

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



RESTORE NHS, PUBLIC SERVICES

» **Tax the rich!**

» **Renationalise rail and mail**

» **Strengthen the pay fight**

See inside

Against banning books in Poland

August Grabski on the Russian nationalist author Zachar Prilepin

Pages 8-9

PCS: no time to give up on pay

After Tories offer £1,500 one-off, union signals weakness

Pages 6-7

Students fight uni clampdowns

Sheffield, Manchester, Brighton: moves against protesters

Page 5

"Socialistic nation of scholars..."

How James Connolly saw Ireland before the 17th century

Page 11

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban

Tax the rich, fund services!



Editorial

The Tory government has ruled on behalf of the capitalist class and the rich. Under the Tories, Britain has become more unequal.

In 2022, incomes for the poorest 14mn people fell by 7.5%, while incomes for the richest fifth saw a 7.8% increase.

The richest fifth of earners had an income more than 12 times the amount earned by the poorest fifth.

The top 1% have incomes [much higher](#) than the rest of those in the top 10%. The differences in wealth are even starker. In 2020, the Office for National Statistics calculated that the richest 10% of households hold 43% of all wealth. The poorest 50% own just 9%.

Nearly 3mn people used foodbanks in 2022-3. One in ten of the population, or 6.5mn people, live in damp, draughty and cramped sub-standard accommodation.

Simultaneously the Tories have run down Britain's public services.

Those who can afford to now often pay to see a private GP, as getting an NHS appointment is so difficult.

Seeing a dentist on the NHS is also often hard: in 2021 the UK had only 5.15 dentists per 10,000 people: [com-](#)

[pare](#) Germany, 8.53, Sweden, 17.73. In 2022 Labour scheduled a debate in Parliament on the UK's dental crisis. MPs reported constituents having to wait two years for NHS treatment, attempting to pull their own teeth with pliers, and Labour alleged that the commonest reason for children going to hospital now is to have teeth removed.

Britain in 2023 has fewer hospital beds than almost any other rich country. Among 18 of the richest countries, Britain has some of the worst five-year survival rates for breast, colon and lung cancers.

The 2019 Tory election manifesto promised the building of 40 new hospitals. It quickly emerged that some of those "new hospitals" were extensions of old ones. And an investigation by the [Observer](#) in February concluded that the majority of these "40 new hospitals" don't even have planning permission yet.

The Tory Brexit lie of £350mn extra per week for the NHS was promoted by Boris Johnson, a buffoon and windbag, who had no intention of fulfilling that pledge which was cynically invented by his spin doctors to fool the gullible. Meanwhile, as we face the Brexit damage, Johnson "earned" £5mn in the first six months after he left office as Prime Minister, from speaking engagements and book deals.

Social care provision staggers on,

in crisis. Last year's promised government reforms which would have meant more people were eligible for publicly funded social care, and that a cap on lifetime social care costs would be introduced, have been shelved. Endemic poor pay in the sector has led to high job vacancy levels. Numbers of people asking for publicly funded care have been rapidly diverging from the numbers getting that care.

What conclusions are there, here, for the left and the unions? We need a government which is willing to tax the rich to fund public services.

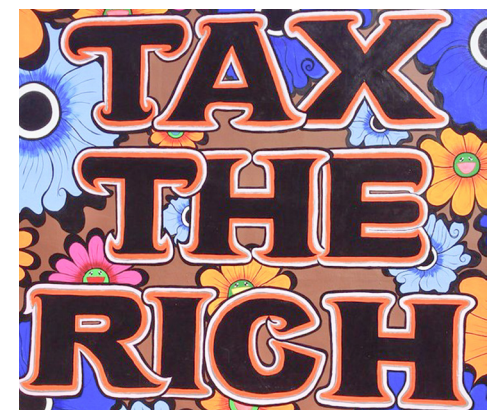
Moreover, the labour movement needs control over the process of reform. Social care (private care homes etc) should be nationalised, with staff on NHS pay and conditions.

Public utility companies (water, gas, electricity), which are natural monopolies should be nationalised and amalgamated under workers' control.

The same should happen to our rail services.

The minimum wage must be increased, and increased in future by a "lock" to e.g. median male earnings.

And an Ipsos poll from February showed only 10% (8% in England) think the government has the right policies for the NHS. Support for the NHS is overwhelming: 90% believe the NHS should be free at the point of delivery. 84% think the NHS should be funded



primarily through taxation.

Who should pay for our health care and adequate, decent services? The rich should pay by being taxed more.

However, Labour leader Keir Starmer, who was elected on a Corbyn-style programme of reform which he has now abandoned, and his band of Blairite advisors, are adamant that this will not happen. They are pro-market dogmatists, out of step with the labour movement.

The unions, reinvigorated following the pay-strike wave, must demand better.

We must impose our will on Starmer and Labour. They expect us to work for a Labour government. We will do so, of course. The Tories must be thrown out of office. But we must do so with the intent of reversing the staggering inequality in Britain. □

Capitalist "s/v" and mental health



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Ludwig Wittgenstein was the most famous philosopher of the 20th century. In his 30s, after getting out his only finished book, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he worked for several years as a primary school teacher in a remote villages in Austria.

He fled teaching in 1926 because he had repeatedly beaten a student about the head, and the student collapsed. The village people were used to teachers hitting small children, but this was too much. A formal complaint failed, but Wittgenstein had quit anyway (and ten years later would return to the village to apologise).

Teachers are now banned from hitting students (though in the UK only since 1998; it was banned in Russia by the workers' revolution in 1917, and by many European states earlier than in the UK). And it is becoming relatively common for top bosses to get into trouble for abusing high-level subordinates, usually for sexual harassment (CBI scandal) but sometimes for intimidating or insulting speech (Dominic Raab).

Sadly, this doesn't mean that capitalism is getting rid of bullying and abuse.

Capitalism generates more resistance to bullying than previous modes like serfdom or slavery, where it is endemic. Wage-workers in a capitalist society generally have more self-confidence, and more will to support each other against bosses' abuse, than serfs or slaves.

As Marx put it: "The so-

cial principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-abasement, resignation, submission and humility, in short, all the characteristics of the canaille [rabble], but the proletariat is not prepared to let itself be treated as canaille and it needs its courage, confidence, pride and independence even more than it needs its daily bread".

On the capitalist side, the big shareholders want their managers to employ competent people, not personal favourites, and to promote productivity rather than sullen plodding-on. Direct personal abuse has tended to be in the "higher" spheres and the "lower" (as with gangmasters and such).

Current moves against abuse in "higher" spheres are good. But at the same time mental ill-health has increased for the bulk of workers.

Why? Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson showed in [The](#)

[Inner Level](#) that anxiety, depression, etc. are correlated with social inequality (and more with that than with absolute living standards).

An ultra-competitive society with a chasm between "winners" and "losers" pushes many (and perhaps especially school students) into seeing themselves as "failures". Workplace exploitation compounds that.

[78%](#) of school teachers in the UK report mental ill-health (2022). In my observation, it is common to find teachers reduced to tears by their work.

The immediate trigger may be unruly students, but there are more tears than with just as many unruly students in the 1970s or in countries now where schools are less crammed into "exam factory" mode. Teachers are plagued with management surveillance, "performance assessment" via grades, and pointless or even

counterproductive box-ticking and cramming.

[69%](#) of lawyers or paralegals suffer mental ill-health each year, and I'm told tears at work are common there too. Yet teachers and even junior lawyers are better-off workers, in what have long been considered easier jobs. Capitalist work pressure – the "personal" expression of Marx's formulas about "s/v", "necessary labour", "surplus labour" – is reaching out even to those trades.

And being ramped up in other trades, from mail delivery to health care to cleaning.

It's not the same as the direct person-to-person bullying suffered by slaves and sometimes by satraps. But it blights life. Socialism will replace that blighting with comradeship, collective, cooperative, supportive work discipline, social equality, lighter workloads and shorter work hours. □

Pay rises, from 18% to 2%

By Ollie Moore

The last time the yearly rate of RPI inflation was below 5% was September-to-September 2021-2. Since April 2022, that yearly rate has never yet dropped below 10%. The Bank of England, whose predictions have been over-optimistic, expects yearly CPI inflation still to be at 5% in late 2023. Any pay "increase" for workers below the yearly rate of inflation at the time of the award represents a real-wage cut compared to 12 months before.

Despite greatly increased levels of industrial action, and despite many workers forcing real improvements relative to bosses' original offers (for 2022-3 the government offered civil service workers 2%), few workers have succeeded in winning above-inflation pay rises.

Where workers have won higher increases, it has invariably been as the result of prolonged, sometimes indefinite, strikes. Liverpool dockers won increases of between 14 and 18%. Dockers at Felixstowe won a 7% increase, plus a one-off payment of £500, for 2022, and an 8.5% increase and one-off payment of £1,000 for 2023. National Express West Midlands workers won a 16.2% pay rise. Abellio bus drivers in London won an increase to £18/hour, an 18% increase on the basic rate of pay.

The union involved in all cases was Unite. Unite has taken a decision to pay strike pay of £70 per day to all striking members, so workers feel more secure in taking sustained action.

Few unions will be able to match this;

Unite can pay more strike pay because each single group of strikers is a small proportion of its total membership. But all unions can undoubtedly do more in terms of improving the financial support available to members, either through strike pay or targeted hardship payments.

Scottish local government workers got a better deal than many for 2022-3: after relatively sustained strikes, workers earning less than £20,500 got a £2,000 flat-rate increase (representing between 9.8 and 10.7%); workers earning between £20,500 and £39,000, a £1,925 increase (between 5 and 9.8%); workers earning between £39,000 and £60,000, a 5% increase; and workers earning over £60,000, a £3,000 increase. On 3 April 2023, the employer made an offer for 2023-4 of 5% on all pay grades.

Teachers

In March 2023, after sustained strikes, Scottish teachers accepted an improved pay increase, covering 2022-3 (7%) and 2023-4 (5%). English teachers got 5% for 2022-3 (more for some lower-paid staff). On 21 May, the Sunday Times reported a leak from the School Teachers' Review Body claiming the Body had recommended a 6.5% pay increase for teachers in England from September, for 2023-4. The government's current offer, made in March 2023 and rejected by teachers' unions, is for a 4.5% increase.

In the NHS, a pay deal for 2022-4 implemented after a majority of affected unions voted to accept, is a one-off pay-

ment of between £1,655 and £3,789, depending on pay grade, to cover 2022-3, and a 5% increase for 2023-4. Members of Unite and the Royal College of Nursing have continued industrial action. Junior doctors in Scotland are currently voting on whether to accept a 6.5% increase for 2023-4, and a 7.5% increase for 2022-3. Their counterparts in England plan further strikes in June, where the government's offer currently stands at 5%.

In March 2023, firefighters voted to accepted a two-year pay deal with an increase of 7% from July 2022-July 2023, and a 5% increase from July 2023.

Local government workers in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland had a £1,925 flat-rate pay increase for 2022-3. The offer has been repeated for 2023-4. All three main local government unions, Unison, GMB, and Unite, have rejected it this year.

In the civil service, employers have been told they can increase pay by 4.5%, or up to 5% for lower grades for 2022-3, but with an expectation that government departments fund pay increases from their own budgets. On 2 June, the government offered an additional £1,500 unconsolidated payment.

In the high-profile dispute on the national rail, Network Rail workers voted by a 76% majority to accept a two-year deal, involving a £1,750 consolidated increase, or 5% (whichever is higher for a given role) for 1 January 2022 to 30 September 2022, and a further 4% increase to annual base rates of pay for 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2023.



Rail workers employed by Train Operating Companies are still in dispute; the Rail Delivery Group's latest offer is for a 5% increase backdated to 1 January 2022, and a 4% increase for 2023-4.

In Royal Mail, a "negotiators' agreement" between the company and the Communication Workers Union leadership includes a 2% increase from April 2022, a 6% increase from April 2023, and a 2% increase from April 2024. Following strikes, BT workers, also in the CWU, were awarded a £1,500 flat-rate increase from 1 January 2023. The CWU presented the award as a victory, despite it being identical to the increase imposed for 2022, which the union had denounced. □

Strikes

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

From 22 May: Drivers for GXO on contract to City Plumbing, Warrington (Unite), launch indefinite strike to win reinstatement for sacked rep

30 May-26 June: Workers at St Mungo's homeless charity (Unite) strike.

5-8 June: SOAS academic staff (UCU) strike

5-8 June: (and 13-16 and 19-22 June) Lecturers at City of Glasgow college (EIS) strike

6-8 June: Offshore oil and gas contractors (Unite) strike

6-8 June: Workers at Prendergast schools in Lewisham

strike against academisation (NEU and GMB)

12-16 June: Workers at SOAS (Unison) strike

13, 15, 20 June: Cleaners, care workers, and concierge workers at seven workplaces across London (UVW) strike

14-16 June: (ends 7am 17 June) junior doctors in England (BMA) strike

20-21 June, 26-27 June, and 5-7 July: Manchester Metropolitan University workers (Unison) strike over pay

Ballots

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

15 May-27 June: Senior doc-

tors (BMA) ballot for action over pay

15 May-28 July: Teachers in England (NEU) ballot for action over pay. Nasuwt rebal-lots 15 May-12 June (in 6th form colleges) and 5 June-10 July (in schools), and NAHT 15 May-31 July, ASCL 19 June-31 July.

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

From 30 May: Cleaners at several mainline Train Operating Companies (RMT) re-ballot to renew industrial action mandate



Upcoming meetings

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

Thursday 8 June, 7pm: Anti-union laws: where now in the fight?

Thursday 8 June, 8pm: State and Revolution – Zoom study group

Sunday 11 June, 11am: Ecosocialist reading group: Jevons Paradox

Thursday 15 June, 3pm: Tubeworker monthly meeting – Why LGBT+ Equality is a Union Issue

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 \[workersliberty.org/events\]\(https://workersliberty.org/events\)](https://workersliberty.org/events) or scan QR code □



The risks from bird flu



Environment

By Léo Karran

For the past two years a variant of H5N1 avian influenza (bird flu) has been circulating in wild and domestic bird populations. This strain, particularly transmissible and deadly to birds, started in unaffected geese and ducks (migratory birds).

The flu variant has not yet spread in humans; measures to guard against that have included six months where farmed birds have been kept inside and a number of other measures affecting animal welfare.

A select few strains of influenza (H1 and H3) can infect humans (and pigs), whilst birds are affected by H5 and H7 influenza. Humans can become ill with bird flus when working very closely with birds, though only seven bird-to-human infections have been recorded with this strain, and no human-human

infections.

However, the mixing of different flus within the same host can allow significant exchange and reordering of variants and new strains of highly transmissible and more deadly genes. Hosts for different strains of influenza can easily mingle in agriculture (horses, pigs, chickens, humans).

The global impact on poultry is much more significant than the human cost so far. Since this strain was identified in late 2021, it has infected 60+ species of wild birds including shoreline migratory geese and other fowl as well as domesticated chickens and turkeys, with wide global spread along migratory routes. More than 300 UK farms have reported cases.

Whilst you shouldn't worry about birds in your garden, agricultural birds have been culled in exceptionally high numbers (200+ million globally), and other mammals too (the first reported case of infection in mink led to a large cull there).

The economic impact from domestic



culls, changing animal housing practices to being inside has been great on farmers, and is reflected partially in the rising cost of meat. In Brazil, the largest exporter of chicken globally, the outbreak has been tremendously detrimental to local populations within a country struggling with deforestation and climate impacts.

For free range birds to be housed inside can create knock-on issues for health. When housed inside, birds are typically cramped, which can facilitate disease spread, and factory farming practices utilise low and permanent doses of antibiotics to keep their poultry "healthy".

Such practices utilise the vast majority

of antibiotics globally, and are also responsible for the majority of developing antibiotic resistance within bacteria that can infect humans (salmonella).

Vaccine stocks are available for humans but in short supply, unequally distributed and very technically difficult to scale up. Avian vaccines have been used but again their distribution is unequal and often out of reach for impoverished farmers.

Globally there are some initiatives for surveillance, but without universal access and sharing of data, it is limited.

We should recognise the need for publicly owned vaccine manufacturers, fully funded public disease monitoring and effective responses by all levels of public organising in health and agriculture.

The risk is for now relatively low to humans, but not zero; a mutation could lead to epidemics of a scale and lethality like the "Spanish flu" or Covid. People should be prioritised over the perceived "savings" of capitalist inaction on this. □

America the "most authoritarian"?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Anti-Americanism has a long history on the left. Of course the American history of genocide of the native population, slavery and then segregation at home, and imperialist aggression overseas, is repugnant to anyone calling themselves a socialist.

Recent events surrounding the rise of the fascist Donald Trump and the fact that in November 2020, 74 million Americans voted fascist, only goes to confirm a dim view of the so-called "land of the free."

But can America seriously be described as "the most authoritarian country in the world"?

That description comes from Roger McKenzie, former Unison bureaucrat, recent recruit to the CPB, and now a prominent contributor to the *Morning Star*, which on 1 June gave him a whole page in which to put forward that thesis, covering every American crime from its genocidal foundation



through to the abolition of Roe v Wade abortion rights last year.

But the "most authoritarian country in the world"? Despite the best efforts of Trump and his supporters, the US remains a bourgeois democracy – flawed, limited and under increasing attack from the Trump/DeSantis fascist and semi-fascist right, but still a bourgeois democracy. Despite the nonsense of the electoral college and much else, there are elections. Despite DeSantis' bizarre anti-"woke" campaign in Florida, in general free speech survives. Despite the overturn of Roe v Wade, protesting women are not (yet) gunned down in cold blood as they are in Iran or denied basic human rights as in Afghanistan.

Despite the regular police killings of Black people, what

is happening to them is not on the genocidal scale of what is happening to the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province of China. And, unlike in China, there are independent trade unions.

The Democracy Index, produced every year by the Economist Intelligence Unit, is of course, not compiled on the basis of socialist values. But it is considered a reliable and thoroughly-researched guide to measuring how the nations of the world measure up in terms of electoral freedom, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture: nations are then categorised as "full democracies", "flawed democracies", hybrid regimes" and "authoritarian regimes."

In 2022, Norway topped the list of "full democracies" with the UK at 18th. The US has been listed as a "flawed democracy" ever since the Index began in 2006 and presently stands at 30th (down by 4 points). Among 167 countries, Russia ("authoritarian") is at 146 (down 22 points), Iran is at 154, China is joint 156th (with Tajikistan), Syria is 163rd and North Korea 165th. Afghanistan is at the bottom.

McKenzie, perhaps aware that his claim of America being the "most authoritarian country in the world" doesn't bear scrutiny, goes on to shift his ground: "The US is out there on its own, though, because of the way authoritarian measures that begin in the US spread like a contagious disease elsewhere."

This is, presumably a reference to America's many foreign wars and coups against non-compliant regimes. McKenzie is on slightly stronger ground here, but ignores China's recent policy of promoting authoritarianism around the world by means of propaganda, economic influence and the capture of corrupt elites using Chinese technology to repress their citizens.

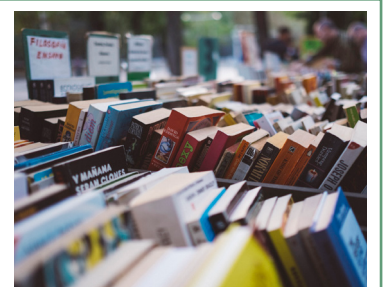
Of course, McKenzie avoids dealing with any of this, claiming that he "can already hear

the shrill liberal voices pointing the finger at other parts of the globe from a mostly anti-communist or Islamophobic standpoint".

Despite McKenzie's crude anti-Americanism, genuine socialists have always known there is another America, recalled by the US Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon in 1948: "It is well to recall now that America was born of revolution in 1776, and secured its unity as a nation through another revolution – the Civil War – which smashed the abomination of chattel slavery in the process. Our great, rich wonderful country was once the light and hope of the world... we firmly believe the real America – the America of the workers, the people – will help save the world by saving herself." □

Second hand books

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the current stock and prices, and to order. □



Sheffield, Manchester, Brighton: students fight clampdowns

By Sam Myerson

At the time of writing the [statement](#) organised by the Student Cost of Living Campaign calling on the University of Sheffield to drop ongoing investigations and proceedings, and end the use of private investigators against student protesters, has 350 signatures.

The last Sheffield University Student Union Council passed a motion passed condemning the securitisation of campus, the university's disproportionate response to activists, and the intimidating environment it created. We're still waiting, however, for public statement

from the Student Union, or from its officers, on the recently reported use of private investigators by management against students.

In Manchester, as reported in the *Guardian* ([4 June](#)), students are facing the threat of expulsion from University over their occupation of University buildings in support of the demands of the Rent Strike campaign. This is affecting final year students, who may be prevented from graduating. Disciplinary hearings are being held on the day after some students' final exam. A 600 page dossier was presented to students after the investigation was com-

pleted. The students have a [fundraiser](#) for legal costs.

Students in Brighton have now ended their occupation after an apparent fire in the building, during which no fire marshals were in place and security left the building. This has been reported in a [statement](#) from the occupiers.

The response of the university to the occupation is all too familiar: no engagement with the occupiers, straight to legal threats and court processes, all from institutions that cry poverty, cutting courses, jobs and pay. □



Punishing families is no cure



Women's
Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Darren Rodwell, the Labour leader of Barking and Dagenham council and parliamentary candidate for Barking, has threatened to evict council-tenant families not working with the police over knife crime.

"If your child is involved in an incident and knows who the perpetrators are, and refuses to speak out, we will look at reviewing your housing agreement," Rodwell said. "Everyone must play their part in stopping these crimes. As parents, it is up to us to know where our children are, and that we play

an active role."

He added: "If families know their relatives are linked to crime, they must speak up or we will start to look at tenancy agreements."

Barking Council is writing to parents telling them they must act to stop violence and anti-social behaviour during the "lost hours" of 3pm to 7pm, the hours where children and young people are no longer at school but many parents are still at work.

The plan is clearly an attack on the basics of criminal justice. There is no detail on burden of proof required to take action against a family for insufficiently working with the police, but clearly it will be less than that required for conviction of any crime, or the threat would not be necessary.



Darren Rodwell

It is also another sign of the socially conservative direction of the Labour Party. Labour Councils have closed youth services and have stood by as life got worse for most working-class people. The blame for social ills is placed with parents (especially mothers), and the solution is police and losing everything if you don't satisfy the police that you are

cooperative enough.

The shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, has said Labour will deliver 13,000 additional police officers and community support officers, and claimed that "only Labour is the party of law and order now".

Labour has chosen meaningless law-and-order rhetoric over solutions that might actually reduce knife crime. Local government budgets for youth services have been cut, including safe young people's spaces and targeted services to help young people leave or avoid gangs. Inequality has been shown to drive an increase in violence, and London is becoming more unequal. By placing the responsibility for violent crime at the door of mothers, Labour is indulging in placing additional burden on

working-class mothers whilst letting the true culprits off the hook. □



Activist
Agenda

A meeting on 3 June in London launched the new umbrella "Workers Against the CCP" China solidarity campaign, bringing together Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong, the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, and several other groups. The new campaign's first outing was the next day, 4 June, when its supporters joined some hundreds of others at the Tiananmen Square massacre commemoration in Trafalgar Square, London, called by [China Deviants](#). Other upcoming activities include support for the Uyghur rights demonstration, 6pm outside the Chinese Embassy, on 5 July, the anniversary of the Urumqi massacre. The new campaign will in due course set up its own website and mailing list, but for the present you can sign up for [emails](#) via LSWHK and follow news via the [LSWHK twitter](#). □

- Links for campaigns and motions at [workersliberty.org/agenda](#)

Hundreds killed in India train crash

By Sacha Ismail

The official death toll from the rail crash in the eastern Indian state of Odisha on 2 June is 288, with 803 injured. We send condolences and solidarity to the victims and their loved ones.

We send our solidarity to India's rail workers and their unions, engaged in a long struggle against the understaffing, cuts and privatisation that form the background to

this disaster.

India has a long history of devastating rail collisions; this is far from the first one that has seen hundreds killed. Its infrastructure is crumbling. Two days after the Odisha crash a four-lane suspension bridge in the state of Bihar collapsed for the second time in fourteen months.

Despite its modernisation rhetoric, the far-right government in power under Nar-

endra Modi since 2014 has worsened the situation.

Spectacular tragedies like this one occur in the context of vast numbers harmed in industrial accidents, through overwork, inadequate nutrition, lack of services and infrastructure, and poor social conditions.

As the UK and Indian governments seek a free trade agreement at the expense of working people in both coun-

tries, UK-India workers' solidarity is needed. Rail workers, reaching out to learn and co-operate on the similar issues they face, can be an essential part of that. □

Eric Lee

Eric Lee's column is taking a break for a couple of weeks while he is on holiday. □

PCS conference sticks with weak strategy

By a PCS member

PCS, by far the largest civil service trade union, met in national conference between 23-25 May 2023.

The major agenda item before Conference was the national dispute over pay, pensions, job security, and redundancy pay. The argument at Conference was whether the NEC's conduct of the dispute would be sufficient to win the dispute, most critically the demand for a 10% pay rise backdated to 2022 and a living wage of at least £15 an hour.

The NEC argued for continuation of the current approach of once in a blue moon cross civil service one day strikes and paid selective action. Alternative motions and speakers rightly argued for an escalation of national and selective action; noted that a hostile government would not be persuaded to meet our pay claim by the current level of action; and that the spasmodic national strikes were damaging to the momentum of the dispute.

The General Secretary replied that PCS members were not like RMT and CWU and would not accept being called out for fifteen days of national strike action. It was a classic bureaucratic argument – avoid addressing the lack of action (three days in seven months) and instead pick another figure and say members would not support that number of strikes across an unstated period.

Vote

The NEC won the conference vote but their strategy is not close to winning the 2022 claim for a 10% pay rise. This was confirmed by the government on 2 June, when it said it will give Departments discretion to give staff a £1,500 one off, unfunded, taxable, lump sum but nothing more, no consolidated increase in salary backdated to 2022. The Government is, of course, planning another real terms salary cut for 2023.

SWP supporters argue for escalation but maintain their long-standing position of supporting a leadership opposed to escalation while opposing the election of those activists who also argue for stepping up the fight.

Remarkably, the SWP comrades' position of sticking with the current leadership no matter what, includes supporting a long standing, very well paid official as the leadership's candidate for Assistant General Secretary (AGS) in opposition to John Moloney,

the current AGS, formerly a low-paid clerical worker and now the only senior official who favours escalation and who donates a considerable proportionate of his salary to the PCS Fighting Fund (over £100,000 since his election in 2019) on the principle of elected officials taking a workers wage.

The international section was very positive, largely thanks to the work of the [Independent Left](#) group in the union and Assistant General Secretary John Moloney. In constructive engagement with NEC members, John has improved the work of PCS's international committee since taking over international matters about a year ago and has shifted it to a more active engagement with solidarity campaigns and trade unions elsewhere in the world.

Conference agreed to work with Solidarity with the Iranian Workers, chaired by John McDonnell MP, to promote solidarity with struggles in Iran, to organise a distinct trade union presence on solidarity mobilisations, and to make direct links with workers, workers' organisations and socialist, democratic and feminists groupings resisting the regime.

Similarly, Conference passed a motion in support of the beleaguered trade unions in Myanmar and to take various actions to render that solidarity meaningful, including, in response to a request made by Myanmar trade unions in a meeting with PCS, to call on the UK Government to ban the export of aviation gas and diesel to Myanmar, including fuels ostensibly exported to Myanmar for commercial use, as these fuels are used by the military regime to attack the population.

An NEC motion reaffirmed PCS's condemnation of Russia's continued invasion of Ukraine, its solidarity with the Ukrainian people and its trade unions, and Ukrainians' right to defend themselves and to liberate their country. The motion declared that "it should only be Ukraine that decides the aims of their resistance and when to enter into negotiations with Russia." It instructed the NEC to offer whatever practical solidarity is possible to sister unions in Ukraine and to send a delegation in co-operation with sister Ukrainian unions and the Ukrainian Solidarity Campaign. Interestingly, after last year's comprehensive defeats at national conference of the pseudo anti-imperialism of the Stop the War stripe, such opposition was not forthcoming this year. Opponents of the policy sat on their hands



on an unprincipled basis.

The Conference was the worst since the formation of PCS, when it was controlled by the right-wing "Moderates" group, for blatant manipulation. The President, Fran Heathcote filibustered the conference.

Unfortunately for her, a WhatsApp message she sent, explicitly asking Left Unity (the leadership faction) delegates to come in on a motion to waste time so that a motion they opposed would not be heard, was leaked and went around the conference hall.

Whilst we all know that such manipulation happens, this was positive proof. The motion she was trying not to get heard was in relation to the union's LGBT+ network, "PCS Proud" (more on this, further on). Whilst normal in many unions, the tactic of "talking out" is absolutely appalling, anti-democratic, behaviour. It denies delegates the opportunity to debate and decide on policies that the NEC majority does want heard. If the President was sending messages in relation to one motion,

then it must be obvious to delegates that she might have been filibustering other motions.

So why prevent hearing a motion on Proud? LGBT+ activists want it to be a self-organising group, the leadership wants it to be a network under the control of a Full Time Official, and ultimately the General Secretary. If self organised, activists will push an agenda on Trans rights that the General Secretary is opposed to. Mark Serwotka believes it possible to be stridently "Gender-Critical" and at the same time be fully supportive of Trans rights; you can't. The leading proponents of "Gender-Critical" views are opposed to Trans rights and the two viewpoints cannot be reconciled. One of the good things with Mark Serwotka leaving the union is that his views on "Gender-Critical" will be ditched as they are not supported by the bulk of the union. Only the GS's personal prestige and bureaucratic intransigence have given them the prominence they have had up to now. □



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, Corbynism, 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". □

Next steps for PCS pay

By a PCS member

On 2 June the government informed PCS, and two other civil service unions (FDA and Prospect), that it is prepared to allow departments the “discretion” to pay an additional £1,500 to civil servants “in recognition of the pressures that they have felt during the 2022/23 pay year.”

The £1,500 would be unconsolidated, i.e., it will not increase salaries. Departments variously announced that they will implement the unconsolidated lump sum or that they would consider it in departmental negotiations.

Some departments have, apparently, suggested that payment will not be made to staff on poor performance procedures (usually lower-grade, often ethnic minority, often with a “disability” as defined in law) and to staff on attendance warnings (which would exclude staff with serious illnesses and with “disability”).

The ministerial explanation for this discretion – “in recognition of the pressures” – is nauseating in its hypocrisy. The ruling Conservative party has driven down the real pay of civil servants for thirteen years, including in the last pay freeze in 2021.

PCS members need substantial, permanent, increases in pay. An unconsolidated award of £1,500 in the 2023-24 pay year comes nowhere near to meeting PCS’s claim for a 10% consolidated pay increase for 2022-23 and a living-wage underpin of £15ph.

But PCS’s scant report read: “...PCS welcomed the fact that the government and Cabinet Office has now listened and responded to the concerns of our members after they have taken what has been the most industrial action in the union’s history in this dispute.”

Members’ concern is that they should receive a consolidated pay increase that matches inflation. Ministers have not responded to that concern. Properly recognising that the Tories have moved a little because of the PCS action does not require a serious leadership to exaggerate that small move.

Earlier this month PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka stated: “In HMRC alone, almost one in three staff are now on national minimum wage. In DWP one in five staff are having to claim in-work benefits. These people are the government’s own workforce, who are suffering the consequence of year after consecutive year of meagre pay rises leaving tens of thousands of them in financial crisis.”

An unconsolidated one-off payment will leave members on the minimum wage, still having to claim benefits. It will do so after 20 years or more of “socialist” leadership of PCS by Left Unity



and Serwotka.

The Government will immediately recoup a chunk of an unconsolidated payment by reducing the amount of in-work benefit paid to civil service recipients and by extracting higher repayment of student loans from younger staff.

Buried within the Government’s decision to pass to departments the discretion for the payment of the £1,500 is a Tory trap.

PCS has prohibited departmental and other bargaining unit representatives from engaging in delegated pay talks for 2023-24, to ensure unity of members across the well over one hundred departments and other “delegated bargaining units” which have separate pay scales and to maintain a national union focus on winning the 2022-23 pay claim.

The Tories’ aim is to entice PCS into localised pay “negotiations” for 2023-24 and thereby break the national character of our dispute.

Given the oft stated views of National Executive Committee (NEC) members from the leadership faction (Left Unity) throughout this dispute, i.e., that members cannot afford to strike, there is a risk the PCS leadership will walk into that trap, and enable their supporters in some departments to agree or passively accept or agitate on the NEC for “their” Department’s 2023-24 below-inflation awards plus £1,500 to be treated as both sufficient for 2023-4 and as settlement of the 2022 dispute

The Government has told departments that they will only be allowed to make average pay awards of 4.5%, with a further 0.5% targeted at lower pay bands, at a time when the annual CPI rate of inflation (April to April) stands at 8.7% (19.1% for food and non-alcoholic beverages) and the Bank of England believes that inflation at the end of the year will still be above 5%.

The PCS leadership should have been clear in talks with ministers and officials that it required a national solution to a nationally imposed 2022 pay cut. And that should be its position now. The NEC should not allow the Tories to

bury the 2022 dispute by reversion to local pay “negotiations” for 2023.

The difficulties here are accentuated by the silence of the leadership on the 2023-24 pay round, and its failure to unequivocally state that the union requires inflation-proof awards this year in addition to 10% for last year, although the way it has handled the dispute has seen the 2022 pay campaign run into the 2023 pay review period.

If the leadership wants local talks to commence for 2023 it should submit an inflation-proof national claim for 2023 that all negotiators must comply with (an option it rejected at this year’s annual conference) and it should be clear that departmental 2023 talks cannot resolve the 2022 dispute.

The NEC meets on Monday 5 June. We will see then what Serwotka recommends to the NEC and what it decides. We have to be concerned, however, that the inept, unconfident, secretive, running of the dispute and negotiations has placed PCS in a weaker position than it should be in, and that the small cabal of people who run PCS, and the Left Unity NEC members who nod through all that is recommended to them, will begin moves to close the dispute down.

Confidence

Throughout the dispute the leadership has lacked confidence in the members to strike and to win the dispute. The leadership took twelve weeks to call the first national strike day after ballot results on 10 November. This inordinate delay, coupled with its ignorance of the anti-union laws applying in Northern Ireland, meant that when the leadership did call a national strike for 1 February, it had to belatedly exclude Northern Ireland members. To date the leadership has only called three days of national action in 30 weeks.

At the annual conference (23-25 May) Serwotka said that our members are not CWU or RMT and would not take 15 days national action (even if so, why only three days is a mystery). The leadership has repeatedly thrown away momentum and opportunities to increase the pressure on the Government.

The leadership placed all its bets on paid selective action, having resisted for over two decades the PCS Independent Left’s call for such action to be a vital part of the Union’s armoury. But it had failed to build up the financial war chest (another two-decades old PCS IL demand) necessary to fund extensive and ongoing selective action.

PCS Independent Left rightly supported a belated, post ballot, levy of all members, but even so the Union’s ability to fund selective action remained constrained by the leadership’s lack of

foresight, preparedness, and willingness to listen to those, the PCS IL, who “got it right” many years earlier.

The failure of the leadership to announce ballot dates to renew the legal strike mandates that will expire in July for members in HMRC reveals nervousness about its ability to re-ballot successfully and sends a powerful signal to Government to stand firm.

As does the leadership’s failure to begin bringing DWP members back into the dispute. More than three weeks after DWP was a mere 1% below the 50% turnout required to renew the strike mandate, the leadership has still to set dates for another ballot to get over that hurdle.

Although members are much more focussed on the pay aspect of the dispute, the national dispute also involves other demands – around employment security, pensions, and redundancy terms – that the Government could easily move on. Even there the Tories have been dismissive.

In reply to PCS’s demand for a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, the Government has reiterated its commitment to avoiding such need “wherever possible.” The Tories could park an army of compulsorily redundant staff in the “wherever possible” caveat, especially when staff selected for compulsory redundancy receive greater compensation if they subsequently “volunteer” to leave, and, unsurprisingly, invariably do so.

The Government has rejected PCS’s demand for a reduction of 2% in pension contributions backdated to 2019, as recommended by the civil service pensions board, and is fighting PCS’s legal challenge (PCS lost in court but has permission to appeal).

In response to PCS’s demand that they commit to not making detrimental changes to civil service redundancy terms, ministers have stated that they will refrain from any changes before 2025. This is a concession, and we should say that PCS’s action secured it.

But the PCS leadership should not exaggerate. In the light of PCS’s successful legal challenge to the lack of consultation over Tories last set of detrimental changes to redundancy terms some years ago, the Tories wish to appear to be consulting properly. Ministers downgraded changes to redundancy terms when Johnson and Res-Mogg quit and took with them their insane policy of shedding 90,000 civil service jobs as fast as they could. Ministers have no desire to pay off any more staff than they have to at present; and the Chancellor is forcing departments to shed staff by “natural wastage”. □

A book banned, a ban on Zachar Prilepin in

By August Grabski

As regular readers will know, *Solidarity* sides with Ukraine against the Russian invasion. At the same time we have [criticised](#) destructive cultural “derussification” in Eastern Europe. Here August Grabski, a Polish socialist, criticises the “crossroads of cancel culture and nationalist-clerical politics” in Poland.

In Poland we live in a world of appearances. Seemingly, we have a full, constitutionally guaranteed democracy and freedom of speech. And yet, for one year now, theatres have been afraid to show the works of playwrights from a certain country, concert halls have been afraid to perform the music of composers of a certain nationality, and publishing houses have been afraid to publish writers whose works were written in a certain language. In the shadow of government policy and the information industry, the directors of these cultural institutions are afraid of hate campaigns, boycott, job loss, etc. All this in a supposedly free, enlightened and democratic country where everyone is indignant when shown historical films where Nazis burn books and Stalinists withdraw some titles from the libraries. In our country, after all, the political class derives from the libertarian tradition of “Solidarity”.

Of course, freedom of speech is and has been a myth. The Solidarity establishment, as it turned out after 1989, fought for freedom of speech mainly for itself – as the famous saying of the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza/The Electoral Gazette* proclaimed – “the Left can accomplish less”. In addition to “Solidarity”, the Catholic Church and John Paul II also remained sacred cows in the mainstream narrative, which could only be criticised in few tabloids (such as the *Nie/No* weekly). An entire catalog of topics forbidden in historical research has been developed by the Institute of National Remembrance – the powerful institution of mass historical education. Information about the Warsaw Uprising (1944) is only shown positively, about the AK (Home Army, 1942-1945) – only very positively; however, information about communists is only shown negatively, etc.

For a long time, we have been living in Poland at the crossroads of demo-liberal cancel culture and the nationalist-clerical “Good Change” politics [of the ruling Law and Justice Party]. Al-

though seemingly contradictory, both directions can find common ground on various issues: this is especially true of the authentic left and Russia. In these matters, the state media, state stations and joint liberal-conservative popular movement can make hell for every dissident on social media forums and in professional life. However, without a doubt, the war in Ukraine questioned freedom of speech in Poland in the most radical way. When the guns are thundering in strongly clerical Poland, you can even blame the Pope himself after his words that “perhaps NATO’s barking at Russia’s door” prompted the head of the Kremlin “to react badly and unleash a conflict.” A real novelty in all Polish history! This situation with Pope Francis shows that the current institutionalised hatred is not about condemning the war (after all, the Pope condemns it), but about forcing an uncritical attitude of acceptance of all the theses of NATO propaganda.

What’s the sense of banning writers?

The great thinkers who formed the foundations of our civilisation – Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – accepted the institution of slavery. Hundreds of other great writers who lived before the 20th century would be surprised by slogans of religious tolerance, democracy, and women’s empowerment. Ezra Pound, Ferdinand Celine and Knut Hamsun were outstanding writers and at the same time supporters of Nazism. The Polish writers Władysław Reymont, Adolf Nowaczyński, and Zofia Kossak – presented views on Jews that we would not like to remember. There are dozens of examples of this type. However, is it not possible to leave the reader free to choose today in the name of the constitutional principles of freedom of speech and publication? Additionally, we do not have to agree with the book we are reading to consider it a valuable source of information about Others (even if they are not liked), their reasons or mistakes, their way of thinking, sensitivity, etc.

Zachar Prilepin (born in 1975) is one of the most famous Russian writers. Several of his novels have also been published in Poland such as *Sankya* (2008), *Pathologies* (2010) and *Black Ape* (2013). However, after 2014, the pro-liberal Czarne / Black publishing house, which promoted him, broke with the writer after he volunteered in

the armed struggle in Donbas on the side of the separatists. Prilepin’s brilliant polemic with Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* – the novel *Monastery* – was not published in Czarne, but in 2016 by another publishing house.

At the end of 2021, the young left-wing publishing house Glowbook released one of Prilepin’s two novels about his struggles in Eastern Ukraine: *Some Will Not Go to Hell*. The publishing house commented on the book: “Although the book is subtitled ‘The Novel-Fantasmagoria’, it is undoubtedly also autobiographical in nature. The narrative is based on the author’s controversial participation in the civil war in Ukraine on the side of the so-called separatists from Donbas. There are many political assessments and considerations in the novel. We present this book to the reader, aware that the ideological message it contains may arouse extreme reactions. However, it is a literary work worth getting acquainted with.” However, Glowbook’s caution was useless: immediately there was a wave of hatred, and after the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the publishing house suspended the sale of the book and even hid the fact that it was published by Glowbook.

The writer at war

The novel presents, paradoxically, the now forgotten conflict that has been smouldering in eastern Ukraine since 2014, in which several thousand people died. After the pro-European Maidan in Kiev, many inhabitants of the East did not want to agree to the discrimination of the Russian language, the destruction of monuments to the left, the further rehabilitation of fascist Stepan Bandera, the OUN [Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists] and the UPA [Ukrainian Insurgent Army], etc. Against this background, the Luhansk People’s Republic, the Donetsk People’s Republic, and Russia’s detachment of Crimea from Ukraine were proclaimed.

Anyone expecting Prilepin to idealise the separatists and Russian state propaganda would be surprised. Prilepin’s prose is masculine, raw, devoid of sentiments and often downright brutal. We have many heroes among the separatists, but there are also dense vapours of alcohol, clouds of cigarette smoke above the novel, the intrigues and the power struggles of minor politicians are shown “in the provinces (in Donbas) of a former (Ukrainian) province (of the

Soviet empire)”, unpleasant enforcers sent to Donetsk from Moscow to stifle a local initiative and the mysterious murder of the self-proclaimed president of the Donetsk People’s Republic, Alexander Zakharchenko.

Prilepin went to fight for Donbas as a longtime sympathiser and activist of the nationalist left. Undoubtedly, the writer is a real homo politicus: his current politico-cultural programs on YouTube have hundreds of thousands of viewers. During the promotion of the French edition of the novel in 2019, he described himself as a supporter of “Russian Orthodox (religious) socialism”. This formulation shows the crumbling of divisions among Russian nationalists: supporters of Lenin versus those who support Nicholas II. As Prilepin recalls: “We sat at a table under oilcloth eaves. As in my rural childhood: there was always this oilcloth. In the corner hung a portrait of Lenin, drawn on a wooden board. Probably in one of the houses where they were staying, the soldiers found one and brought it here for everyone to see. Kuban [one of the separatists] was always anxious to shoot it or gouge out its eyes. He stubbornly disliked the leader of the world proletariat – he comes from Cossack roots and traditions. By the way, I do not remember White Guards in the battalion, but neither the active Bolshevik element. I don’t even remember anybody arguing or discussing all these topics.

“I think that the great dispute between the unburied unholy relics of Lenin and the martyr Nicholas Romanov was still significant for Kuban and for me, but for people twenty years younger (and those in the battalion constituted the majority) – not anymore. Both figures were already dead for them. However, they could hang Lenin in the kitchen, but Nicholas II – I doubt it. Lenin was irritating to our unfortunate enemy [i.e. Ukrainians], so he seemed to be on the spot for some of our soldiers but it did not disturb the rest of them”.

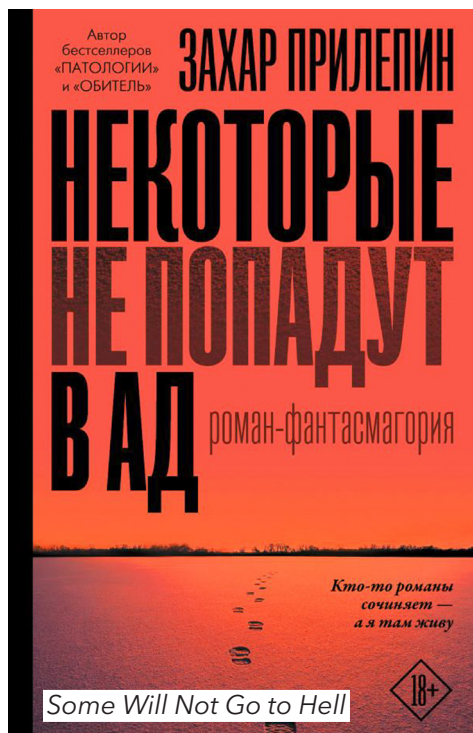
Although among the volunteers for separatist units there were representatives of various options (national-Bolsheviks, communists, nationalists, neo-pagans, etc.), perhaps the most serious force were those who supported the Orthodox Church: “on the eve of the Lord’s Baptism, one hundred and twenty millimeters of a mortar hit our shelter. Avos and Anapa were in the

Banned famous writer: in Poland

shelter. The missile collapsed the entrance, the second – pierced the ceiling. The first miracle: the upper bunks collapsed on the boys but they did not die (although they should have). They were buried under rubble. However, they remained under fire. If the shelter was hit twice, it meant that it could happen a third time. They couldn't get out. Anapa, realising that this was the end, cried out to his favorite saint: 'Get us out! Do you hear me?' – and suddenly something hit the exit, leaving a gaping hole which they jumped out of. And then, as was to be expected, the third missile hit the shelter. But they're both still alive. And that's how we fight. We think, 'Any soldier can pick his saint. It should help, no?'"

Prilepin knew right away that he would pay a high price for his involvement – even in Russia, where the pro-Western, liberal cultural sector enjoys a great deal of influence. "In Russian show business, you could admit that you bit off a pigeon's head as a child, that your extramarital child is in an orphanage, that you drank human blood and all other human fluids, that your children were artificially bred, that you have three citizenships and not one is Russian, because it's not a country, but vomit, and you have to wash it off... You may have confessed that you have four nipples, two navels, and special suction cups on your body... But to go to Donbas – my God – it's monstrous, out of the question".

The separatists' attitude to Ukraine as presented by Prilepin is complex. It shows the conventionality of easy journalistic labels that someone is "pro-Ukrainian" or "anti-Ukrainian". Prilepin recalls: "the festive, golden cartridges were nice to pick at with your fingers, you would like to say a word or a few words: 'I love you, Ukraine', or 'Surrender, chochol' [a derogatory Russian term for Ukrainians]. It's even better about the word chochol: the [Russian] letter 'ch' comes out great with four rounds, although it's not allowed, it's clear. [The volunteer] Tyson, for example, considers himself a Ukrainian. Many in the battalion also considered themselves Ukrainians and fought for [the Soviet partisan] Kovpak against [Nazi collaborator] Shukhevych, for [anarchist] Makhno against [nationalist] Petliura, for [pro-Moscow] Bogdan Chmielnicki against [pro-Polish] Ivan Vyhovsky". The author himself writes



about Ukraine in a similar way: "Dear friends, I am in love with Ukraine. One thing is sad: now the words 'I have been in love with Ukraine since childhood' are in the same category as saying 'Well, I even have Jewish friends'. But how to say it differently if you love something?" However, the attitude of his former fellow writers from Kiev towards Prilepin became irreconcilable. While in Geneva, he read a leaflet of the Ukrainian PEN-Club about himself: "After a cursory reading of the paper, it became clear that in Europe there is no one more terrible than me: Kievan authors compared me to a Scandinavian degenerate who had fired into a crowd of children with a rifle not so long ago. They called for me to be detained by brute physical force, stuffed into a package and shipped to them – and they would take care of me. As justification for such radical measures, the following characterisations of me were listed: a terrorist, a killer of civilians, a maniac, a person whose behavior puts himself outside the framework of human morality, something which now does not apply to me. In times gone by, I drank beer with the signatories of this letter and we hugged each other to greet each other".

The fighting separatists are not only the inhabitants of Donbas, but also supporters of the "Russian peace" from all corners of the former USSR and even other countries – for example, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Czechs or Serbs. Their experience of fighting and

being controlled by "curators" from Moscow often contained an element of disappointment. To Prilepin, contemporary Russia appears to be a soulless bureaucratic juggernaut, full of behind-the-scenes political games, deaf to the needs of ordinary people, unable to take into account their need for freedom: "Everyone here [in Donbas] – as I'd foreseen – is waiting for Russia to come someday. Russia will come and there will be order and peace. But Russia doesn't come like that. They expect it in one form and it comes in another form. It comes like a road roller. It comes like a meat grinder. It devours everything and does not even spit out the bones – it grinds it up".

Prilepin himself, who created a separate battalion in the Donbas using his own money and with fundraisers, falls victim to behind-the-scenes power struggles in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, after the death of Alexander Zakharchenko, whom he adored as an authentic people's leader. Unexpectedly, he became a persona non grata there: "I crossed the border, drove away three metres and a man – with a typical Russian face, blond with an open gaze and light denim jacket – caught up with the car with a quick pace. I rolled the window down, and he said in my ear, leaning in close to make me understand everything: 'You are on our blacklist. You won't go there any more, please don't even try. You hear? You are banned from entering the Donetsk People's Republic. Goodbye'".

We've Moved Past Black and White Television

Is Prilepin's picture of war outrageous? The Czarne publishing house, which has distinguished itself in the popularisation of Ukrainian literature in recent years, published a book in 2022 by the Slovakian author Tomas Forro called *Apartment at the Hotel War. A Report from Donbas*. Undoubtedly, the author is "pro-Ukrainian" and his information contributed to several volunteers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia being repressed severely. However, his report also includes fragments which undermine the Manichean vision of the conflict in Ukraine. He writes: "International organisations record war crimes committed not only by separatists. The Office of the UN High Commissioner and the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe] document

cases of torture and even homosexual violence by soldiers of the [Ukrainian] Donbas and Azov regiments. Amnesty International documented cases of torture and murder committed by the Aidar regiment. Ukrainian television reported that the militants of the Aidar delivered a package with the pro-Russian rebel's head to his mother. (ibid., p. 105). Elsewhere, Forro writes how "members of ordinary families from the nearby settlement [in Sloviansk] blocked the march of Ukrainian heavy military vehicles with their own bodies, and one of these people literally threw herself under the wheels of the mighty Hummer [off-road vehicle] from the 13th Brigade" (p. 53). This is not Putin's propaganda – these are quotes from the reportage of a pro-Ukrainian journalist who, despite this, can see that the history of the Donbas is not black and white.

The dispute over the limits of freedom of speech will last forever. Let us agree, however, that – to quote the last Polish Nobel laureate, Olga Tokarczuk – "literature is not for idiots" and let us leave it to the readers, not the censors and Taliban of all sorts, to decide. □

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/

Ukraine: backlash in the UCU

By Dale Street

The backlash against the decision of the 27-29 May congress of the Unity and College Union (UCU) to back the Stop the War Coalition (STW) line on the war in Ukraine continues to gather momentum.

The motion adopted by the congress (though just 130-121) portrayed Russia's imperialist aggression as a proxy war between Russia and the US, opposed Ukraine being provided with the weapons which it needs to defend itself, and committed the UCU to backing events called by the rump STW.

An Open Letter signed by UCU members (and former UCU members) at the University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies condemning the motion attracted over a quarter of a million hits on Twitter in less than 24 hours.

Not all of those would have been UCU members. But probably a lot of them were. Many UCU members who have publicly retweeted the Open Letter.

Two UCU branches – St. Andrews University and Edinburgh University – have already met and passed motions condemning the STW motion: "Ill-informed, discriminatory, equates the victim and the aggressor, denies Ukraine's agency, and only helps Kremlin's propaganda."

A lot more UCU branches are likely to pass similar motions in coming weeks. Outraged UCU members have already publicised on social media their intention of tabling branch motions condemning the position taken by the union's congress.

Understandably, but less than helpfully, UCU members have also resigned from the union in protest at what is now official UCU policy:

"I have now resigned from the UCU. As a scholar and human being I cannot possibly belong to an organisation that is denying agency to East European countries."

"I have just cancelled my UCU membership. This time it has gone too far. Enough geopolitics and antisemitism. Concentrate on university teachers'

working conditions."

"I'm in an online symposium with Ukrainian scholars in Kharkiv and Kyiv. In solidarity with them and with Ukraine, I cannot in good conscience remain in the UCU while that shameful motion is official policy."

"Outrageous that UCU should white-wash Russia's crimes in Ukraine and include a dash of antisemitism. I have now resigned from the UCU in protest at the motion and in solidarity with Ukraine."

"Along with several of my colleagues in Ukrainian, East-European and Russian Studies, I have resigned from the UCU following the disgraceful motion passed at the union's national congress."

True, a second motion on Ukraine was also passed at the UCU congress, one which recognised Ukraine's right to self-determination, did not engage in whataboutery (about NATO), and committed the union to promoting links with Ukrainian trade unionists and feminists.

Margin

In fact, that motion was passed by a much larger margin than the STW motion. But everything positive in the motion has been overwhelmed by the wave of outrage unleashed by the adoption of the Putin-apologist and leave-Ukraine-defenceless motion.

That backlash has already forced a change of line on the UCU's General Secretary, Jo Grady.

As social media erupted in protest at the adoption of the abandon-Ukraine motion as UCU policy, Grady's initial response was to marginally distance herself from the motion while pushing back against criticism of its adoption.

Picking up on a tweet by Paul Mason which condemned the politics of the motion, Grady responded:

"UCU stands against every single war and for you to suggest otherwise is an absolute disgrace. I didn't agree with the motion that passed, and I know that neither do many UCU members. But we won't take lessons from you [Mason] on this or any other matter."

But just three of the 600-plus com-

ments posted in response expressed support for Grady, and even that support was vague and half-hearted. Recognising which way the wind was blowing, Grady issued a lengthy statement three days later. Headed "Solidarity With Ukraine", it struck a very different tone.

Now Grady was "deeply disappointed" that the motion had passed. She was "acutely aware" that the passing of the motion had "caused a great deal of understandable upset and anger."

The motion "sent the wrong signal about our union". Grady wanted to "seek ways to put that right", which she would be doing at the next meeting of the union's National Executive Committee: "I'll be showing leadership at the NEC, and I'm sure our elected officers and reps will too."

At the same time, however, Grady continued to look both ways. Her statement opened with the words: "This weekend a motion was passed at UCU Congress that has been used to attack the union and question our solidarity with the working class and people of Ukraine."

The motion was not being "used" – with the implicit suggestion that the motion's critics had some ulterior motive – to question the UCU's solidarity with the workers and people of Ukraine. It was the motion itself which did not merely "question" but actually ruled out solidarity with Ukraine.

The abject nature of the motion's politics is crystal-clear. How UCU activists should organise against it is more complicated.

Congress is, rightly, the supreme decision-making body in the UCU. It is not within the powers of the union's NEC to overturn a policy voted through by congress. Even less so is it within the powers of the General Secretary.

But Grady herself would probably be open to such an approach. She already has a record of using online "plebiscites" to try to undermine decisions taken by the union's elected constitutional committees in its ongoing pay and pensions campaign.

And a unilateral ditching of the motion by Grady might also work to her advantage in the factional in-fighting in the UCU. (The motion originated with sections of the UCU Left, Grady's main opponents in the UCU.)

Simply ignoring and failing to act on the motion would be an inappropriate response. Even allowing for the abhorrent nature of the motion, non-implementation would set a precedent for the same approach to be adopted in relation to other motions in subsequent years.

From a constitutional and democratic point of view, a policy adopted

by congress can be overturned only by another congress. And the UCU Rulebook contains provision for holding emergency congresses, if so requested by twenty or more branches.

But that too is problematic.

The UCU is in the midst of a long-running industrial dispute. As more and more universities impose punitive penalties of up to 100% of pay in response to the marking assessment boycott now underway, that dispute is escalating.

Strikes

Individual HE institutions are also planning or running strike ballots over proposed job cuts. And the FE sector of the UCU is gearing up for a national campaign to be run over the summer, with a strike ballot scheduled to take place in September.

In that context, a push for a recall congress might be seen by many members as a mistimed diversion from the core trade-union "bread and butter" issues which the UCU needs to focus on, especially right now.

Opportunistically and dishonestly, supporters of the anti-Ukraine motion would certainly argue along those lines. They might even succeed in winning some traction.

Moreover, one response to the UCU congress adopting the motion containing the STW's politics is not that the UCU should pass motions with better politics but that the UCU should not dabble in politics at all. UCU members holding that view may not want UCU resources put into holding an emergency congress.

Whatever the final conclusion reached by pro-Ukraine UCU activists about the question of whether to push for a recall conference, there should be an organised campaign in local UCU branches to build solidarity with Ukrainian trade unions, including raising material support.

The fact that the UCU congress narrowly decided that the union at a national level, in terms of UCU policy, should turn its back on Ukraine does not prevent local branches from organising solidarity. This would also be entirely consistent with the second motion on Ukraine passed by the congress. □

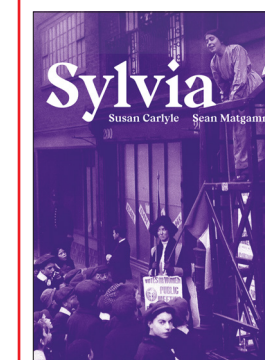
• More online: bit.ly/ukr-ucu2

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

“A socialistic nation of scholars and students”



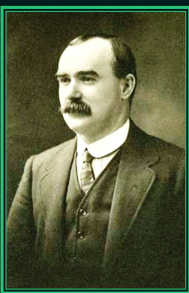
Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

This, from Erin's Hope (1897), was James Connolly's first statement of his thesis that primitive communism survived in Ireland much longer than in other countries, indeed until the 17th century, and so the struggle for socialism there equated with the struggle against foreign impositions. It is the fourth instalment on "Connolly's historiography" in our long-running series on "James Connolly, politically unexpurgated" (workersliberty.org/connolly).

“Before the time of the conquest, the Irish people knew nothing of absolute property in land. The land belonged to the entire sept; the chief was little more than the managing member of the association. The feudal idea which came in with the conquest was associated with foreign dominion, and has never to this day been recognised by the moral sentiment of the people.”

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

In these few words of Mr [John Stuart Mill](#) the impartial student may find the key for unravelling the whole tangled skein of Irish politics. Latter-day politicians, both on the English and Irish side, have done their utmost to familiarise the public mind with belief that the Irish question arises solely out of the aspirations of the Irish people to have more complete control over the internal administration of the affairs of their country than it is possible for them to exercise while the seat of government is located at Westminster, and that, therefore, some form of local self-government, as, for instance, Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill, is all that is needed to settle this question, and lay forever the troubled spirit of Irish discontent. According to this luminous (?) exposition of Irish history, we are to believe that the two nations have for seven hundred years been engaged in unceasing warfare, that the one country (Ireland) has during all that time been compelled to witness the merciless slaughter of her children by famine, pestilence and the sword; that each succeeding generation has witnessed a renewal of the conflict and a renewal of the martyrdom, until the sensitive mind recoils from a perusal of Irish history as from the records of a shambles, and all, forsooth, because Irishmen and Englishmen could not agree upon the form of political administration best suited for Ireland.

If this new reading of Irish history were true the intelligent foreigner might be forgiven for rating at a very low standard the intelligence of the two nations, which during seven hundred years had not evolved a satisfactory solution of such a simple question. At precisely the same low standard may safely be rated the political acumen of the English and Irish party leaders, who are to-day complacently trotting out the discredited abortion of Home Rule as a sovereign remedy for Ireland's misery.

The Irish question has, in fact, a much deeper source than a mere difference of opinion on forms of government. Its real origin and inner meaning lay in the circumstances that the two opposing nations held fundamentally different ideas upon the vital question of property in land. Recent scientific research by such eminent sociologists as Letourneau, Lewis Morgan, Sir Henry Maine, and others, has amply demonstrated the fact that common ownership of land formed the basis of primitive society in almost every country. But, whereas, in

the majority of countries now called civilised, such primitive Communism had almost entirely disappeared before the dawn of history and had at no time acquired a higher status than that conferred by the social sanction of unlettered and uneducated tribes, in Ireland the system formed part of the well defined social organisations of a nation of scholars and students, recognised by Chief and Tanist, Brehon and Bard, as the inspiring principle of their collective life, and the basis of their national system of jurisprudence. Such a striking fact will, of course, be interpreted in many ways, according to the temperament and political and racial sympathies of the reader. The adherent of the present order of society will regard it as proof of the Irish incapacity for assimilating progressive ideas, and will, no doubt, confidently assert that this incapacity is the real source of Ireland's misery, since it has unfitted her sons for the competitive scramble for existence, and so foredoomed them to the lot of hewers of wood and drawers of water.

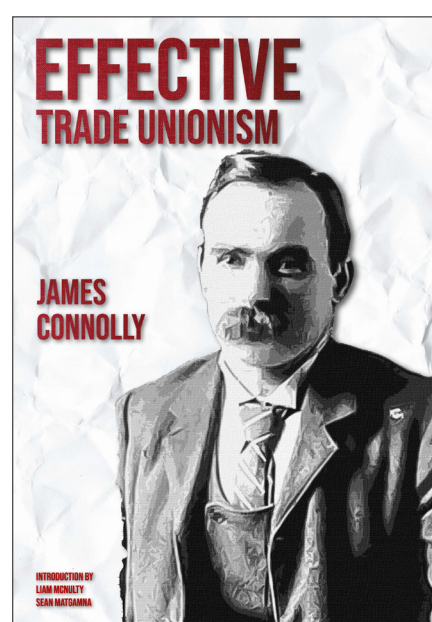
The ardent student of sociology, who believes that the progress of the human race through the various economic stages of communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and wage slavery, has

been but a preparation for the higher ordered society of the future; that the most industrially advanced countries are but, albeit often unconsciously, developing the social conditions which, since the break-up of universal tribal communism, have been rendered historically necessary for the inauguration of a new and juster economic order, in which social, political and national antagonism will be unknown, will perhaps regard the Irish adherence to clan ownership at such a comparatively recent date as the 17th Century as evidence of retarded economical development, and therefore a real hindrance to progress. But the sympathetic student of history, who believes in the possibility of a people by political intuition anticipating the lessons afterwards revealed to them in the sad school of experience, will not be indisposed to join with the ardent Irish patriot in his lavish expressions of admiration for the sagacity of his Celtic forefathers, who foreshadowed in the democratic organisation of the Irish clan the more perfect organisation of the free society of the future.

Whichever be the true interpretation of Irish history, one fact at least stands out clear and undeniable, viz., that the conflict between the rival systems of land ownership was the pivot around which centred all the struggles and rebellions of which that history has been so prolific. The Irish regarded with inveterate hostility their English rulers, at all times set little store upon promises of incorporation within the pale of the constitution, and rose with enthusiasm under their respective chiefs, because they regarded this as the all-important question, because in their eyes English rule and Dublin parliaments were alike identified as the introducers and upholders of the system of feudalism and private ownership of land, as opposed to the Celtic system of clan or common ownership, which they regarded, and, I think, rightly, as the pledge at once of their political and social liberty.

The English Government was also astute enough to perceive that the political or national subjection of Ireland was entirely valueless to the conquerors while the politically subjected nation remained in possession of economic freedom. Consequently, we find that the first stipulation made to the Irish tribe upon its submission always provided that the lands of the tribe should be regarded as the private property of

continued on page 12→



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



→ from page 11

the chief; that he should therefore accept them as a grant from the crown, from which he should in future hold them; that he should drop his Irish title, which proclaimed him the freely elected chief of a free community, and should instead accept an English title, such as duke or earl, and in all things conform to English ideas of civilisation and social order. All these stipulations were in the last degree repugnant to Irish ideas. The chief, as Mill has justly observed, was but the managing member of the tribal association, although in the stress of constant warfare they usually limited their choice to the members of one or two families; yet the right of election was never abdicated by the tribesmen. Whenever the seductions of English gold overmastered the patriotism of an Irish chief, and succeeded in inducing his acceptance of the alien property system and the alien title (as in the case of Art O'Neil and Nial Garbh O'Donnell, the Queen's O'Reilly and the Queen's Maguire), they immediately elected another chief in his stead; and from that moment the unfortunate renegade became an outlaw from his

own people, and could only appear in his native territory under an escort of English spears.

The Irish system was thus on a par with those conceptions of social rights and duties which we find the ruling classes to-day denouncing so fiercely as "Socialistic". It was apparently inspired by the democratic principle that property was intended to serve the people, and not by the principle so universally acted upon at present, viz., that the people have no other function in existing than to be the bondslaves of those who by force or by fraud have managed to possess themselves of property. They did not, indeed, regard all forms of productive property as rightfully belonging to the community; but when we remember that the land alone was at that time of importance, all other forms of property being insignificant by comparison, we see that they were as Socialistic as the industrial development of their time required.

The English civilisation against which they had fought was on the other hand, thoroughly individualistic; and, as it triumphed, we are reaping the fruits to-day in the industrial disputes, the agricultural depressions, the poor-houses,

and other such glorious institutions in Church and State as we are permitted the luxury of enjoying in common with our fellow-subjects in this "integral portion of the British Empire". The results of the change on the national life of Erin are well illustrated in the scornful words in which Aubrey De Vere apostrophises the "new race" of exploiters which then arose:

The chiefs of the Gael were the people embodied;

The chiefs were the blossoms, the people the root.

Their conquerors, the Normans, high-souled and high-blooded,

Grew Irish at last from the scalp to the foot;

And ye, ye are hirelings and satraps, not nobles –

Your slaves they detest you, your masters, they scorn;

The river lives on, but the sun-painted bubbles

Pass quickly, to the rapids incessantly borne.

The break-up of the Kilkenny Confederation in 1649, and the consequent dispersion of the Irish clans, was the immediate cause of that confusion of thought and apparent lack of direct-

ness in aim which down to our day has characterised all modern Irish politics. Deprived of any form of political or social organisation which might serve as an effective basis for its practical realisation, the demand for the common ownership of the land naturally fell into abeyance until such time as the conquest of some form of political freedom should enable the dispossessed Irishry to substitute for the lost tribal association the fuller and broader conception of an Irish nation as the natural repository and guardian of the people's heritage. But when the fusing process of a common subjection had once more welded the heterogeneous elements of Irish society into one compact nationality it was found that in the intervening period a new class had arisen in the land – a class which, while professedly ultra-nationalistic in its political aims, had nevertheless so far compounded with the enemy as to accept the alien social system, with its accompanying manifestations, the legal dispossession and economic dependence of the vast mass of the Irish people, as part of the natural order of society. □



Buy our books

Order from workersliberty.org/publications

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

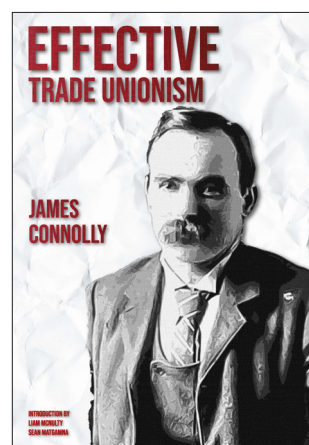
Prices listed exclude postage and packaging: £1 for small items, £3 for larger items, free over £30. Every third publication is half-price and 15% off over £50. □



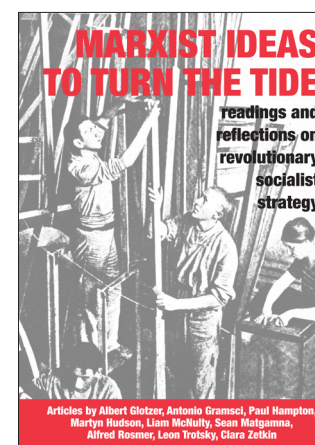
Lessons for socialist and left activists 60 pages **£4**



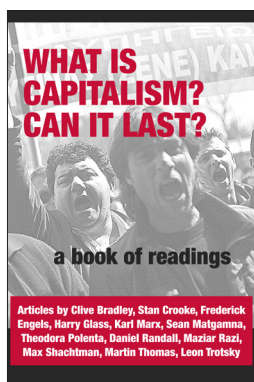
Rühle's abridgement is a good intro 131 pages **£6**



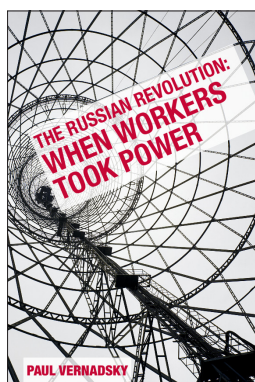
Writings by James Connolly 64 pages **£5**



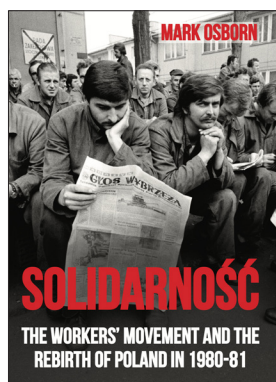
Revolutionary socialist strategy 138 pages **£5**



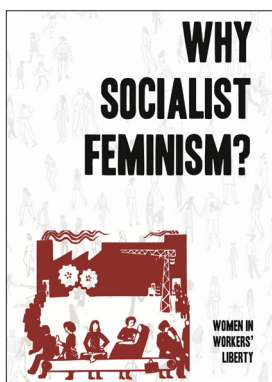
Socialist readings to understand and fight capitalism 128 pages **£5**



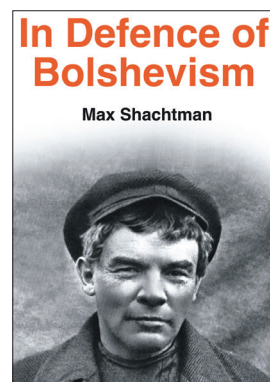
The 1917's revolution's real history, and lessons 374 pages **£12**



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



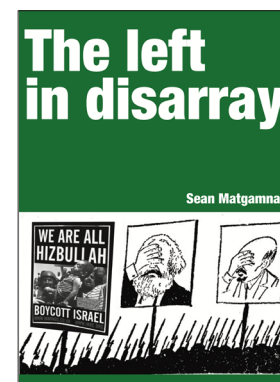
A socialist approach within recent "waves" of feminism 102 pages **£5**



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



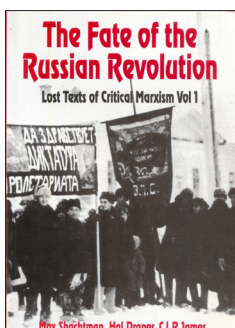
A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more 107 pages **£5**



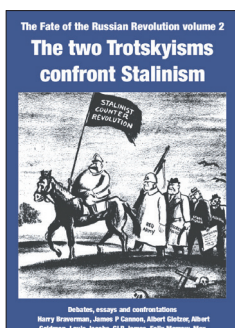
Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward 408 pages **£12**



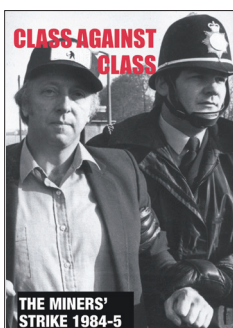
Can Socialism Make Sense? **£8**



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



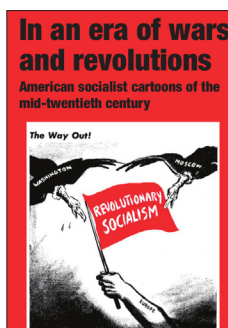
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms **£20**



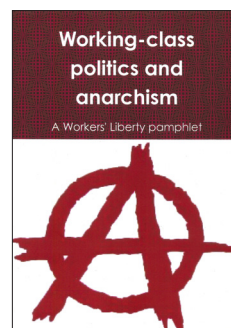
The Miners' Strike 1984-5 **£9**



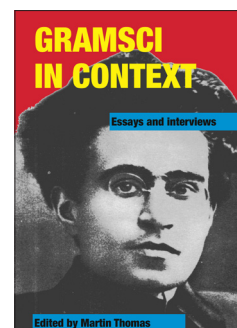
1919: Strikes, struggles, soviets **£4**



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



Class Politics and Anarchism **£5**



Gramsci in Context **£6**

Sanders denounces Biden-Republican deal

By Bernie Sanders

On Thursday 1 June the US Senate approved a budget deal negotiated between President Biden and Republican leaders in order to approve an increase in the USA's federal debt ceiling. Bernie Sanders voted against, saying:

At a time when climate change is, by far, the most existential threat facing our country and the entire world I cannot, in good conscience, vote for a bill that makes it easier for fossil fuel companies to pollute and destroy the planet by fast-tracking the disastrous Mountain Valley Pipeline. When the future of the world is literally at stake we must have the courage to stand up to the fossil fuel industry and tell them, and the politicians they sponsor, that the future of the planet is more important than their short-term profits.

At a time when we spend more on the military than the next ten nations combined I cannot, in good conscience, vote for a bill that increases funding for the bloated Pentagon and

large defence contractors that continue to make huge profits by fleecing American taxpayers with impunity. Let me remind my colleagues that the Pentagon is the only federal agency that cannot pass an independent audit or account for trillions of dollars in spending.

At a time when the pharmaceutical industry is charging the American people, by far, the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs I cannot, in good conscience, vote for a bill that does nothing to take on the greed of the big drug companies that are bankrupting Medicare and cancer patients while spending tens of billions of dollars on stock buybacks and dividends.

At a time when over 45 million Americans are drowning in student debt I cannot, in good conscience, vote for a bill that eliminates the moratorium on student loan payments that has been a lifeline to millions of working families during the pandemic.

Deficit reduction cannot just be about cutting programs that working families, the children, the sick, the elderly,



House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Joe Biden

and the poor depend upon. It must be about demanding that the billionaire class and profitable corporations pay their fair share of taxes, reining in out-of-control military spending, reducing the price of prescription drugs, and ending billions of dollars in corporate welfare that goes to the fossil fuel industry and other corporate interests.

The fact of the matter is that this bill is

totally unnecessary. The President has the authority and the ability to eliminate the debt ceiling today by invoking the 14th Amendment.

I look forward to the day when he exercises this authority and puts an end, once and for all, to the outrageous actions of the extreme right-wing to hold our entire economy hostage in order to get what they want. □

Cycling ban is political backlash

By Martin Thomas

On 26 May British Cycling banned trans women from competitive cycling. Joanna Harper, the leading academic researcher on trans women's sports performance, and a trans athlete herself, commented on ITN:

"This is just another in a long line of British sports governing bodies that have made very similar decisions, following triathlon, athletics, rugby, etc... There have been a number of trans cyclists in Britain and around the world who have been reasonably successful in the sport, but they have not been over-represented in the sport, nor are in any way threatening to take over the sport".

Trans women have gone into competitive cycling in larger numbers and more successfully than into other sports (for example, swimming, despite all the fuss about Lia Thomas). They are still far off the 1% of all wins which you'd expect if there were equality, since trans people are about 1% of



the population. Yet some people see a trans woman winning even one event as an affront.

There has been agitation about trans women "taking over" women's competitive sport at least since Renée Richards was allowed to compete in tennis, in 1977, and yet no sign of the "take-over" happening. Meanwhile, in some US states the backlash has led to trans girls even before

puberty being banned from girls' schools sport, which lacks even the spurious rationale of British Cycling's ban (which is only for top-level competitive sport: for recreational or club events, British Cycling accepts self-identification).

Joanna Harper commented: "I accept that there are remaining advantages [for trans women]. But an overall advantage, especially in the sport of

cycling? No, I do not accept that.

"Trans women cyclists especially will lose endurance [through medical transition]. Their power will drop. Their VO2 max [capacity to use oxygen] will drop... In cycling, at least, the effects of hormone therapy are sufficient to produce meaningful competition between trans women and cis women...

"There was pressure put on sports governing bodies by the British government to ban trans women from the women's category. And many have done so...

"The idea that all women are entitled to a category in which they can compete in a meaningful way with other women – I absolutely accept that. But I think that trans women are a subcategory of all women. The physiological differences between trans women and cis women are important for sport. But it does not appear that trans women are anywhere near on the verge of taking over women's sport.

"Emily Bridges [the leading

excluded trans woman cyclist] has the right to feel very, very bitter. She's done everything asked of her, always...

"This young woman has faced such hatred. And so Emily has the right to feel violated...

"I anticipate that there will be legal challenges in the next 12 months". □

More online

The "House of Terror"

Budapest's museum is selective in its exhibits
bit.ly/bp-h-t

Ukraine and Vietnam

Dismissing Ukraine's rights leads to distorting facts about Vietnam
bit.ly/ukr-vn

More on entropy

Zack Muddle replies to Stuart and Paul
bit.ly/d-entropy

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!

We've finally made it to over £21K, but only just, thanks to donations from Dave and Mark. We will need a big push in the remaining few weeks to see us

over the line. Our total stands at £21,222. Keep donating! □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

A thirty-question pop quiz



Diary of a rail worker

By Steve Allan

With pay talks at an impasse on the Elizabeth Line in London, managers are keen to work us for what we currently earn. In response to supposed staff idleness, we've all been set a thirty-question pop quiz! When we're allowed to complete this is unclear, plus

no news of the consequences if we don't "pass".

Coupled with the new directive on "mandatory" body cameras, staff are reacting poorly to being treated like children. Management has benefited plenty from staff goodwill in recent weeks, with delays and infrastructure issues hampering our jobs. Now when they expect us to work extra hours or move stations, they can't be surprised if staff refuse.

Staff struggle with early and late shifts as it is, given the company's refusal to provide staff transport. There are no

parking spaces and engineering works give some a two-hour bus ride home.

We're a week into a new roster and there are teething problems. For starters there are not enough staff to cover every shift at Paddington. This means staff having to move up and down the line, which can affect break times and shift relief. Reps remind us we have rights even if a platform is left unstaffed.

The next staff cohort should complete training soon, hopefully easing these issues.

But there is still plenty of turnover. □

Lecturers fight job cuts

By Dale Street

Lecturers at the City of Glasgow College, members of the EIS-FELA trade union, are striking against plans to axe around a hundred jobs in the college by the beginning of July.

Following a period of action short of a strike, lecturers have been on strike

since 30 May for four days each week.

The cuts to jobs come on top of cuts in the contact time lecturers have with students. This has resulted in lecturers being given more classes to teach, and a consequent increase in workloads.

The college has been picketed each day of the strike, with visits by delegations from other trade unions and by

supportive MSPs. A rally was also held at the Scottish Parliament last week.

So far, there is no sign of college management backing down. Management blames the cuts on the SNP's recent decision to claw back £26 millions worth of funding already allocated for Further Education. □

The Monocled Mutineer



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

More political TV drama: this week I want to highlight *The Monocled Mutineer* (BBC 1986), written by Alan Bleasdale (best known for *Boys from the Blackstuff*). The action centres on a World War One mutiny by British and Commonwealth troops at Étaples, an army camp on the French coast. One of the leaders is Percy Toplis (Paul McGann) who disguises himself as an officer (hence the monocle).

The broadcast caused protests from various quarters, mainly, I suspect because the topic of mutinous allied troops rising against their officers and the war was the "dirty linen" that many did not to be washed in public. Bleasdale was accused of distorting the facts and an almighty row ensued but he was adamant: "I have said from the word go that my piece is a work of



fiction".

In fact conditions at the Étaples camp were appalling. A severe discipline was inflicted on the troops who knew that, within a few days, they would have to march to the front and almost certain death. The poet Wilfred Owen, who was once at the camp,

wrote: 'I thought of the very strange look on all the faces at that camp [...] it was a blindfold look and without expression, like a dead rabbit's.' □

• Online (bit.ly/train-a): Myths of cinema no.2: did the audience flee the screen when the first moving film was shown?

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

NHS pay: getting the vote out

By Alice Hazel

The re-ballot for industrial action on pay in the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) runs up to 23 June. The last day to order a replacement ballot is 11 June, which makes this week vital in getting the vote out. As it is an aggregated ballot, every vote will make a difference in getting past the turnout

threshold. A day of action for #Vote-forStrike has been organised by NHS Workers Say No for [Friday 9 June](#).

NHS bosses' failure to deliver the paltry imposed award into many pay packets this month, and the fact that bank staff will not receive the one-off, may boost the response in the ballot.

The campaign to get the vote out

must include the case for escalated action, and unity with the other striking health unions, Unite and the BMA, to bring confidence that further industrial action can win further concessions. Unite struck again on 1 June at Guys and St Thomas's in London, and on 2 June in Yorkshire Ambulance Service, and has mandates in other ambulance

and hospital trusts. Junior doctors in the BMA plan to strike again between 14 and 17 June.

Sharp escalation with the largest number of NHS workers striking at the same time, with emergency cover under local workers' control, is the best way to win the dispute. □

The way forward for RMT in the rail dispute

The below is a statement circulated among RMT members in the Train Operating Companies for a change in direction and pace to win the dispute.

Our year-old industrial action strategy for the TOC dispute has not delivered an acceptable deal.

Recent comms from the union leadership have sought

to talk up the gains we've made and suggest that there are now only two ways for the dispute to go: carry on as before or TOC by TOC negotiations. As expressed by an overwhelming majority of TOC reps at a meeting in January there is a third way; escalate the action. Multiple branches representing members in this dispute have called for esca-

lation via strikes on Saturdays. These strikes can be part of an intensified programme of action that also includes more sustained strikes during the week, such as the three-day strike with which we began the dispute a year ago.

Whilst talks with the RDG are important they are not what is going to decide whether we get a good deal or not going

forward; that will be down to the intensity of our strike action and the determination we prosecute it with. For those in favour of escalating the action but who are unsure what form it should take we think that it is better to try a positive action rather than nothing happening because of indecision.

We call on the leadership to announce a three-day

strike, with targeted hardship payments timed to give the maximum support to members, followed by strikes on four consecutive Saturdays, followed by a five-day strike. These actions should be carried out in a three-month period. We want these actions to continue until the union leadership has a deal they can recommend we accept. □

“Greedflation”: a faulty picture

By Rhodri Evans

Inflation is slowing, but less than the experts predicted. The CPI index was up 8.7% April 2022-April 2023; the RPI, 11.4%. RPI's technical flaws, often overestimating inflation, make it valuable for trade unionists because they roughly offset the tendency of CPI (“average”) inflation to underestimate inflation for worse-off people.

Some talk of inflation being “greedflation”. This makes little sense (capitalists were greedy before 2022), and offers no hope for action (how to stop capitalists being greedy?)

In a Marxist view, capitalist profits originate from capitalists keeping down wages. They can't just increase prices whenever they feel specially greedy.

The academic work which does best at disputing this Marxist view is Isabella Weber's February 2023 paper ([bit.ly/isa-web](#)). It shows that some firms can sometimes use economic shocks or bottlenecks to ramp up prices and profits. That may be relevant to some of the fuel price rises since February 2022, which continue to work through to “downstream” price rises; but not to food prices, the sector with the highest inflation rate (19.1%), and one where

competition between supermarkets [curbs](#) opportunist pricing.

Three-month RPI inflation was actually up in April (an equivalent of 15% yearly, compare 8% in March, 7% February, 5% January), but as the already-established slowdown of world gas prices feeds through, it is near-certain that overall inflation will come down. How much is another matter. We don't know.

Better results on wages would probably extend inflation a bit, but a wage-price spiral is better than a prices-alone spiral.

Capitalists are indeed greedy – all the time, not just in 2022-3. We fight to

squeeze their profits, and by so doing to build the organisation to take over their wealth, and organise the economy so that all the basics are available free or at low prices, and a privileged few can no longer siphon off a big part of what workers' efforts produce. □

Press for “no work notices” pledges

By Ollie Moore

Humza Yousaf, the First Minister of Scotland, has pledged that the Scottish government will not issue “work notices” compelling workers to break strikes, should the Tories' Minimum Service Levels Bill become law.

Yousaf said: “Be in no doubt, the Scottish government will never issue or enforce a single work notice, we will continue to do everything we can to oppose this disgraceful legislation.”

So far, no Westminster

government figure has suggested that the provisions of the bill would legally oblige the Scottish government, or any other employer, to issue work notices. So, even after the bill becomes law, there looks like being significant scope for political, or even industrial, pressure to demand that employers refuse to issue work notices.

Employers such as Labour councils and transport authorities overseen by Labour administrations, such as Transport for London, are obvious primary targets for such campaigning. But unions should prepare

to mount such campaigns against all employers.

But they also need to prepare for direct defiance. If an employer does issue a work notice, the bill's language suggests unions will face injunctions if they fail to make “reasonable” efforts to instruct their members to work. It is unconscionable for unions to turn themselves into administrators of scabbing; the only alternative is to directly defy the law and go ahead with strikes even in the face of injunctions.

The bill returns to the House of Lords on 8 June.

The Lords will decide whether to defy the Commons, by reinserting its amendments which the last round of Commons voting opposed, or, as per convention and protocol, accept the Commons' rejection of those amendments and nod the bill through.

The Free Our Unions campaign is holding an online open planning meeting at 7pm on the same evening to discuss possibilities for resistance. Speakers include Labour MP Nadia Whittome. More: [freeourunions.org](#) □

Get Solidarity every week

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

Visit [workersliberty.org/sub](#)

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

Contact us



[020 7394 8923](#)



[solidarity@workersliberty.org](#)



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



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



Re-establish the right to protest!

By Dan Katz

New laws aimed at repressing radical protest and scaring activists into silence are being used to harass environmental, anti-deportation and left-wing political campaigners. And so are many old ones: in fact, jail sentences tend to be for “old” offences. The new laws give the police vast new powers against protest which they are only just starting to use.

In April two Just Stop Oil (JSO) protesters were sentenced to long jail terms for “public nuisance” over occupying the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge at Dartford near London. Morgan Trowland and Marcus Decker spent 37 hours on the bridge, disrupting traffic. JSO was demanding the government stops the development of new fossil-fuel projects in the UK.

Trowland was jailed for three years and Decker two years and seven months.

“Public nuisance” has long been a “common law” offence (defined by courts rather than law, with possibly unlimited sentences). It was made a “statutory offence” in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (Police Act 2022). It now carries a maximum sentence of ten years in prison.

JSO commented: “Since the Just Stop Oil campaign began on 1 April 2022, there have been over 2,000 arrests and 138 people have spent time in prison, many without trial. There are currently two Just Stop Oil and five Insulate Britain supporters in prison, serving sentences for actions taken with the campaign.”

JSO, intent on keeping up protest despite the new laws, have re-jigged their tactics, and have protested in London every day since 24 April with “slow-walking” demonstrations.

The government has now pledged legislation to ban slow-walking protests by tweaking the 1986 Public Order Act. Changes to the law will be made through secondary legislation (i.e with minimal parliamentary scrutiny). JSO states that it will continue direct action until the government stops granting new licences for oil, gas and coal.

The Public Order Act 2023 received Royal Assent on 2 May, just in time to be used (for arrests, but apparently not charges) in London on 6 May during the coronation of Charles Windsor.

Labour, having voted against the new law in Parliament, has refused to state that the legislation will be repealed when they are elected. Labour shadow minister, Andrew Gwynne, said the “next Labour government will look very carefully at this

piece of legislation.”

This Act further tightens restrictions on protests in England and Wales. In particular, it does the following:

- Sets a low threshold to define disruptive protesting;
- Gives the police new powers to stop environmental protests occurring at transport networks and oil, gas and energy plants;
- Makes “locking on” (attaching yourself to an object or another person, widely used by environmental activists) a criminal offence;
- Extends the use of stop and search powers – including suspicion-less stop and search – to protests;
- Introduces protest banning orders that can prevent individuals from attending protests.

Anyone who blocks roads, airports and railways can be jailed for up to 12 months. Those found guilty of locking-on face a maximum of six months in prison, an unlimited fine, or both. Carrying equipment that could be used to lock on – such as padlocks and superglue – can also bring unlimited fines.

The Met arrested 64 people during the coronation, including a group of JSO activists. Police said JSO was planning to disrupt the event, but JSO believes the police’s real reason was just that they were wearing Just Stop Oil t-shirts.

According to the cops 52 of the arrests were “related to concerns that people were going to disrupt the event”.

One man was arrested for carrying a megaphone which police said “could scare the horses” during the royal procession. Six members of the anti-monarchy campaign, Republic, were arrested for having “locking-on equipment” – in reality, were straps holding bundles of placards together.

The police later apologised and released the Republic activists, but only after the new king had been crowned and the crowds were long gone. Graham Smith from Republic said the arrests



Pic: @XRebellionUK

were a deliberate act which aimed to “disrupt and diminish” the republican protests. On Sky News Smith went on, “We [now] only have the freedom to protest contingent on the permission of senior police officers and politicians, and it’s my view that those senior police officers were under immense pressure from politicians.”

Two of the coronation protesters were arrested under Section 5 of the 1986 Public Order Act, which stops people causing “harassment, alarm and distress” to others. Others were arrested for “conspiracy to cause a public nuisance”, under the Police Act 2022.

The Police Act 2022 widened police powers to stop protests, increased penalties against activists found to have breached the law and lowered the bar on what the state can consider acceptable levels of disruption and noise.

In April over 100 animal rights activists were arrested for taking direct action at the Grand National horse race. Before the race 150 protesters handed out leaflets and held placards reading, “You bet, [horses] die.”

Three people went on trial from Tuesday 30 May, charged with causing a “public nuisance” for blocking a road outside Brook House Immigration Removal Centre at Gatwick Airport on 9 November 2021. The activists were attempting to prevent 50 people being removed to Jamaica; in the end four people were deported.

Those due to be deported included a 20-year-old woman who had been in the country since she was 13 and has no relatives in Jamaica, and nine people who had been in the UK for 20 years or longer.

Also in May, XR’s co-founder, Gail Bradbrook, was informed by the police that they were dropping a conspiracy case which they had been attempting to build against her. Bradbrook’s home was raided at 5.30am on 11 May 2021 and she was removed in handcuffs while her phone and laptop were seized. She was arrested on “suspicion of conspiracy to cause criminal damage to a number of banks,” a charge with a maximum sentence of ten years in jail.

Two years later the police have finally admitted they have not got enough evidence to proceed and dropped the charges.

Bradbrook commented, “The police implied I was trying to bring down the financial system, which I found hilarious. I pointed out it was doing a good job of bringing itself down.”

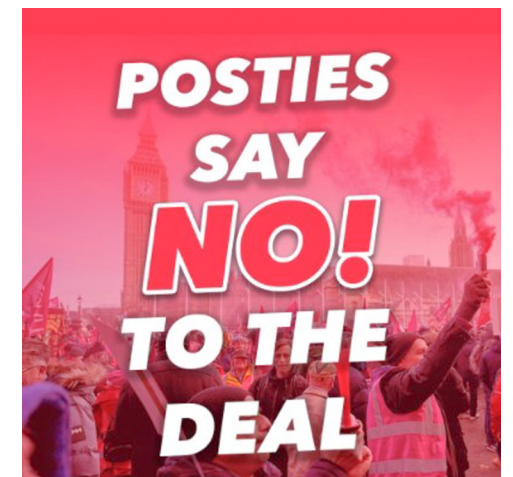
Kevin Blowe from Network for Police Monitor-

ing, commenting on the Bradbrook case, said, “Policing in Britain is never neutral. It exists to protect corporate and business interests.”

Labour must declare it will repeal the new anti-protest laws and others back to, at least, the Public Order Act 1986, which empowered the police to ban any protest with insufficient advance notice or which they think could bring “serious public disorder” or “serious disruption to the life of the community”. It must abolish catch-all offences from old common law like “public nuisance”, and legislate to establish positive rights to protest.

This is a labour movement issue: right now the police are mostly targeting environmental and other radical protesters, but it will only be a matter of time before this legislation is used against trade unions. □

Organise against Royal Mail deal



Postal workers continue to organise against the deal which CWU union leaders have signed with Royal Mail bosses, though the membership vote on the deal has been postponed with no new date set, and the 2023 union conference has been cancelled. The deal introduces seasonal hours and formalises 30 minute flexibility; increases workload; and flags through a two-tier workforce with new starters on more hours for worse pay. Twitter [@PostiesSayNo](https://twitter.com/PostiesSayNo). Download leaflet: bit.ly/rmail-no □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

UCU BOYCOTT BATTLE SHARPENS

By a UCU member

The marking and assessment boycott (MAB) called by the University and College Union continues in universities as exam boards approach. A handful of employers including Cambridge and Sussex have publicly called for their representative body, UCEA, to return to talks – as has the National Union of Students – but majority of university bosses have not.

Threats of strike action have persuaded some institutions to withdraw threats of 100% pay deductions for participation in the boycott, or at least to reduce them. At Liverpool Hope, in the face of a strike notification, management cut deductions from 50% to 35%. Kings College London bosses are deducting 50% but for a maximum of ten days rather than twenty. At Leeds University, where the 100% deduction threat still stands, staff have voted to begin an indefinite strike on 15 June.

The employers hope that if they dig in they will be able to ride out the boycott. Publicly they are blaming the government for a broken funding model. True, the government has allowed the value of univer-

sity teaching funding to fall by almost a third in the past decade. However, within the vast majority of universities there is still scope to reprioritise how money is spent and find the cash to keep up with inflation. Any Vice-Chancellor who is genuinely convinced that they can't afford a pay rise should open the books and negotiate next steps with local unions.

Bosses

Instead, university bosses are using systems established during the Covid pandemic to deal with an international health emergency to address a situation that is only an emergency because they have chosen to make it one. These include allowing students to be awarded marks based on prior averages, suspending normal moderating processes that ensure marking is consistent, and letting graduations go ahead before it is even clear that students have passed. They are making it clear that they're in the business of selling certificates, and uninterested in upholding even basic standards.

To get away with that approach there have been some outstandingly undemocratic manoeuvres. At the University of Bath, for example, elected

academic representatives on the institution's Senate (the body responsible for academic matters) were excluded from voting on boycott "mitigations" on account of their participation in industrial action.

The fact that employers are resorting to such measures shows they're under pressure. It's vital now to keep up the fight as exam boards approach.

Within the union there is also a fight on about Ukraine. The annual congress passed both a positive solidarity motion to provide practical support to trade unionists in Ukraine and – by a narrow majority – a motion for an end to western military support for Ukraine, which in practice would abandon Ukrainian workers in the face of Russian imperialism. Some on the right of the union are arguing that in future international solidarity motions should simply not be discussed, while others see this as an excuse to move further towards e-voting on resolutions chosen by the General Secretary. Neither is the answer: UCU members should organise on the basis of the positive motion and look to overturn the "peace at any price" vote next year. More on Ukraine: see page 10. □