Hamas. However, these groups do not express only an instinctive "resistance" to oppression, but rather have comprehensive political projects of their own, for an Islamic state over the whole area which was Palestine under the British Mandate 1920-48. Their indiscriminate rocket attacks against civilian targets in Israel express are just one expression of the thoroughly reactionary nature of those politics.

Liberation

If the resistance of PIJ and Hamas was "more effective", in the sense of more of its rockets finding their targets and killing greater numbers of Israelis, that would be a horrific development, not one that moved the Palestinian people any closer to liberation. As Gazans who have lived under the rule of the Hamas-run semi-state know well, the social programme of such groups is itself deeply oppressive, especially for women, LGBT+ people, and other minorities.

In a very real sense, and despite their military asymmetry, the extreme chauvinists on both sides need each other. Rocket attacks against Israeli civilians bolster the security narratives of the militarists in Israeli society; periodic Israeli assaults and the choking effects of the blockade bolster support in Gaza for Islamist paramilitaries, as seemingly the only people standing up to Israel.

The conflict has no military solution, only a political one. As the left-wing Jewish-Arab social movement Standing Together has proclaimed, in protests against war it has organised in several towns: "No security without peace." Security for the peoples of Israel and Palestine can only be assured on the basis of a political settlement that levels up rights between the two peoples, guaranteeing both an equal right to self-determination.

- End the war on Gaza – stop the bombing, stop the blockade!
- No to rockets!
- End the occupation – for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel!
- Workers' unity across the borders – towards a socialist federation of the Middle East! □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

RAIL: NEXT STEPS IN THE TOCS DISPUTE



Off The Rails

It was good to be back on the picket lines on 12-13 May, as both Aslef and RMT returned to industrial action in the national dispute with the Rail Delivery Group over pay, jobs, and conditions on Train Operating Companies.

We need to ensure that is swiftly followed up with further, escalated action.

Sporadic strikes aren't enough to force satisfactory concessions from the employers. RMT's National Executive Committee will soon meet to discuss naming further action.

As Mick Lynch noted in several media interviews when asked about why the strike had been scheduled for a Saturday, many TOCs branches have called for Saturday strikes. With commuting habits having changed post-pandemic, Saturday is now the day that sees most rail travel, and thus is the day on which many rail workers feel we have most leverage. Given the clear call for Saturday strikes from several TOCs branches, the union should name ongoing Saturday strikes.

But we can't rely on a "Saturdays-only" strategy. Striking

every Saturday for several months would be a form of escalation relative to the previous strategy of striking for one or two days with weeks or months in between rounds of action, but it's unlikely that even this would budge the employers far enough. This strategy was pursued in some of the disputes against Driver Only Operation in the past, without clear success. Ongoing Saturday strikes need to be supplemented with sustained strikes through the week, for three or more days, to maximise the pressure. A programme of action that began with a three-day strike, followed by a month of Saturday strikes, followed by a further three-or-four day strike, could get results.

That's a big step up from where we've been previously. We should offset the financial burden as much as possible via an effective use of hardship funds. And if we go for a strategy that might actually win, the sacrifice will be worth it.

On the Aslef side, calling three strikes in relatively quick succession (on 12 and 31 May, and 3 June) is a step up. But, again, it's unlikely to be enough.



Now that both unions have resumed action, the question of coordination is posed immediately again. The prevailing consensus is that it's better for the two unions to strike separately, as this spreads disruption over two days, rather than one. We remain unconvinced that this benefit outweighs the disadvantage of entrenching sectional identities, where workers identify with their own union or job role rather than as rail workers engaged in a common fight over issues that affect all grades.

Joint discussions, at least of the two unions' NECs, to develop and agree a common strategy, would be good.

With TransPennine Express having been nationalised due to its franchise holder's failings, it's surely also time for rail unions to step up our demand for the full public ownership of the railways. □

• Abridged. More bit.ly/tocs-n

