

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

OPEN BORDERS!



- » **No to detention ships and camps**
- » **No to deportations**
- » **Local and migrant workers' unity**

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BMA, UCU, PCS, rail, Amazon

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No to detention ships and camps

6699 Editorial

The Conservatives' torrent of anti-migrant measures continues, with the Illegal Migration Bill (IMB) progressing through Parliament.

The IMB virtually [abolishes](#) the right to claim asylum, and other protections, for anyone arriving via small boats and other irregular routes.

There are few safe, regularised options, so most refugees will be expelled, imprisoned, or permanently trapped on the margins of society, in destitution and at risk of deportation.

Even expanded safe routes and humanitarian visas could never cover all the desperate situations in which people are forced to flee their homes and seek sanctuary. The right to escape danger by any means necessary, and claim asylum on arrival, is an [essential part](#) of any refugee system.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman has also [announced](#) a ban preventing most international students from bringing their families with them. Starmer's Labour leadership refuses to oppose it.

And the Home Office has [diverted](#) more than £3m from aid to fund Turkish border forces. These repel migrants with extreme violence, including firing live rounds at adults and children.

Support the right to protest on campus!



Bailiffs drag out Manchester student occupiers

Students at Sheffield University face sanctions up to expulsion for protesting. Sign the petition at bit.ly/sheffield-open-letter.

Student protesters at Manchester University are also facing disciplinary action. Donate to their fundraiser for legal advice at bit.ly/uomfunds.

The National Union of Students has released a statement: bit.ly/nus-statement. □

Sunak's quiet [dropping](#) of the existing two-tier policy which means asylum seekers arriving irregularly have to wait until after regular arrivals to have their claims considered will help many who are still awaiting decisions on their claims. But the reprieve is limited – if and when the IMB passes, all who have arrived or will arrive after 6 March 2023 will be subject to its new regime.

Housing for asylum seekers (who are banned from supporting themselves through work or social security while awaiting processing) continues to worsen.

Forty were [left](#) on the street after the Home Office tried to pack them four to a room in a cramped London hotel – it took two days of protests by the refugees and supporters to force a U-turn. 8,000 Afghans who came to the UK fleeing the Taliban face [eviction](#) onto the streets.

At asylum accommodation run by outsourcing giant Serco, workers [whistle-blew](#) on bullying and abuse. They accused senior managers of harassment, humiliation, intimidation, racism, withholding of food and mismanagement of medical care. The Home Office has backed its corporate contractor.

Barges

Plans are progressing to cram refugees into prison-barge-style ships with [limited access](#) to the outside world. And the government is [plotting](#) for slum landlords by exempting them from basic standards when housing asylum seekers, including gas and electrical safety and minimum room sizes.

Despite some incremental [legal wins](#) and organising and action by campaigners including refugees, political opposition to the government's agenda remains dangerously muted. Labour leaders persist in their shameful strategy of pandering to xenophobia, breaching both party policy and Starmer's pledges. Most trade union leaders fail to follow up positive words with significant action. And extra-parliamentary opposition is punching far below its weight.

Resistance

Direct resistance to raids and deportations is vital and brave work. Legal work has achieved limited but life-saving reprieves. Lobbying for amendments can blunt this or that aspect of Tory legislation (though it can [risk](#) diverting or moderating overall opposition). But these are rearguard actions. We cannot turn the tide without a large-scale, mass-participation political offensive.

Despite the toxic parliamentary and press atmosphere and far-right mobilisation, there is also significant public

[sympathy](#) for refugees and revulsion at Conservative policies. Those people could be a major force, and could win round others too.



Pic: @gewman

Yet there has been little opportunity for them to participate in large-scale demonstrations of their opposition, or to be invited into sustained activist organising for a positive alternative. Mass protest is not a complete answer, but nor is it dispensable.

The [reiteration](#) of threats by civil service workers in PCS to strike against the Rwanda deportation plan is a glimmer of light. They deserve the encouragement and solidarity of the whole labour movement. Their activity could also be a launchpad for a wider political mobilisation.

Campaigners have rightly [criticised](#) the double standards and implied racism of creating bespoke schemes for Ukrainians and Hongkongers, while refusing one to, for example, Sudanese people fleeing the civil war. Delayed asylum and family reunion decisions continue to [put](#) Sudan refugees in danger, or force them onto dangerous criminalised routes. (The flawed [schemes](#) for [Ukraine](#) and [HK](#) should not be prettified, either)

While people in danger need specific evacuation operations and escape routes, we should not demand a multiplication of crisis-by-crisis resettlement

schemes.

That would rely too much on the government's calculations each time. We must fight instead for a consistent, permanent policy of free passage and welcome. An end to criminalisation, detention, and deportation. Rights for asylum seekers and all migrants, from their day of arrival: to permanent residency; to decent housing within communities; to work; to access equal social security and public services; and to appropriate support for survivors of war, persecution, torture and abuse.

Common interests

As workers, we combat division by highlighting our common interests regardless of birthplace. Rather than competing against one another for scraps, we organise to battle together, for a massive redistribution of wealth and power from the rich to the whole working class.

Our goal is a world where we are all free to move and stay across the planet with liberty, equality and a good life wherever we are. At present free movement is a privilege of the rich and powerful. Socialists fight to make that privilege into a universal right. □

Why the strongest have done poorly in the strikes so far

By Ollie Moore

By most statistical measures – levels of union density; number of members covered by collective bargaining agreements; numbers of workplace reps – workers in the railway, including the London Underground, and in the postal service can be considered among the best organised in Britain. They are also able to hit their bosses' or the government's income directly by strikes, unlike most public service workers.

Despite ostensibly extensive strikes, neither group has been able to win victories in their 2022-3 campaigns, while gains have been won by some weaker-placed workers. Why?

Part of the reason is that the disputes with Network Rail, the Rail Delivery Group (representing Train Operating Companies, TOCs), and Royal Mail have been not only about pay – and with London Underground Ltd. (LU), not about pay at all. They are disputes in which pay, if a factor at all, has been



less central than resisting enormous restructures and changes to terms and conditions, often involving thousands of job cuts. Employers have been committed and determined to drive through change as they have return to routine operation after the Covid lockdowns. They have sometimes posed things in apocalyptic terms, insisting that the future of the industry depends on them being able to make their cuts. Royal Mail bosses have threatened to declare the business insolvent.

Pay disputes often include demands over other conditions, and settlements may involve improvements for workers

or productivity gains for bosses, or sometimes both. But in national rail, Royal Mail, and Tube, the disputes have more of an “all or nothing” character.

The problem is that the unions have not launched programmes of action sufficient to win “all” in an “all or nothing” disputes.

RMT, CWU, and Aslef have struck sporadically, usually for one or two days at a time, often with big gaps in between rounds of action. CWU escalated its strikes in Royal Mail in December 2022, but with little follow-up.

Sprint

RMT's dispute with Network Rail was settled for a below-inflation pay increase and a fudge on terms and conditions that freed the union from having to sign up to Network Rail's changes, in effect because they were already being implemented. In the Royal Mail dispute, CWU leaders have signed up to a “negotiators' agreement” that gives Royal Mail much of what it wanted (with below-inflation pay increases) but has suspended the members' referendum on that deal. The disputes on TOCs and LU continue, but without, so far, any meaningful intensification of action.

Given the stakes, the disputes were only ever likely to be won via escalating strikes. The “marathon, not a sprint” approach which the union leaders consciously proclaimed is never good,

even in simpler pay disputes, but least of all good in these higher-stakes battles. The high membership levels, and even high numbers of reps, in rail, mail, and Tube, do not make the workers immune from the long ebb of industrial struggle prior to the 2022/3 wave. Postal workers maintained traditions of militancy and unofficial action on a local level, but had taken no national action since 2009. Prior to 2022, London Underground workers last held network-wide strikes in 2016. Some TOCs had seen strikes in the mid-2010s over the implementation of Driver Only Operation, but there had been no national rail strikes since the 1990s.

Even in higher-density industries, over that long ebb union membership often came to be seen as something akin to taking out an insurance policy. It was sometimes consciously promoted by unions as such. RMT used the “insurance for your job” analogy in promotional materials. A workforce where large numbers of workers are union members, but typically see the union as something largely external to which a fee is paid in exchange for the service of “protection”, is not a truly “well organised” workforce.

To change that, socialists active in unions need to win a different approach to industrial action, and a different approach to the day-to-day functioning of the union in the workplace. □

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), on indefinite strike to win reinstatement for sacked rep

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

11-25 June: DVLA workers in Swansea (PCS) strike

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

13, 15, 20 June: UMW members at seven workplaces across London strike

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

15-19 June: Bristol university workers (Unison) strike

20-21 June and 27-28 June: Arriva bus drivers in London (Unite) strike

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

23 and 26-9 June: Newcastle uni-

versity staff (UCU) strike against pay deductions

From 28 June: (29 days total) security workers at Heathrow (Unite) strike unless new offer (balloted on 13-23 June) is accepted.

12-15 July: Scottish junior doctors (BMA) strike

20-21 July: NHS consultants (BMA) strike, pending the outcome of ballot closing on 27 June

Ballots

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

15 May-28 July: Teachers in England (NEU) ballot for action over pay. Naswt reballots 5 June-10 July; 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 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](https://workersliberty.org/events).

Thursday 15 June, 3pm: LGBT equality is a union issue (Tubeworker meeting)

6pm: *Outcast* book launch with author Camila Bassi and Daniel Randall

8pm: *State and Revolution* reading group continues

Saturday 17 June, 11am: Another Ukraine (Ukraine Solidarity Campaign), Derbyshire House, St Chad's Street, London WC1H 8AB

1pm: Abortion should not be a crime (demonstration called by BPAS, WEP, Fawcett Society), Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London WC2A 2LL

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

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



Trump's stay-out-of-jail card?

By Tom Harrison

In the 1930s Depression era America evangelists went on the radio to rob the poor of their hard earned cash. One in particular peddled the line that there was a mother somewhere saving her money in a cookie jar but not knowing for what purpose. Now was the chance to send that money to reverend so-and-so to help him "do God's work".

The USA has never been short of con artists tricking the working classes out of their earnings. At the present time the most accomplished of these is Donald Trump. His latest grifting exercise raised \$14 million in a fortnight following his arraignment in New York over hush-money payments. Now that he has been indicted for federal crimes over illegal possession of classified documents, that grifting mill will go into overdrive.

With Trump it's always been about money. Becoming President in 2016 was literally a golden opportunity to rake in millions for his family businesses – anything for back room deals with the Saudis to overcharging the government for the use of Trump properties. His time in office probably saved him from another one of his bankruptcies!

To the aim of self-enrichment, an-

other has been added – keeping out of jail. More indictments are coming from the State of Georgia and the Department of Justice regarding Trump's concerted efforts to overturn the 2020 election and the attack on the Capitol in January 2021.

No one knows what motivated Trump to wilfully retain classified documents. Were they "souvenirs" which gave him bragging rights? Were they to be sold to foreign governments? Or to be used for blackmail? What is certain from the photographs provided by prosecutors is that documents were stored in such a haphazard manner that anyone going through Mar-a-Lago could have access to them from the ballroom stage, the shower room, etc.

Evidence

If a picture says a thousand words, then such evidence is damning. Yet no leading Republican has come out to condemn him. Instead they continue to trot out the line that it is all a politically motivated witch-hunt. The indictments have had the effect of sucking the life out of his rivals' campaigns for the presidential nomination.

Trump increasingly sees the nomination coming his way as his stay out of jail card. Most of his adult life has been



an exercise in playing the legal system. If he's allowed to spin all these cases out until the run up to the general election, then no jail time. Win that election, and all the charges disappear. He may even pardon himself! Things could change of course if, as indictments pile up, his poll ratings plummet, and Ron DeSantis then mounts a serious challenge.

America is described in Economist Intelligence Unit rankings as a "flawed democracy". The degree of breaching democratic rights varies from state to state. For example, I can think of no other country in the world where the death penalty applies in certain parts but not in others.

DeSantis wants to make the rest of the US "like Florida"; he presents himself as more far-right than Trump. He has set up an authoritarian regime in his own bailiwick: abortion bans, anti-gay legislation, easier implementation of the death penalty, virtually non-existent gun control, attacks on diversity programs and book banning.

He has been on a drive to recruit police officers from elsewhere in the country, offering \$5,000 bonuses to relocate to Florida. It has attracted officers who've had numerous complaints against them, including use of excessive force, false imprisonment and sexual extortion.

At present though, 2024 looks like a rerun of Trump versus Biden. Both of their respective parties offer nothing to benefit the American working class.

The recent budget deal Biden negotiated with the Republican leadership in Congress demonstrates that. It benefited the military-industrial complex and the big corporations, whilst cutting back programmes helping out workers and the poor.

The American working class is badly in need of a party of its own. There has been a modest growth in trade union membership recently, with an estimated 48% of non unionised workers wanting to join unions. Aggressive employer anti-union actions, many of them illegal, form a barrier to this and socialists have to campaign against them.

Only its own strength and organisations can protect the working class against "illiberal" and fascist projects from elements of the American ruling class. □

Israel and Ukraine: both no right to exist?



By Jim Denham

People who want to see Putin prevail in Ukraine were overjoyed by the recent UCU congress vote against Ukraine having the arms it needs to defend itself.

Andrew Murray wrote in the *Morning Star* that "The University and College Union (UCU) vote to oppose the continuing war in Ukraine, including arms sales, and to support the campaigning of the Stop the War Coalition against British government policy over the war is a beacon to the rest of the movement".

Just days earlier, the PCS conference had passed a resolution supporting Ukrainians' right to defend themselves and liberate their country. The *Morning Star* didn't even mention it.

One aspect of the UCU motion that Murray failed to men-

tion is the clause which states: "Volodymyr Zelensky says he wants Ukraine to become a 'big Israel' – an armed, illiberal outpost of US imperialism."

The definition of Israel as "an armed illiberal outpost of US imperialism" was not, in fact, something which Zelenskyy actually said. On one occasion, over a year ago, Zelenskyy stated that Ukraine might have to become "a big Israel" out of necessity, because it would have a permanently hostile neighbour. That's all.

Endorsement

The clause amounts to an endorsement of Putin's pretext for his invasion of Ukraine: In order to defend Russia's legitimate security concerns in the face of expansionary US imperialism, he claimed, he was left with no alternative but to launch an invasion.

The clause can also be read as an endorsement of Putin's war aim of the destruction of the Ukrainian state.



But if Murray chose to ignore the rather embarrassing "Israel" comparison, John Wight, an uncritical contributor to Putin's RT television channel who (writing on the Medium website) has repeatedly described the Russian invasion as an "anti-Nazi" cause, has no such hesitation.

In the *Morning Star* of 9 June, Mr Wight describes Israel as a "proto-fascist state" (note: the "state" not just the present far-right government) that is protected from criticism by "the success of the pro-Israel lobby in the West". It is based upon "white supremacy in a Zionist

variant" (again, not just the present government, but the state itself).

"Israel is not a democracy, it is a settler-colonial state" Mr Wight informs us without mentioning the circumstances under which those "settlers" arrived.

But his central theme is "the similarities that now exist between Ukraine and Israel". He has to admit that "Ukraine is not a settler-colonial project" but goes on to repeat Putin's discredited propaganda stating that "the mistreatment of its ethnic and Russian-speaking minority in Southern Ukraine since 2014 has been as brutal and murderous as that meted out to the Palestinians by Israel" (exaggerated allegations of mistreatment amounting to genocide of Russian speakers in Donbas and elsewhere have been one of Putin's justifications for the invasion).

Wight's comparison concludes with the claim that "both countries are drowning

in the poison of ethno-nationalism, and both are US vassal states, dependent upon Washington's support and economic largesse."

In Wight's worldview, Israel is an artificial construction (an outpost of US imperialism) not the expression of the (supposedly non-existent) Hebrew-Jewish nation. It therefore has no right to exist. Like Putin, he clearly takes the same view of Ukraine.

Mr Wight, in his crude, pro-Putin, conspiratorial left-antisemitism, has summed up the thinking behind the UCU anti-Ukraine motion. Murray, the *Morning Star*, the Communist Party of Britain and people like the Socialist Workers Party, in reality go along with this stuff, but generally avoid stating it in public. I suppose we should thank Mr Wight for bringing it out into the open. □

• In preparing this piece, JD has made use of Dale Street's article "The Left, the UCU motion, and antisemitism": bit.ly/u-u-a

Jailed for getting an abortion



By Kelly Rogers

On 12 June a woman, Carla Foster, was sentenced to 28 months in prison for obtaining drugs to induce an abortion after the legal term limit. After taking the medication, she experienced complications and called 999. Police were called to her hospital bedside.

Currently, the legal limit on having an abortion in England, Scotland and Wales is 23 weeks and six days, as per the Abortion Act of 1967. The maximum sentence under the offence is life imprisonment.

Compared to countries around the world like Poland and the US, it's easy to think that we have "the right to abortion" in the UK and that that's enough. This case serves as an important reminder of just how limited our reproductive rights actually are.

At the most recent Workers' Liberty AGM, held in April this year, the conference passed policy in favour of an



"as early as possible, as late as necessary" approach to abortion, in favour of the abolition of term limits. The policy states:

"Policy barriers to safe abortion include criminalisation, mandatory waiting times, the requirement that approval must be given by other people or institutions, financial charges (e.g.

for some migrants), insufficient levels of provision and limits on when during pregnancy an abortion can take place. Such barriers can lead to critical delays in accessing treatment and increase risk of unsafe abortion, stigmatisation, and health complications. Some barriers are used by anti-choice individuals and organisations to push women past legal term limits to prevent legal abortion.

"We are for the removal of all these barriers and the decriminalisation of abortion, which would lead to it being regulated in the same way as other healthcare procedures.

"Our support for abortion rights is based on bodily autonomy. Nobody should be forced to stay pregnant against their wishes."

The "pills by post" scheme that Foster used to procure the medication was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic to enable people to continue to access abortions in spite of lockdown restrictions. A number of groups and professionals, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives, sent in a mitigation plea to

the court arguing that the introduction of "pills by post" "was one of the single greatest advances since abortion care was legalised by the 1967 Act."

They made the case for a non-custodial sentence on the grounds that imprisonment would deter other people from accessing abortion services or seeking medical care. The letter also denounced a recent increase in criminal investigations following late-gestation terminations.

In his [sentencing remarks](#), the judge states: "The balance struck by the law between a woman's reproductive rights and the rights of her unborn foetus is an emotive and often controversial issue. That is, however, a matter for Parliament and not for the courts."

It is clear that our reproductive rights are neither adequate nor safe. Over the coming weeks we will likely see protests organised in solidarity with Foster and in support of our right to abortion. At these, we must raise the banner for abortion as early as possible and as late as necessary, because no one should be criminalised for accessing healthcare, and because no one should ever be forced to stay pregnant against their will. □

• Protest Saturday 17 June, 1pm, Royal Courts of Justice, London.

Can Johnson do a Trump?

By Martin Thomas

Boris Johnson has flagged up an attempt to do a Trump or a de Gaulle: to position himself as the outsider hit by an establishment conspiracy, the better to come back later.

Johnson has resigned "for now" from Parliament to preempt a parliamentary committee verdict on "Partygate", and has floated a tax-cut, harder-Brexit stance against Rishi Sunak.

A possible game plan for Johnson is to get back into parliament just before a 2024 general election, or just after, then seek to replace a defeated Sunak as Tory leader.

We'd have to know more about the inside of the Tory party, and possible crises in the next year or so, to assess his chances, but luckily they don't look good. Johnson could of course still cut a big figure as a journalist, maybe editor of a major daily.

De Gaulle resigned from his RPF movement (described by French Marxists at the time as fascist) in May 1953, went off to write his memoirs, and then was made president by a "soft" military coup in May 1958.

Trump has re-established himself as by far the leading Republican contender for president in 2024, drawing in, subduing, or marginalising Republicans who distanced from him after the 6 January 2021 storming of the Capitol.

But Johnson, demagogue, chancer, and liar though he is, doesn't have as much autonomy from mainstream bourgeois consensus as Trump. And the far-right grass roots, in gun clubs, churches, militias, and local Republican committees, which Trump has managed to channel, have been brewing for decades in the USA. The Tory party has no comparable insurgency.

6.1% of adults in the USA,

about 17 million, [see](#) violence to stop Trump being prosecuted as justified. Many of those people have guns, and all of them have a model in their heads of what "violence" means here: 6 January 2021.

Worryingly many people in Britain tell opinion [polls](#) they go along with far-right conspiracy theories. But that is mostly a constituency of atomised wild half-thoughts.

The consolidated Republican base is much [more right-](#)

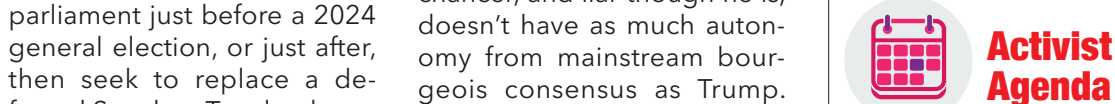
[wing](#) than the Tories'. On the claims that the real problem with discrimination is people seeing it where it's absent, and that the country will do better to stick to its tradition than be open to change, in each case about 70% of US Republican voters say yes, only about 40% of Tories.

30% of Republicans oppose abortion in all circumstances, only 9% of Tories. 16% of Republicans say they don't want an immigrant as neighbour, very few Tories.

The Tories have moved and are moving to the right, and crises can crystallise inchoate far-right sentiment very quickly. But in a way that Johnson can seize on? Maybe not. And we can hope to change things positively before then. □



Pic: @gewman



On Saturday 8 July Workers' Liberty people will be organising at the [Durham Miners' Gala](#) and at [London Trans Pride](#). □

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

Trans rights: the UK falls behind



Interview

By Joanna Harper

The following represents the opinion of Joanna Harper and is not in any way a representation of the opinion of Loughborough University.

Joanna Harper is a researcher on trans sport performance (at Loughborough University), author of the book *Sporting Gender*, and a trans athlete herself.

Trans women have probably been more successful in cycling, on a global level, than in any other sport. The list of successful trans women cyclists includes a Dutch 15-year professional cyclist who just retired in the last year, and an alternate for the 2020 US Olympic team. Whatever advantages these trans women may have, and they certainly exist, they have not led to an over-representation of trans women, even in cycling.

I believe that, especially in endurance events, reducing testosterone to typical female values via hormone therapy mitigates the advantages of having gone through a testosterone-fueled puberty

– mitigates, does not eliminate – to the point where we can have meaningful competition between trans women and cis women. I don't see the need for banning trans women from the women's category.

A lot of the people who are opposed to trans women in sports consider trans women to be men who think they are women. For these people each successful trans woman becomes an affront. For instance, the recent [victory](#) by Austin Killips [a US trans woman cyclist] is cited as justification for the British cycling decision to ban trans women from the women's [competitive race] category. As another example, a trans woman finished the London Marathon no.6,159 in the women's division, out of approximately 20,000. The result was a headline reading "trans woman beats 14,000 women in the London Marathon". I would suggest everyone should push back against this demonisation of trans women. The rights of trans women do not threaten the rights of cis men and women.

As an alternative, I suggest that we think of trans women as a physiologically distinct sub-category of all women. Hence, trans women belong in women's spaces, including sports. Trans people make up approximately



1% of humanity, thus proportional representation would lead to 1% of women's cycling races won by trans women. The actual percentage is much smaller. And cycling is the sport in which trans women have had the most success. Banning trans women from the women's category is not a necessary or proportionate means to deal with the physiological differences between trans and cis women.

I'm in a team at Loughborough University which has done a lot of research on the effects of medical gender transition on sporting performance. We're now trying to get the most recent data published, and I'm not allowed to share our research yet. In general, however, I can tell you that there are substantial reductions in the athletic performance of trans women with hormone therapy.

In grassroots sports, I think we should just have self-identification. In fact, in grassroots sports, we don't even necessarily need to divide men from women. There are many creative things we can do at grassroots level. British Cycling has stated that they won't ban trans women from women's recreational cycling. However, at higher levels of sport, we need a women's category if we want women succeeding. And if we are to allow trans women into that cat-

egory, then trans women should bring their testosterone to female-typical values. Some suggest that requiring medical transition is dehumanising for trans women, but I would counter that drug testing of elite athletes also involves invasive tests. At levels where all athletes require drug testing, then trans women should require testosterone suppression.

The trans debate extends beyond sports. In the United States now, there is a state-by-state cultural divide. The largest state in the nation, California, does not require hormone therapy for trans girls to compete in high school sports, but over 20 states have now completely banned trans girls as young as six or seven years old from the girls' category. The bans are clearly political, as the same states are also outlawing gender-affirming hormone therapy, or even drag shows. These measures are aimed not just at trans people but also at all queer people.

Marriage

Until 2015 or so, opponents of equal rights for queer people focused on same-sex marriage, but since the marriage laws changed these same people have now focused on the rights of trans people. The obvious facts that trans women are bigger and stronger than cis women have made trans women in sports a successful wedge issue. This is true in the UK as well as the US.

Scandinavia and most of western Europe are more liberal on trans athletes than the UK currently is. That wasn't the case six or seven years ago. The UK has become more restrictive and a less desirable place for trans people to live. There was a time, maybe 15 years ago, when the UK was ranked as the most queer-friendly country in all of Europe. The UK has now fallen to no.17.

I long for a world in which trans people are accepted for who we are. I also believe in meaningful sport for all women and thus think that some restrictions (but not bans or near-bans) on trans women in sport are acceptable. □

More headaches for SNP

By Dale Street

Former SNP leader and former Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was finally arrested and questioned under caution by the police for seven hours on 11 June.

Her arrest was part of the ongoing police investigation into the SNP's finances and the fate of over £600,000 of donations for a second referendum on Scottish independence..

The SNP's true believers have reacted to the arrest as only true believers can: It is a conspiracy by Westminster.

"We all know this is just another dead cat from Westminster to take the heat off what's happening down there. Total witch-hunt again. Takes the heat off bonkers Boris. Another distraction away from this desperate despicable Tory party."

Reality check: Policing in Scotland is a devolved power. Police Scotland was created by the SNP government in 2013. It is overseen by the Scottish Police Authority. Members of the latter body are appointed by Scottish Ministers.

Sturgeon's arrest has sharpened divisions within the SNP and within the broader pro-independence movement.



For Alba, set up by Alex Salmond after he quit the SNP, Sturgeon's arrest constitutes a form of poetic justice. Alba members hold Sturgeon responsible for Salmond (supposedly unfairly) facing 14 charges of sexual assault, indecent assault, intent to rape and attempted to rape in 2020.

Whatever the eventual outcome of the police investigation, socialists can certainly take pleasure in the infighting, backstabbing and cycle of mutual denunciations in the SNP and the broader pro-independence movement. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/h-snp



Our audio

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

- Public meetings – 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
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CONNOLLY'S HISTORY AND HIS SOCIALISM



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

This is the fifth instalment on "Connolly's historiography" in our long-running series on Connolly: workersliberty.org/connolly

What did James Connolly contribute to politics in Ireland? A powerful myth, knitting together socialism and pre-1652 Gaelic-Irish society, defining socialism as the revival on a higher level of ancient Gaelic common property. Part of that myth was the idea that militant nationalism led to socialism and so was a way, perhaps, to reach the Protestant workers of north-east Ireland.

Connolly created a story. A myth, in the sense that Gramsci says Machiavelli created a myth in his account of "The Prince": "a 'live' work, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a 'myth'." A living story, combining feeling and advocacy and accounts of history.

Not long after he moved from Scotland to Ireland in mid 1896, Connolly published a three part article on Ireland in the *Labour Leader*, the Independent Labour Party weekly edited by Keir Hardie. All three parts had one title: Ireland for the Irish. It was a play on an idea pushed by The Clarion and Robert Blatchford: "Britain for the British" (also the title of a popular book by Blatchford), which in turn was a play on the popular cry: India for the Indians. Blatchford, who ran *The Clarion* newspaper and the Clarion Cycling Clubs, was a deeply chauvinist Englishman who led a strand of British socialism and semi-socialism into backing Britain in the Boer war.

Of course, "Ireland for the Irish" was

different from "Britain for the British". With small variations, Connolly's text would be republished repeatedly in subsequent decades as a pamphlet, *Erin's Hope: The End And The Means*. The last edition seen through the press by Connolly himself would come out in 1909, and its account would be reprinted in *Labour In Irish History* (1910, but serialised earlier in *Workers' Republic*) and in *The Reconquest of Ireland* (1915).

Here Connolly set out his basic idea of Irish history and of the roots, as he conceived of them, of future socialism contained in that history. It was the history of only one of the two peoples inhabiting the island. In later versions Connolly wove in the Protestant Irish, but the basic story was that of the Gaelic Irish alone. In *The Reconquest of Ireland* Connolly [made out](#) that the Protestant settlers from Scotland were, or mostly, ne'er-do-wells and criminals; if true, it would mean that they broke the unjust laws, and would scarcely weigh with socialists.

Ireland communist until the 1650s

Connolly found in Gaelic-Irish history a form of agrarian communism that had refused to go down before the invading "English" social system for 500 years after the Norman-English conquest, and had survived in Ireland until 250 years before the date at which Connolly was writing (and in the highlands of Scotland until 1745). In Ireland, capitalism was therefore an alien social system, the "English system", imposed along with foreign conquest in the 1640s.

The long, long conflict between conquerors and conquered had not been a mere political conflict, but one between Irish common tribal property in land, destroyed by the Conquest, and English feudal individual ownership in land. Connolly dated the change^[1]

from one to the other to the Cromwellian conquest at the end of the 1640s and beginning of the 1650s, and the dispersal of the Irish tribes.

The socialist revolution would be the reconquest of Ireland, i.e. the restoration of ancient tribal ownership on a higher level. There are books of history and books embodying historical myth. In *Erin's Hope: The New Evangel*, in *Labour In Irish History*, in *The Reconquest of Ireland*, and in passing in articles, Connolly proposed the rooting of socialism and of Irish nationalism in a mythical version of Irish history.

The working class and socialism

That drive to root socialism in Irish history was there from the very beginning of Connolly's activity in Ireland. His advocacy of this version of socialism in Ireland presupposed his nationalism, a nationalism that excluded (though he said it did not) the proletariat of modern advanced industry in Ireland, in the north-east.

That raised another problem for a Marxist. Marxism called itself scientific socialism. For that Marxism, socialism was not only a good idea; it was being created by capitalism, which produced, wrote Frederick Engels, "the invading socialist society". Industry was being amalgamated, reorganised, by capitalist society; so, in America, was agriculture. So was the working class, which would have to make the transition from capitalism to socialism, which in Connolly's understanding then it would do by seizing industry and thereafter running it.

That meant for Marxists that socialism could only come out of advanced capitalism and that it could not come from pre-capitalist societies or underdeveloped capitalism. The Socialist International looked to Germany, which had modern industry and a mass socialist party.

Meaning a break with that view, Antonio Gramsci hailed the Russian Revolution of 1917 as "the Revolution against 'Capital'". It wasn't so. What the Bolsheviks did in 1917 was prove that the workers could take power in conditions which were not ripe for socialism. The workers took power from their base of being concentrated in giant factories, dotted within a sea of backward agriculture. (Serfdom had been abolished only in 1861.)

None of the Bolsheviks thought that this victory could be a socialist revolution as distinct from a workers' revolution: the society was painfully unripe for socialism. They thought their revolution doomed unless it more or less immediately spread to societies they saw as ripe for socialism, Germany for example. But the spread was blocked by the right wing of German social democracy, whose politics during the World War Connolly had shared, though he also praised Karl Liebknecht, the right wing's enemy and future victim. The idea of building socialism in backward Russia alone did not emerge from Stalin and Bukharin until late in 1924.

Unless the revolution spread, "all the old crap" – Marx's words, cited by Trotsky in reference to Russia in the 1930s – would come back and prevail – privileges, development of classes, all that was in pre-socialist society. As indeed it did in Russia.

Ireland, linked to British capitalism, was – but only via that link – "ripe" for socialism. An Ireland considered as an independent economy, relying only on itself, was in no way ripe for socialism. Still less so an Ireland whose industrialised segment had been partitioned out.

Worse. It was plain from the resistance to all-Ireland Home Rule in 1912-14 (and in 1893, or in 1886) that independent Ireland would not include the industrial north-east. In fact, Irish independence in isolation and self-con-

tained socialism in Ireland were simply not possible in any Marxist conception of socialism. Connolly himself had understood that at some points.

Connolly gave Ireland not the working-class socialism he had advocated all his life, outside Ireland at least, and sometimes advocated even after late August 1914, when he, an erstwhile opponent of all imperialisms, became an advocate and apologist for one of the great imperialisms, Germany – not that working-class socialism, but a populism that was many things to many people.

In his *Labour in Irish History* Connolly did not work with a Marxist definition of the working class distinct from the peasantry. He amalgamated workers and peasants as “labour”, the labouring people, including the peasants, who had of course been oppressed and treated monstrously through the history Connolly dealt with.

The connection to militarism

Connolly had belonged to a socialist group, the De Leonites, who made an a-historical fetish out of Marx’s time-and-circumstances-bound idea that peaceful socialist change might be possible in Britain or in the USA, which at that time had no heavy European-style state machine. Connolly moved all the way from that to Blanquist insurrection in Dublin, an insurrection based not primarily on social circumstances, but on the readiness and equipment of the insurrectionists. He travelled to the far end of IRB insurrectionism.

That insurrectionist turn, too, became part of the hybrid myth, along with the nationalism at its centre. It morphed into the idea that militant nationalism and militarism would somehow become socialism and thus reach the Protestant working class. For generations of revolutionaries, that would be their guide. Connolly became a wild – socialistic – card in the Republican and nationalist martyrology.

James Connolly contributed to Irish history by being military commander of the 1916 Rising and joining the canon of Irish republicanism by his death before a British Army firing squad on the morning of 12 May 1916. That gave the socialists a hero and a martyr to claim – in the iconography of Irish nationalism. Sean O’Casey, first secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, would sum it up like this: “Irish Labour lost a Leader. A well-known author has declared that Connolly was the first martyr for Irish Socialism; but Connolly was no more an Irish Socialist martyr than Robert Emmett, P H Pearse, or Theobald Wolfe Tone”.

The truth about Irish clan society

Connolly believed that until the mid-17th century Cromwellian conquests Ireland had had, not the primitive communism known everywhere at the dawn of history, but a worked-out system, enshrined in laws. He identified historical Gaelic tribalism with an idealised ver-

sion of that pre-history.

There are two questions about Connolly’s history: Is it true? Does what is true lead where he thinks it leads?

Connolly’s history shows gross illusions in Irish clan society. The clans – many, many hundreds of them – had collective ownership of their land. But that Irish society was extremely aristocratic and bound by tradition. Every class from slaves to royals existed in that society. In the period, before 1500, for instance, when a hybridisation of the Irish-Norman-English nobility had occurred, the English took to the Irish custom of coyne and livery. They billeted their soldiers on the Irish farmers. In France later this custom was called dragooning (dragonnades). It was used to break intransigent Jews and Protestants after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

Serfdom was formally abolished in Ireland only in 1604 or 1605, long after it had ceased in England. The abolition was used as a device against Hugh O’Neill by the new English masters of Ireland, to curb his growing control of the North.

The idea of Irish tribalism, or of the often out-of-use laws that had reflected it, as socialism, was sheer nonsense, and harmful nonsense in advocating socialism to the Protestant workers of the north-east.

But Connolly maintained:

“The Irish system was thus on a par with those conceptions of social rights and duties which we find the ruling classes today 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 today, viz., that the people have no other function in existing than to be the bond-slaves 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 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 would allow”.

Whatever the legalities it went by, the description was a gross falsification of ancient Gaelic society. At the Norman invasion, the Gaelic clansman had the choice of becoming serfs.

Connolly and the landowning peasants

In 1896 Connolly was writing eleven years after the Ashbourne Act had pushed on the redistribution of Ireland’s land by way of the state putting up the cost of buying out the landlords, a principle set out at the time of the Disestablishment Act in 1869. The British ruling class was engaged in making an Irish revolution from above. From the social point of view, the winning of Dublin government in 1921-22 would be an afterthought. Ireland was being

not so much “reconquered” as surrendered piecemeal, under duress, under the political control of the old conquerors, and to a segment of the population, the farmers.

There was no reason, when Connolly wrote, to think that this surrender of landownership was not what the Irish tenants wanted. Quite the opposite. On this, one of Connolly’s mentors, John Leslie, had quoted Charles J Kickham, the one-time “Head Centre” of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and a novelist and songwriter (“She Lived Beside the Anner”). Asked whether the Irish people were attached to the land, Kickham replied: “They would go to hell for it”. He was probably not exaggerating.

Even if Connolly’s account of distant Irish history were faultless, it is not clear what bearing that could have on this reality of his time or on a very powerful trend that would end only with the complete redistribution of the land as the private property of peasant owners. By the time of Connolly’s return to Ireland from the USA in 1910, the redistribution had essentially already happened.

Connolly’s political conclusions were more akin to, say, the Russian populism of the 1870s and after, or the Bulgarian populists led by Stamboliyski in the 20th century, than to anything commonly found in Marxism in the 1890s. Connolly was aware of this, and he knew that he was ignoring the generally accepted Marxist ideas of what was involved in the land redistribution.

“Those who believe in the strange theory that the progress of the human race has been in some strange manner pre-ordained to pass through the various stages of communism, chattel-slavery, feudalism and wage-slavery as a preparation for the higher ordered

society of the future, who teach that since society has walked along certain lines it might not under altered circumstances have reached the same high goal along totally different lines, will of course regard the Irish adherence to clan ownership at such a comparatively recent date as the seventeenth century as an evidence of retarded economic 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 be more inclined 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 society of the future”.

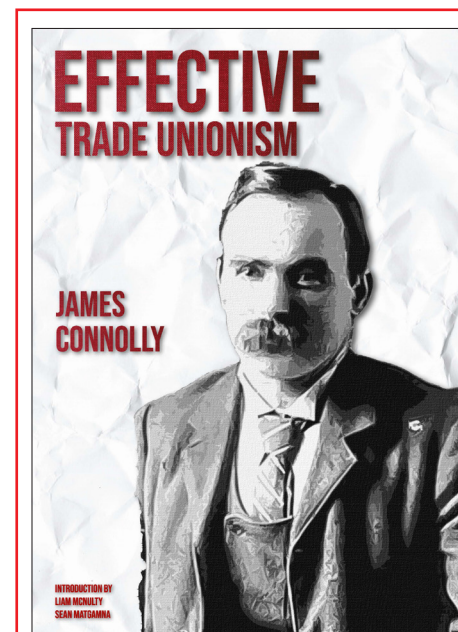
This was Connolly at his worst. And it was sheer nonsense.

An agrarian socialism?

For Connolly, Irish socialism was not something that would come out of advanced capitalism, not even by the roundabout route which Marx sketched, of peasant revolution in Ireland triggering workers’ revolution in Britain, which in turn would open the way for socialism in Ireland. For Connolly, socialism was a way by which Ireland could largely avoid capitalism. This is the relevance of Connolly’s account of Ireland’s past in this, its first outing; it is the model of the Irish agrarian-socialist future. Connolly may have been influenced by the Russian populists, some of whom – the Social Revolutionaries – were then members of the Socialist International. In any case, his arguments paralleled theirs.

“There are two things necessary for the maintenance of life in Ireland, as in every other country. They are land and labour. Possessed of these two essentials, the human race has at its command all the factors requisite for the wellbeing of the species. From the earth labour extracts alike its foods and the mineral wealth with which it contrives to construct and adorn its habitations and prepare its raiment. Therefore the possession of the soil is everywhere the first requisite of life. Granting this as a proposition too self-evident to need any elaborate demonstration, we at once arrive at the conclusion that since the soil is so necessary to our existence the first care of every well-regulated community ought to be to preserve the use of that soil and the right to freely share in its fruits to every member of the community, present or prospective, born or unborn. The moment when the land of a country passes from the care of the community as a public trust, and from being the common property of the entire people becomes the private property of individuals, marks the beginning of slavery for that people and of oppression for that country”.

Ignoring the implications for capitalist development of the peasant landown-



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

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ership which already existed and was spreading, and of the elements of Irish capitalism (mainly small-scale capitalism) that already dominated even the nationalist parts of the island, Connolly argued that capitalist industry could not develop in Ireland. Capitalism was a foreign plant that could not root itself in the country. Irish independence was one country alone, and not or only marginally part of a world division of labour.

Evidently, Connolly's socialism was an agrarian socialism; his idea of a future Ireland, an independent agrarian republic. His ideal seems to be the ideal which De Valera was to be much mocked for enunciating: a world of homesteads from which would come "athletic youths and comely maidens".

How, if say Britain was showing chances of a higher life, would the athletic youths and comely maidens be got to choose to live in the agrarian republic? Vast thousands of the town and country labourers of independent Ireland flocked to jobs in England, when they became available, and in the British Army. Some of them sang a parody of the armed forces song, as I heard my father sing it:

*Bless them all, bless them all
The long and the short and the tall.
Bless De Valera and Sean McEntee
Who gave us black bread and a half
ounce of tea
So we're saying goodbye to them all
And back to the boys we won't crawl.*

Capitalist industry impossible in Ireland?

"To establish industry successfully today in any country requires at least two things, neither of which Ireland possesses and one of which she can never possess. The first is the possession of the wherewithal to purchase machinery and raw material for the equipment of her factories, and the second is customers to purchase the goods when they are manufactured... Tell me how poor Ireland, exhausted and drained of her life-blood at every pore, with a population almost wholly agricultural and unused to mechanical pursuits, is to establish new factories, and where she is to find the customers to keep them going. She cannot create new markets. This world is only limited after all, and the nations of Europe are pushing their way into its remote corners so rapidly that in a few years time, at most, the entire world will have been exhausted as a market for their wares."

Not only was the industrialisation of Ireland impossible; it was undesirable. It would be "to cover the green fields of Erin with huge, ugly factories, with chimneys belching forth volumes of poisonous smoke and coating the island with a sooty desolation". Moreover: "The agriculture of Ireland can no longer compete with the scientifically equipped farmers of America..." Connolly makes trends within the world economy, the intensity of competition, the difficulties of late-industrialising countries, into absolutes.

Plainly Connolly had in mind a very primitive and minimalist independent Ireland. The only desirable option was agrarian production for use, and the trading by the government of the surplus farm produce to gain industrial commodities. "The only hope that now remains is to abandon competition altogether as a rule of life, to organise agriculture as a public service under the control of the boards of management elected by the agricultural population and responsible to them and to the nation at large, and with all the mechanical and scientific aids to agriculture the entire resources of the nation can place at their disposal. Let the produce of the Irish soil go first to feed the Irish people, and, after a sufficient store has been retained to ensure of that being accomplished, let the surplus be exchanged with other countries in return for those manufactured goods Ireland needs but does not herself produce".

Ignoring the trend before his eyes, Connolly saw the future of Ireland as agriculture on socially-owned land.

"The days of small farms, like small capitalists, are gone, and wherever they are found today they find it impossible to compete with the improved machinery and mammoth farms of America and Australia". Connolly considers peasant proprietary to be "even if practicable... of very questionable justice. To make the land of a country the property of a class is to my mind equally iniquitous whether that class number a few hundreds of a few hundred thousands... The private ownership of land by the landlord class is an injustice to the whole community, but the creation of a peasant proprietary would only tend to stereotype and consecrate that

injustice..." He called "for the nationalisation of land in the hands of an Irish state".

Class struggle on the land

He was quite clear about the class struggle in the countryside. "The capitalist farmer, driven to the wall by the stress of competition, seeks in vain to maintain his foothold in life by an unceasing struggle with the lord of the soil on one hand and a ruthless oppression of the labourer on the other..."

But he fulminated against big landlords as if they were the only owners, and as if their ownership alone were an outrage to all the others. "The moment when the land of a country passes from the care of the community as a public trust, and from being the common property of the entire people becomes the private property of individuals, marks the beginning of slavery for that people and of oppression for that country. With the land held as the property of individuals there are immediately created two antagonistic classes in society, one holding the land and demanding from the other a rent to live upon it..."

Home Rule was no solution. It would only "create in Ireland a host of place-hunters and Government officials, who, secure in the enjoyment of a good income themselves, would have always acted as a barrier between the people and their oppressors... Home Rule is simply a mockery of Irish national aspirations". And a republic would not be.

Irish revolution and British revolution

Connolly argued for separation of Ireland from Britain on grounds of "race" (which word in that context carried a different meaning then from now). "The national and racial characteristics of the English and Irish people are different, their political history and traditions are antagonistic, the economical development of the one is not on a par with the other, and, finally, although they have been in the closest contact for 700 years yet the Celtic Irishman is today as much of an insoluble problem to even the most friendly of the English as on the day when the two countries were first joined in unholy wedlock".

Here Connolly was explicitly nationalist. He immediately went on to make a bow in the direction of the old ideas of Marx and the Social Democratic Federation that an agrarian revolution in Ireland would impact mightily on England.

"No Irish revolutionist worth his salt would refuse to lend a hand to the Social Democracy of England in the effort to uproot the social system of which the British Empire is the crown and apex, and in like manner no English Social Democrat fails to realise clearly that the crash which would betoken the fall of the ruling classes in Ireland would sound the tocsin for the revolt of the disinherited in England"

But Connolly had changed Marx's

idea considerably. The proposition was now that a socialist revolution in Ireland would impact greatly on the working class of England. Of course; but everything concrete and specific in Marx's idea of the linkage of Irish and British politics had been lost.

For Marx, the linkage hinged on the landlords in Ireland being the same class as in Britain, often the same people, and the interpenetration of the landlord class with the bourgeoisie. The revolution that Ireland could experience would be a bourgeois revolution. It was surely ripe for nothing more. If the British working class took power in society, then Ireland might very well be an underdeveloped agrarian appendage of British socialism, freely deciding for itself. Connolly substituted an Irish agrarian-socialist revolution for Marx's Irish bourgeois revolution; and he depicted that agrarian-socialist revolution as self-sufficient and nation-bound, at least at first.

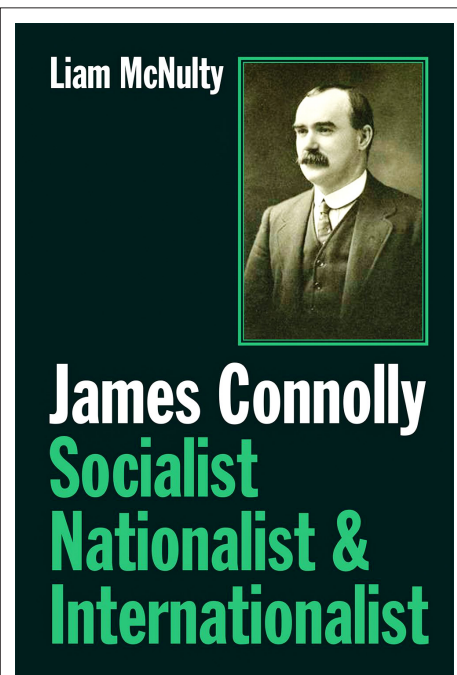
Appealing to the past of a people, and to a people's alleged traditions, Connolly conflated workers with farmers, and socialism with national liberation. That was more than an attempt to root working-class socialism in nourishing ground. It was the collapsing of what is specific to Marxist socialism into a nationalist populism. In later generations, Connolly's ideas and myths would merge with the idea that extreme militarism and nationalism – with Connolly the supposed model for it – would be viable socialist activity.

In his writings, Connolly did relate to the proletariat specifically, appealed to it, tried to organise it. On the level of his basic programmatic ideas, however, he constructed a mechanism – industrialisation closed, small farmers unviable, etc. – which, derived from making absolutes of existing economic trends, made what he did not want impossible. And, to bring about what he did want, he appealed to the traditions and "political intuition" of a (part of a) people. He combined mechanical-materialist Marxism with an idealist view of history.

Adding in the working class?

In the 1909 edition of *Erin's Hope*, Connolly's last, he made a substantial addition: "But on whom devolves the task of achieving that downfall of the ruling classes in Ireland? On the Irish people. But who are the Irish people? Is it the dividend-hunting capitalist with the phraseology of patriotism on his lips and the spoil wrung from sweated Irish toilers in his pockets; is it the scheming lawyer – most immoral of all classes; is it the slum landlord who denounces rack-renting in the country and practises it in the towns; is it any one of these sections who today dominate Irish politics? Or is it not rather the Irish Working Class -the only secure foundation on which a free nation can be reared..."

This was a clear stress and focus on the working class. But how was it achieved? By not mentioning the peasantry after having invoked "the



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Irish people"! By 1909 that class of small bourgeois had made additional giant strides in the direction of running most of Ireland. In 1896 Connolly had ignored the burgeoning tendency towards peasant proprietary; now he "ignored" the peasantry.

When he could, plausibly or otherwise, put forward the goal of an agrarian socialist republic, the populist implications of this and of his nationalism were not so glaring. Now Connolly's nationalism, and the equation of the workers with "the people" and with their ancient "political intuition", could only, given the political realities of Ireland, lead to a conflation of the working class and the nation, not to speak of a disregard for that majority of the industrial working class, in the north-east, whose national identity was different. Connolly's idea that "the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland; the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour", lent itself to nationalist-populist subordination of the labour to the dominant nationalist (bourgeois) forces in Ireland far more than to the relationship Connolly aimed for.

Connolly's wish to make the cause of labour the cause of Ireland was another way of wishing to make the labour movement what the struggle on the land had been to the cause of Ireland; and it was a complete failure, except for those who wanted to subordinate labour and socialism to nationalism.

That whole formulation, the equation of the cause of labour and the cause of Ireland, was achieved at the cost of an internationalist approach to the majority of the Irish working class, the north-east Ulster "other Irish". Connolly, of course, included them in his scheme, but he wanted them in on terms – adherence to an identity they did not feel – which ruled out their acceptance.

Connolly had imprisoned himself in a finely spun cocoon of historical myth and fantasy that was too narrow to accommodate the actually existing Irish working class. Instead of devising a democratic program that would allow the different segments of the working class on the island, and on the two islands, to unite despite their differences of identity (as they did during the 1913-14 Dublin Labour War), Connolly locked the prospects of an all-island workers' socialist movement within the aspirations of only one of the two peoples on the island. Given the low ratio of proletarians to others in "his segment" of the country's population, this cut off the big battalions of the working

class. Instead of appealing to the Protestants to do justice by the Catholics, Connolly effectively appealed to them to abnegate their own identity and espouse another in a fashion without historical precedent.

Summing up

A detailed study of Connolly's ideas of their evolution would add nuancing and qualifications to the above, but for our purpose this will suffice. It is time to sum up.

Connolly's exposition of ancient Irish history ignored far too much, and tried to identify the whole history with an idea of a supposed Celtic communism the last remnants of which had disappeared, even by Connolly's own account, two and a half centuries earlier. He interpreted the whole history of Ireland since the Anglo-Norman conquest as the struggle of two ideas. "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 circumstance that the two opposing nations held fundamentally *different ideas* upon the vital question of property in land" (emphasis added).

In his argument Connolly began with a "materialist" picture of a society and made of it an idealist account of history. Far too much of real history was faded out – colonisation, the savage land-hunger of the Elizabethan adventurers, the wars of extermination which were the pioneering model for what the English settlers in America would do to the American Indians, the conflicts of religion and the European military alliances of the wars of religion...

If surviving Irish tribal practice and Bardic jurisprudence were factors here, making assimilation of the Irish more difficult, they were factors of declining importance over the ages of Anglo-Norman and English domination. And they had long disappeared. Engels thought he saw ideas from clan-based society still alive among Irish peasants in 1891, but in any case the great social struggles of the Irish masses had long been battles to become sole owners of private patches of Ireland's land.

Engels' observations, which must have influenced Connolly, spoke of both Irish and Scots highlanders as having preserved attitudes rooted in tribalism. Certainly Scotland had, in its Celtic highlands, such relations a hundred years after Connolly dates their elimination in Ireland. But by 1896 they had gone.

Connolly had no practical idea for

renewing the relations of the past to which he looked, except an appeal to national sentiment. a national sentiment which for the peasant majority was very tightly amalgamated with the sentiment that they, the Catholics, were the nation, and that their unchallenged private ownership of their own bit of Ireland was the very cause of Ireland. The cause of Ireland is the cause of the farmers; the cause of the farmers in the cause of Ireland, might justly have been carried as a slogan by the Home Rule party and the various agrarianists.

Connolly sometimes referred to the fact that the cause of the farmers had become the cause of the Catholic Irish bourgeoisie, and aspired to make the cause of Ireland now the cause of the workers. He never managed that, and it was a fantastic idea, all things considered.

Perhaps Connolly was trying to "get back behind" then-current Irish nationalism and to sap it of the energy he wanted to see applied to a socialist-nationalist-populist program? In fact, he made a cardinal and archetypal error. Trotsky defined that error thus: "We must never play with slogans that are not revolutionary by their own content but that can play a quite different role according to the political conjuncture, the relationship of forces, etc...". The Unionist upper layers in Ireland, Sir Samuel Ferguson and Standish O'Grady for example, made an attempt to create a sort of cultural equivalent in Ireland of "Tory democracy" in England, reviving Irish folklore and romance and poetry, believing that they could go back behind current realities and find common ground with the Catholic peasantry that regarded them only as foreign or foreign-imposed robbers. The nascent radical-nationalist movement appropriated that work of cultural archaeology and used it for its own purposes. Something very like that happened with Connolly too.

What Connolly's ideas could mean was shown after his death, when socialism gained great popularity in Ireland and Connolly's "Gaelic past" socialism was merged with all sorts of archaising appeals to ancient Ireland and with Catholic social teaching critical of capitalism (and utterly condemnatory of working-class socialism) to create a variant of what Marx and Engels had defined as reactionary socialism – social criticism of existing capitalist society, combined with a desire to find a solution in a past period, real or imaginary. Thomas Carlyle had influenced

some of the Young Ireland people in the 1840s, perhaps John Mitchel, who in turn maybe influenced the young James Connolly.

That was a recoil from industrial capitalism to a vague hankering for an imaginary idealised past; its only use was to confuse and help neutralise the forces that saw socialism at the other end of capitalist development and who wanted to go not backwards but forwards, utilising the achievements of capitalism and the criticism of the reactionary socialists.

If Connolly had lived, he most likely would have fought against that tendency; dead, his ideas were easily co-opted as an important part of it. The book on Irish history circulated by British and American communists around 1920 was a backward Catholic-socialist [screed](#) by an English Catholic turned Irish, Aodh de Blácam. □

[1] Why Connolly put the date of the transition in Ireland in the 1650s is obviously the Cromwellian Conquest, but Ireland was finally conquered and unified in 1603. The final conquest, redistribution, and destruction of the Irish clan system was after the Battle of Aughrim in 1691. The Scottish clans lasted until after Culloden in 1746. In 1745 Scottish highlanders in rebellion had moved south as far as Preston. Cole and Postgate described it as the invasion of capitalist England by feudalism. □

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Socialist Worker dismisses pro-Ukrainians as “NATO trolls”



Eye on the Left

By Dale Street

Socialist Worker (SW), paper of the Socialist Worker Party (SWP), is ec-static.

At last it has found a trade union (the UCU, which organises workers in post-school education) that has passed a motion at its annual congress backing the Stop the War Coalition (StW) line on Ukraine.

True, the motion was passed by just nine votes. True, the motion contained an antisemitic trope jumbling up Ukraine and Israel as imperialist outposts. True, Jewish UCU members critical of the motion have been targeted for antisemitic abuse. True, another, and far better, motion on Ukraine was passed by a much larger majority.

All that is true – but, with the exception of the antisemitic trope (which SW, of course, supports), all of it goes completely unmentioned in SW’s coverage of the UCU congress vote.

True also that the passing of the motion has triggered a wave of revulsion among broad swathes of the UCU membership, with many members taking to social media to condemn the motion and, in some cases, resigning from the UCU in protest.

This applies in particular to people who know what they are talking about. Such as Ukrainian members of the UCU and other academics who specialise in the study of Ukraine, Russia and Eastern Europe.

In the best traditions of Stalinist slander, however, SW portrays the backlash against the motion as a ruling-class conspiracy.

The backlash, says SW, was the work of “a vast army of pro-Nato trolls. No one should imagine that this was a spontaneous reaction.” NATO’s Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia, explains SW, recommends “using pseudonyms to mislead social media users”.

SW and its readers should take a reality-check. A statement condemning the motion issued and signed by UCU members (some of them now former members) at the University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies has attracted nearly 300,000 views.

That institution really does exist. Those signatories really do exist. No-one needs to “imagine” this was a spontaneous reaction – it simply was a spontaneous reaction.

SW asks the question: “Why should UCU of all unions break the pro-war

consensus [by a majority of just nine votes]?”

Its answer: “Five years of class confrontation has had a radicalising effect.” The vote, says, SW, “reflected a struggle between the imperialist propaganda machine and grassroots radicalisation.”

True, the UCU has been engaged in a protracted dispute over pay, pensions and working conditions.

Other unions in the public sector, most obviously the NEU and the PCS, have also struck recently and repeatedly. But the “radicalising effect” of their “class confrontation” has certainly not led them to turn their back on the trade unions and people of Ukraine, as the UCU motion did. This year’s NEU conference decisively rejected a StW motion on Ukraine. So too did this year’s PCS conference.

So, the SW’s mindless chain of argument “more strikes, more radicalism, more support for the politics of StW” does not stand up to scrutiny.

UCU

And SW’s claim that the UCU vote “reflected a struggle between the imperialist propaganda machine and grassroots radicalisation” is another Stalinist slander.

Those who voted against the StW motion were neither the agents nor the dupes of “the imperialist propaganda machine”. They were simply members opposed to Ukraine being left defenceless in the face of Russian genocidal aggression.

And many of them have also been leading figures in the “grassroots radicalisation”.

SW’s neat counterposing of an (imaginary) imperialist propaganda machine in the UCU to a UCU grassroots radicalisation does not square with reality. But nothing SW writes about Ukraine squares with reality.

SW’s coverage of the adoption of the StW motion by UCU congress is also an opportunity for it to repeat, at some length, its own version of what the war in Ukraine is supposedly all about.

It condemns Putin’s invasion – but puts the blame for the invasion on NATO: “It was NATO that escalated the tensions that ultimately led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.”

It talks at length of NATO’s post 1990 expansion – but says not a word about Russian imperialism and its centuries of oppression of Ukraine. The digression about NATO climaxes with the claim: “NATO has recently drawn supposedly neutral states like Finland into its alliance.”

But Finland has traditionally been neutral, not “supposedly neutral”. And it has not been “drawn into” NATO. What-



ever we think of NATO – we’re against it – the push for NATO membership came from the people of Finland, fearful after Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.

SW even manages to point the finger of guilt at “NATO” or “the West” for the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam:

“Neither side has clean hands and both have carried out equally appalling acts in the past. The British ruling class has just finished celebrating the anniversary of the Dambusters raid of 1943.”

(“Siri, find me an example of when the RAF blew up dams. Any example will do, no matter how ahistorical or irrelevant.”)

The antisemitic trope inserted into the StW motion by its Socialist Workers Party proposer and seconder is not only defended by SW but expanded upon on: “Zelenskyy gave away that his vision is of Ukraine as an armed outpost of imperialism – like Israel.”

(See bit.ly/u-u-a for an analysis of the significance of role played by that antisemitic trope in securing enough votes to get the StW motion passed – by appealing to the left antisemitic culture in the UCU.)

Agency

As usual, SW denies agency to the Ukrainian people: “The Ukrainian people’s right to self-determination has been wholly subsumed by the conflict between Russian and US imperialism. Ukrainians are used by the West as cannon fodder.”

The fact that Ukrainians – including Ukrainian trade unions and socialists – demand that Ukraine be supplied with the weapons which it needs to defend itself is dismissed as an irrelevance:

“Just because people in a country under attack say they want imperialist forces to pour more weapons into the state doesn’t mean the left has to agree.” (True. But in this instance the people under attack have a legitimate case.)

“Some Ukrainians,” SW continues, “understand that more weapons will cause more deaths – although we accept this is a minority view.” It is such a “minority view” that neither the SWP nor StW can find a single one of the Ukraine’s population of 43 million to express that view on a SWP or StW platform.

(But the SWP’s “Marxism 2023” event will have as one of its speakers Volodymyr Ishchenko, a Ukrainian academic based in Berlin. Ishchenko is not popular on the Ukrainian left, and [with good reason](https://www.workersliberty.org/with-good-reason/).)

In any case, SW is not even correct to argue that “more weapons will cause more deaths”. This is a genocidal war in which the existence of the Ukrainian nation is at stake. If more weapons prevent that genocide, then they will result in less deaths, not more.

The SW’s coverage of the vote at UCU congress pompously concludes by likening the SWP’s position on the war in Ukraine to the Scottish socialist John Maclean’s opposition to the First World War:

“At the outbreak of the war Maclean faced the wrath of workers who disagreed with him. Four years of horror later those same workers celebrated his anti-imperialist stance. After the horrendous nature of the war and the impact on the economy, they understood that he, and others like him, were right.”

But this is not comparing like with like. Maclean was proved right because he was right. The SWP, by contrast, is simply wrong and therefore always will be wrong – however much it may try to cover this up by Stalinist slanders of its political opponents. □

• See also: Ukraine, the new cause célèbre of antisemitism: bit.ly/ukr-cc

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The Jevons paradox and capitalism



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Workers' Liberty's Marxist Ecology Reading group met on 12 June to discuss the "Jevons Paradox" via chapter 7 of *The Ecological Rift* by Foster, Clark and York.

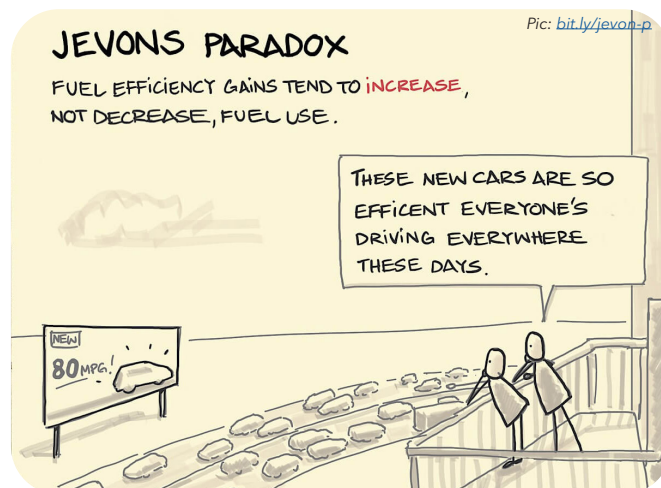
Almost all the models to avoid catastrophic climate change pin hopes on significant gains in resource and energy efficiency. However, history shows that efficiency alone will not do the job so long as production is organised on a capitalist basis. The 19th century economist William Stanley Jevons observed that gains in efficiency tend to lead to increased scale of production and hence paradoxically to increased, rather than decreased, consumption. This trend has been observed throughout capitalist history.

Viewing capitalism more as a natural phenomenon rather than a particular form of social organisation, Jevons offered no explanation for the forces driving unending economic expansion. Marxist theory allows us to explain the underlying drivers of the Jevons paradox, and in so doing, illuminates the way in which the capitalist mode of

production sets us on a course for escalating ecological crises.

Value in capitalist society is "merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour-power expended without regard to its particular form of expenditure." (p.128, *Capital* vol 1). This makes capitalists peculiarly blind to material reality, and peculiarly obsessive about time. We experience this at work with our bosses' incessant demands to squeeze more work from our working-day, the "petty pilferings of minutes", the "nibbling and cribbling" at our free time (p.352, *Capital* vol 1).

The capitalist who can produce more product for less labour hours out-competes the other. "The shortening of the working day... is by no means what is aimed at in capitalist production, when labour is economised by increasing its productivity... The fact that the worker, when the productivity of his labour has been increased, produces say ten times as many commodities as before, and thus spends one-tenth as much on each, by no means prevents him from continuing to work 12 hours as before, nor from producing in those 12 hours 1,200 articles instead of 120." (p.438, *Capital* vol 1).



In fact, productivity gains being used to shorten work time, productivity gains provided by machinery may prompt a prolongation of the working day. The capitalist that has a competitive advantage due to new technology wants to press home this advantage, seeking maximum output before their machinery suffers physical deterioration (by standing idle) or moral depreciation (as competitors adopt the same or better technology).

Production is always a process of "re-ordering of matter" (fn133, *Capital* vol 1) that requires the harnessing of free energy to power this movement. In any given branch of industry, productivity improvements are about maximising

material-energy throughput per labour hour. "Energy savings" in such a system tend to be used as a means for further development of the economic order, generating what Alfred Lotka called "maximum energy flux", rather than minimum energy production (p.180, Foster, Clark and York). Under capitalism, the decisions about what we produce and how we produce it are determined by this logic of endless speed-up, rather than any human or ecological values.

This clearly presents serious challenge in the transition to renewable energy as additional energy capacity is harnessed for economic expansion rather than displacing fossil fuels (p.526-30 *Capital* vol 1).

More discussion to follow. □



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The zoonotic transfer risk



Letter

Léo Karran's article, "The Risks from bird flu" (*Solidarity* 675 bit.ly/r-bird) is right to raise the alarm, and the limitations of current precautions.

Since this highly pathogenic strain of the H5N1 subtype of bird flu emerged two years ago, it spread far and wide across bird populations. A particular concern the last half year, beyond the economic impact, and the very small number of humans knowingly infected, is the large number of mammals infected.

Thousands or tens of thousands of sea lions seem to have been killed by bird flu in south America this year. Many mink were found infected prior to the culling of them in the battery farm in Spain. It has also killed dolphins on the UK coast, a dog in Canada, and likely foxes, otters, and cats.



One fear is that the sea lion deaths and mink infections could be down to spreading within the species. Mammal-to-mammal spread, rather than repeated bird-to-mammal spillover, would put humans at higher risk of a virus

that may be able to spread human-to-human.

As well as the many important damage limitation measures Léo rightly flagged in his article, this threat highlights the grave dangers that large-scale industrial animal farming brings.

The ever-increasing zoonotic spillover, evolution, and spread of deadly diseases under capitalism is driven primarily by ecological destruction, climate change, industrial animal farming, and the wildlife trade. Ebola Makona, Q fever, Zika, SARS, MERS, Swine flu, Covid-19, AIDS, mad cow disease, bird flu, the list goes on...

As well as curbing ecological destruction and halting climate change, we must seek to phase out almost all animal production, and limit wildlife trafficking and consumption. □

Zack Muddle,
Bristol

Trump not fascist



Letter

I enjoy Jim Denham's Anti-doto column but the last one (675, 7 June) was spoiled by the casual denunciation of Donald Trump as a fascist and the claim that in "November 2020 74 million Americans voted fascist."

Trump's a peculiar, unpleasant, right-wing pig, for sure. But misunderstanding the problem Trump and his movement poses for the left and the US labour movement helps no-one.

Trump has widespread support across the Republican party and, in particular among its elected representatives. So, if Trump's a fascist, the Republican party is a fascist party, too, right?

Except the Republican party does not have the basic features of a fascist party. Where is its mass militia, where is the political street violence?

Yes, I know there are actual, real, small, fascist groups and crazy, armed-to-the-teeth, backwoods militias. But they are marginal.

If 74 million people actually "voted fascist" I would expect a mass fascist movement. So where is it?

Trump is, in fact, a right-wing populist and nativist. There's a long tradition in the US. He is, broadly, in that tradition.

I can even concede the point that it is possible to imagine, in the future, Trump leading a fascist movement. I certainly think that if elected in 2024 Trump would be more destructive and dangerous than during his previous presidency.

Nevertheless, words have meanings. And "fascism", for us, has a very clear meaning. To call a person or a party fascist requires measuring them against the Italian fascists and German Nazis. □

Dan Katz, London

Unison left holds on in poll



By a Unison member

It has been a difficult two years in the Unison public service union since the 2021 victory for the Time for Real Change (TFRC) slate which gave the left a majority on the National Executive Committee (NEC).

The NEC has been hampered by a hostile general secretary and bureaucracy, including in regional offices, working closely with the old establishment on the elected committees. 2022 Unison National Conference was very difficult and divided.

The failure of the union to fight austerity and pay cuts since 2010 has meant members' voting turnout has declined in both elections and strike ballots, and so badly that it was always going to take a lot to turn this around.

The old establishment saw the 2023 elections as an opportunity to knock TFRC comrades off the NEC and return

to the previous inertia. They pulled out all the stops, with strong nomination performances in regions. While some of them claimed to just be working together and not a "slate", this election was mainly a head-to-head between the left and the right. For most seats both left and right stood only one candidate.

The results of the 2023 election show that TFRC are still the largest group on the NEC, with 32 seats. While losing some seats, TFRC also won some significant gains, two national health seats and a seat in the Northern region (not held by the left in 20 years).

The Socialist Party (SP), not part of TFRC, lost three of their four seats (in which TFRC did not oppose them), and Unison Unity (sic) won 29. Five seats were won by independents.

There are lessons to be learned on how these elections were run, and on how we build and organise TFRC locally and nationally. After Unison conference (13-16 June), TFRC supporters in branches and regions need to build vibrant local groups and become central to organising around strikes and battles to de-



fend the NHS, defeat the anti-union laws, and more.

There is still animosity towards the SP over standing a candidate in the 2020 general secretary election – some believe that perhaps lost the election for

the left. But we must continue to strive for only one left candidate in elections where rival candidates might help the right win, and organise locally in regions to transform the union at all levels not just the NEC. □

Heathrow security wins new offer

By Mohan Sen

By and large, the workers who have won inflation-busting pay rises in the 2022-3 wave of strikes are those who have taken sustained action.

Security workers at Heathrow Airport (members of Unite) have struck over pay for 18 days since March. Now their union, Unite, has set 31 days over the summer (24 June to 27 August).

The strike plan has produced an improved offer – 10% rise backdated to January 2023, a further 1.5% rise from October 2023, and a promise of an inflation-linked rise from January 2024. The union has called off the first two planned strike days, 24 and 25 June, and is balloting (13 to 23 June) with a recommendation to accept.

Until recently the strikes have involved about 1,400 workers from Terminal 5, Terminal 4 and "campus" (airport-wide security). At

the end of March workers at Terminal 3 voted overwhelmingly to join, potentially bringing in 600 new strikers, and making it much harder for the employer to cover areas on strike.

Heathrow Airports Ltd upped its offer to 10% plus a £1,000 one-off payment, which workers have rejected with the slogan "Dump the lump", and has now gone further.

All this comes after major real-terms pay cuts – 24% across the Heathrow Airports workforce since 2017, according to Unite. During the early period of Covid, the corporation fired and rehired its entire workforce.

Meanwhile Heathrow chief executive John Holland-Kaye has increased his own salary by 88% – from £800,000 to £1.5 million! The Civil Aviation Authority predicts that over the next five years Heathrow Airports Ltd will pay £1.5 billion in dividends. □

Amazon workers say: fight continues!

By Ollie Moore

Amazon workers have sent a message to the support group established to support their ongoing fight for improved wages and conditions, and for union recognition.

A push for recognition at Coventry has been scuppered by Amazon, with the collusion of the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), the government body which oversees requests for union recognition, skewing the figures by suddenly creating thousands of new jobs. This pushes the GMB union's membership level back below the 50% required for statutory recognition, even though a reasonable approach to due process would take the workforce figures from when the union's claim to the CAC was first submitted.

Coventry Amazon workers are not cowed, and are striking from 12-14 June. We will soon know the outcome of strike ballots closing 9 June at Am-

azon warehouses in Mansfield and Rugeley, which could see strikes spread. The message says:

We have decided to pause the legal recognition process. This is because at the moment we are not confident that the CAC (the people in charge) will adopt a real life, fair and common-sense approach.

The CAC has turned a blind eye to obvious union-busting from Amazon:

- Spending over £1 million per month to block recognition
- Taking on 1,300 new starters they do not need during the quietest time of the year to dilute the proportion of GMB members in the warehouse.
- Putting these new starters on insecure, temporary, and part-time contracts in the hope that they will be afraid of joining the union for fear of not getting their contracts extended.
- Blocking the overtime that many of the established GMB

workforce rely on to make ends meet, in the hope that they will leave.

Because the Coventry workforce backed the union, Amazon have decided to try and get a new workforce. But they will not succeed. The flaw in their strategy is that these new starters will be working at Amazon. The working conditions and exploitation that led the established workers to join the union will lead the new starters to join GMB too.

We will continue our campaign of strike action on pay and will recruit our new brothers and sisters to the union. Then, at a time we decide, we will again look at the official recognition procedure.

What we are not going to do is walk into a trap set by Amazon. This is a marathon, not a sprint, and all we are doing is swerving to avoid an obstacle. The next step is to build for big pickets... to show the company we're here, we're already inside and the fight continues. □

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North East mayor: almost half of CLPs refuse to nominate

By Rhodri Evans

Of the 22 Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) in the catchment for the new "North-East mayor" to be elected in May 2024, eight have voted to make no nomination for Labour candidate for mayor.

Hexham, Wansbeck, Blyth Valley, Blaydon, Newcastle East, Newcastle Central, Easington, and City of Durham have voted that way to protest against the 2 June decision by a panel of Labour's National Executive to exclude Jamie Driscoll, current Labour North of Tyne mayor, from the longlist.

Three CLPs did not meet to consider nominations, and two nominated all the candidates longlisted. Only nine nominated the Labour leadership favourite, Kim McGuinness, despite heavy bureaucratic pressure in meetings (some declared nominations made without taking a vote of those present, just asking for a proposer and seconder; one CLP chair threatened members with expulsion for even mentioning Driscoll's name). Gateshead council Labour group also refused to make a nomination.

This response shows that it is possible to organise resistance in CLPs even after all the attrition under Starmer (and, in some CLPs, indeed, that those unjustly expelled in recent years for left-wing views can still help, if they have made a point of continuing with what Labour activity is open to them).

Unite, the FBU, and TSSA have pro-

tested against the exclusion, as have some Labour mayors such as Andy Burnham. Unison, GMB, and Community have nominated McGuinness. We don't know about the CWU or Aslef or Usdaw.

Driscoll's exclusion is unjustified in the most literal sense: the NEC panel has published no reason. Unofficially, Starmer supporters suggest he has been excluded for sharing a platform with the film director Ken Loach.

But that was for a discussion of Loach's films, which are widely appreciated and some of which are set in the north-east.

Loach was expelled from Labour in 2021 for association with "Labour Against the Witch-hunt", a small group set up around expulsions on grounds of antisemitism, by people who had mostly sat on their hands while Labour purged hundreds or thousands of members in 2015-6 just for left-wing associations. That doesn't make Driscoll guilty by association. There is no evidence against him of antisemitism.

Driscoll is broadly speaking on the Labour left. He has not much radical record, except on anti-fascism – he was a prosperous businessman before becoming a Labour councillor in 2018 – and Labour activists in the north-east tell us he might well have lost the selection to McGuinness anyway; but the ultra-Blairites in Starmer's circle went for the tightest control.

Probably the Labour hierarchy will

now push through the mayoral selection as fast as they can, then fob off all complaints with calls to unite behind McGuinness once selected.

It looks like some of Driscoll's supporters may want him to run as an independent (almost certainly not affiliated to any such group as TUSC, Northern Independence Party, Socialist Labour Party, etc., and probably on a "proven effective local leader" rather than specially left-wing basis).

In the North of Tyne mayor election of 2019 Driscoll got 33.9%, the Tories 24.9%, a Chamber of Commerce independent 17.2%, and Driscoll won on transfers. The North East mayor election of May 2024 will be first past the post. The change in area covered is favourable to Labour, and general opinion poll trends are too, but the electoral calculus for 2024 remains unclear.

Whatever about that, a Driscoll candidacy looks more likely to disperse the left – to be a staging-post for fed-up Labour members on the way out of politics – than to rally it (as Ken Livingstone's successful run for London mayor in 2000 on an anti-PPP platform arguably did, for all its faults).

Large progress in reversing Starmer's "Thermidorian reaction" is unlikely as long as the general election is ahead, Starmer looks like winning it, and the unions remain unwilling to use their clout within Labour's structures. But small bits of progress and re-rallying of the left now can be very important for the kickback sure to come as a Starmer government proves dismal. □

A slaughterhouse and Watts



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Released in 1978, Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* initially had a difficult time reaching an audience. It was made on a tight budget while Burnett was finishing at film school – he was writer, producer, editor and director – and there were problems with the film's release as Burnett had not acquired the rights to the 22 songs on the soundtrack.

That was eventually sorted out and the film was transferred to a 35mm print and DVD. It became a much praised depiction of working-class African-American

life in the Watts district of Los Angeles, shot almost entirely on location and using many non-professional actors. A number of critics noted the influence of Italian Neo-Realism, particularly the work of Rossellini.

Stan (played by Henry G Sanders) works at a slaughterhouse. The work, unsurprisingly, depresses him, and that affects his home life. There is no story as such. The film is really a series of sketches following incidents in Stan's life, such as his attempt to buy a motor engine and the efforts of some associates to involve him in crime.

Burnett participated in the Black Independent Movement of African and African-American filmmakers and went on to make *To Sleep with Anger* (1990), *The Glass Shield* (1994) and many documentaries. □

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Civil service: continue the dispute

By a PCS member

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of PCS, recently [stated](#): "As a consequence of a historic amount of industrial action, for the first time in our Union's history we have forced the government to make major concessions on the question of pay." But the truth is that the Government has only made minor pay concessions.

At the heart of PCS's pay dispute for 2022 is the demand for a 10% cost of living increase in salaries and for a national living wage of £15 per hour. All the Tories have done, by way of additional money, is allow management teams in the civil service delegated pay areas discretion to pay an unconsolidated £1,500 per full-time employee in 2023. That does not come anywhere near to meeting our 2022 pay claim.

Ironically, however, Serwotka revealed one truth about his and Left Unity's more than twenty years of dominance of PCS: they have delivered precious little to members by way of increased pay.

Seizing on the £1,500 as a way out of the pay dispute, the leadership:

- Failed to realise that the Government would claw back a chunk of the payment by reducing the benefit paid to members in receipt of Universal Credit.
- Failed to explore how such detrimental consequences could be minimised. (While any increase in income might be deducted from members receiving UC there is a significant difference between losing benefit for a



one-off payment and losing benefit for a permanent rise in salary).

- Failed to insist that civil servants who work part time (overwhelmingly female) should receive the full £1,500, instead of it being reduced pro rata, in recognition of the fact that inflation has hit them just hard as anybody.

- Failed to challenge the restriction of the lump sum to those in civil service employment both on 31 March 2023 and at the time of payment, which will exclude those members who suffered detriment in 2022 but have since left the civil service, possibly after striking, and those members who joined after 31 March 2023 and may also have struck.

These incompetent failings are the product of a leadership over-eager to get out of the dispute and uninterested in the views and expertise of members.

Workers' Liberty supporters in PCS organise as part of the [PCS Independent Left](#) group. For years, the union leadership resisted the PCS Independent Left's advocacy of selective or targeted action alongside national action.

It is the leadership's belated, inadequate, taking up of IL's ideas that has enabled an "historic amount of industrial action." But Serwotka and PCS's dominant "Left Unity" faction want out of the dispute.

They are draining momentum from it by:

- Failing to set ballot dates to renew the legal mandate for strike action in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), where the mandate has expired, and in Revenue and Customs (HMRC), where it is due to expire in July).

- Forgoing further selective action and cross-departmental strikes where mandates remain live.

- Delaying meaningful consultation while they supposedly await the outcomes of local representatives' engagement with management teams about the payment of the £1,500.

- Using this delay to sell the Tories' minor concessions as being of major significance.

To bolster their exit strategy, the leadership refers to the Government's 2023-24 pay remit figure of 4.5%, with an extra 0.5% for the lowest paid, as a "significant concession." Yet:

- According to [Civil Service World](#), Serwotka said that the remit would pour fuel on the flames of resentment after more than a decade of pay freezes and sub-inflationary rises.

- In a [video](#), Serwotka stated: "We know that other workers have already rejected out of hand a payoff of four and a half to five percent for 2023. That is not enough, it's half the rate of inflation and we need more."

- In April PCS [supported Early Day Motion 1097](#), which noted that the 2023/24 pay remit had been set at an average of 4.5 per cent "following an insulting... award of two per cent for 2022 to 2023", that it was below inflation, described it as "derisory", said it would do "nothing to tackle years of endemic low pay", and called on the Government to offer a real-terms pay rise.

PCS Independent Left supporters have circulated a model motion to establish a branch-based campaign to resist the leadership's termination of members' fight to restore living standards, and hope to help launch such a campaign soon. □

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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 □



UCU: raise the pressure

By Neil Laker

The marking and assessment boycott in universities since 20 April is causing increasing disruption. Workers involved the boycott need to stay strong and withstand the pressure of the coming weeks with exam boards meeting. More local stoppages have been announced in response to punitive pay deductions. Newcastle University will strike on 23 and 26-29 June. After UCU strikes, SOAS University of London has ["suspended"](#) its 100% pay deductions.

Response from both the union and from university bosses has been mixed. A small number of institutions have called for a return to

negotiations, most recently the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. In the main, employers are hoping they can ride the boycott out through measures such as big pay reductions at some universities, and through re-allocating unmarked exams and coursework to anyone who will grade them. Clearly they are less interested in upholding educational standards than in continuing to attack workers in the sector.

On the other hand, while the union has made small steps in the right direction in terms of an increased hardship fund, which can be accessed by workers facing 50% pay reductions, the dispute continues to suffer from indifference from sec-

tions of the UCU leadership across this whole campaign. That has resulted in some sections of the workforce growing alienated with the strategy and concluding that "we have won what we can" on pay.

The dispute is not yet over! UCU members can still play an important role in it by supporting the boycott by not co-operating with the re-allocation of marking, resigning from exam boards, and raising financial support with workers who are directly impacted.

Following the UCU congress adopting both disarm-Ukraine and pro-Ukraine policies, there are initiatives to promote solidarity with Ukraine and Ukrainian trade unions: a

model motion coming soon, a ["caucus"](#) 17 June, and a [statement](#). □

St Mungo's: "emboldened"

By Mark Simon

Workers at the St Mungo's homeless charity, members of the Unite union, are striking from 30 May to 26 June over pay.

Speaking at a support rally in Brighton on 9 June, a St Mungo's striker said:

"We're now well into week 2 of our 4-week strike, and we've had an amazing response in the city, from the public as well as comrades across the [union movement].

"Encouragement and words of solidarity from councillors and

across political parties through Lloyd [Russell-Moyle, local Labour MP] and Caroline [Lucas, local Green MP] are also most welcome

"None of us want to be on strike. There is personal sacrifice as well as the impact to our services, and most importantly, our clients.

"But we're here, united by the cause for fair pay, to be treated fairly by our employer...

"This is an important stand for the future of services and the sector at large... We're emboldened, and together we will win this dispute". □



Dam probably breached by Russia

By Dan Katz

The Nova Kakhovka dam, spanning the gigantic Dni-pro river in southern Ukraine, collapsed on the early morning of 6 June. The dam was captured early in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. As early as March 2022 rumours began that the Russians had mined the dam with the intention of blowing it up if the Ukrainians looked like re-taking it.

The dam was completed in 1956 and held 18 cubic km of water. Normally the water surface was held at about 16m above sea level, although at the start of 2023 the level had dropped to 14m, rising rapidly until, just before the dam was breached, the level was 17m.

As of 8 June 48 settlements had been flooded in Kherson region of which 34 (3,625 homes) are in Ukrainian held territory. Four people have died. Another 23 settlements were flooded in Mykolaiv, with one death, according to the Ukrainian authorities. The average height of the floodwaters was 5.6m in low-lying areas.

Ukraine's Agriculture Ministry reported that 94% of the irrigation systems in Kherson, 74% in Zaporizhzhia and 30% in Dni-pro regions are now without water. Crops have been destroyed in an area where 2-4% of Ukraine's agricultural output is produced.

Ecological disaster

At least 150 tonnes of industrial lubricants were also discharged. Whole houses were washed away downstream and into the Black Sea. This is an enormous ecological disaster.

70% of the flooding is on the Dni-pro's left bank, occupied by Russia. Some Russian troops seem to have been taken by

surprise by the flooding and fled the affected areas, leaving Ukrainian civilians, living under occupation, to fend for themselves.

The flooding dislodged Russian mines, some of which were swept away and others exploded. Almost immediately the Russian military resumed shelling civilians in Kherson. By 8 June 11 people were reported injured.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy immediately accused the Russians of deliberately blowing the dam. Later Zelenskyy berated the International Committee of the Red Cross and international donors for not doing more, and responding faster, to the humanitarian crisis. Red Cross vehicles in the capital, Kyiv, were plastered with posters reading, "useless".

The Russians immediately blamed the Ukrainians for either deliberately or accidentally blowing the dam. It is very difficult to see why the Ukrainians would want to destroy their own dam and hurt their own people, agriculture and infrastructure. According to engineering experts it would also be virtually impossible for them. For example, artillery shelling might damage the top of the dam, but would not cause a catastrophic collapse. Whatever happened at Nova Kakhovka it almost certainly took place low down and inside the structure.

Engineering experts think it unlikely, on balance, that the structure collapsed either because of rising water levels or a structural failure. This type of dam has been built to withstand enormous earthquakes and explosions.

Locals reported on social media a blast at the dam around 2.18am on 6 June. NORSAR,



Nova Kakhovka dam in November 2022

an independent Norwegian organisation which monitors earthquakes and nuclear explosions looked at their data and confirmed that an explosion happened at or near the dam.

How would Russia benefit from blowing the dam? It diverts the Ukrainians' political and practical attention from the counteroffensive Ukraine began rolling out this week. It also makes it much harder for the Ukrainians to attack by amphibious landings across the Dni-pro. It lessens the frontline Russia has to defend by 150km.

The destruction of this dam is very likely to be an intentional Russian act, and so significant that it was presumably signed off by Putin. It is another war crime alongside the mass murder of civilians in Bucha at the start of the war, the targeting of schools, the destruction of nearly 900 medical facilities, the abduction of Ukrainian children and the incarceration and torture of hundreds of Ukrainian civilians in filtration and interrogation centres.

The Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine denounced the dam destruction as a Russian terrorist act and expressed concern for the safety of the massive, Russian-occupied, ZNPP nuclear power plant, upstream from the dam and dependent on water to

cool its reactors.

The miners' union appealed for solidarity from the international trade union movement.

As the Ukrainian counteroffensive gathers strength along the Southern front the Russian secret police, the FSB, are terrorising villagers in areas near the frontlines. These are Ukrainian settlements and will rejoice if the Ukrainian army manages to liberate them.

As pressure grows on Russian forces there is now open talk among the Russian diaspora about a post-Putin Russia. The extraordinary and open conflict between the leader of the Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and the Russian army has become more acute. Last week Wagner kidnapped, tortured and filmed a confession by a Russian army officer who stated, under duress, that his troops had ambushed and shelled Wagner units.

Rifts will grow if Russia loses on the battlefield.

Solidarity with the Ukrainian workers' movement! Victory to Ukraine! □

China has new Covid surge

By Martin Thomas

New Covid surges in China and New Zealand are now easing off. New Zealand's, running over the first half of 2023, has cost about 30% of NZ's total Covid deaths over the last three and a half years. Most of the rest were in mid-2022, when NZ finally decided that "zero Covid" via lockdown was unworkable, and reopened social life after a big vaccination effort.

NZ's total toll has been much smaller than other countries', because NZ's island status help the government slow the entry of the virus.

China's figures are much less reliable, but a Chinese doctor has estimated 40 million cases a week in May, 65 million a week in June. China ran an ultra-lockdown policy until December 2022, then abandoned it in the face of mass revolt, with only patchy vaccine coverage.

For a while it looked like only one, and relatively short, Covid surge after lockdown-lifting, but now more like repeated surges, tending to become smaller and milder.

Britain

Meanwhile Britain's Hallett inquiry into the handling of Covid is tussling with the government over access to messages in early 2020. The TUC has commented that much of the UK's relatively high Covid toll must be put down to social erosion in the years before 2020: the NHS run with minimum spare capacity, social care run by profiteers with a casualised and low-paid workforce, inadequate PPE, overcrowded housing, poor sick pay. Sick pay could have been improved at short notice, though the TUC fails to stress that.

The once-popular idea that "test and trace" was a magic bullet against Covid faded long ago. The evidence from China knocks the idea, popular for a while on the left, that sharp lockdowns could have brought "zero Covid".

A new report from the right-wing IEA think tank now claims, equally improbably, that lockdowns, even better-designed ones, brought almost no benefit. Scientists [reply](#) that the report is ill-done. Lockdowns could only slow Covid, but probably they did that.

The one government which did a Covid inquiry in good time, Sweden, [found](#) that its main fault had been in social care: "residential care facilities often had poor access to medical equipment, were short staffed, had low levels of competence and lacked decent and reasonable working conditions for the staff".

It concluded that Sweden's exceptionally mild Covid curbs in 2020 should have been extended to, for example, closing restaurants, but it had been right to keep schools open for under-17s throughout. Over the whole Covid period so far, Sweden shows a cumulative excess-death rate lower than South Korea's and about half that of the UK, Italy, Spain, etc.

There can be no "controlled experiments" here, so judging the efficacy of all the ad hoc policies is difficult. Probably, though, details of different governments' improvised measures mattered less than the level of social provision and social [equality](#) they had before the virus hit.

From that angle we are in a bad way, worldwide and in Britain especially. The NHS is unable to deal with its routine burden, let alone a new pandemic. Social care has greater staff shortages and poor staff pay and conditions. Sick pay remains poor. Stocks of vaccines are being trashed, rather than having governments pay the relatively small extra to get them out and push up the level of immunity. New vaccine research is being shelved again. Little is done to help "post-Covid" sufferers.

The labour movement should demand the social requisitioning of resources to prepare for future pandemics. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

JUNIOR DOCTORS STRIKE 14-17 JUNE

By a junior hospital doctor

The BMA has announced a junior doctors' strike on 14-17 June and a minimum three days of strike action a month until August. And the leaders are saying after that as well, through to the next election.

Personally, I think it's an inadequate strategy because the government will outlast many of us. We're starting to discuss what further escalation there might be and about coordination with the BMA consultants, whose ballot closes on 27 June and have announced that their first strike will be in July.

There's beginning to be talk about other mechanisms of piling on political pressure like including targeted action or rotating action through regions.

Among junior doctors, there is criticism of the three-days-a-month plan from the point of view that it is too little (we need to escalate), and some from the point of view that it is too much, or rather too long (forever). People have been very happy with three days' strike, but if you keep going for three days a month for say 18 months or whatever, then you've lost a lot of salary: it's worth it only if you're going to win big.

The prospects do not depend much on the results of the RCN re-ballot. There are particular areas where BMA-RCN links are strong, and a relationship between reps on the ground. But generally, members feel that



the RCN are not trustworthy. So there wasn't a great push to coordinate with their last strike in May.

The outcome is much more dependent on other groups within the BMA: consultants are the most obvious one, but also GPs and specialty doctors.

In hospitals, the medical workforce is almost 50% junior doctors in hospitals, 40% consultants and about 9% specialty doctors.

There are constant, but very, very disputed conversations about lessons from the 2016 dispute.

Everybody seems to agree that in 2016 there were far too many spokespeople. It was difficult to know what the demands were, and they often got buried in general "save our NHS" rhetoric.

The way people see it, this dispute is not about the NHS. It's about us, it's about health, it's about patients, but it's not about the NHS because the NHS is a shit employer. There's a problem with that attitude, but that's how it is.

Last time we built up from one day of strike while providing bank holiday cover all the way through to a few days with no derogations, or no national derogations. We got an offer which was narrowly rejected on a 28% turnout.

Then, in September-October, there was a call for five days every month which members didn't tolerate. Many had voted to accept the offer in June 2016, and then there had been a big gap in momentum. In the midst of that, junior doctors had rotated employers, so they didn't have the organised networks that they had previously, and the dispute collapsed.

This time, we're about to come up to rotation in August, but I think we can keep up the momentum. □

- On 13 June the BMA announced that junior doctors in Scotland have voted 71% to reject an offer of 14.5% over two years, on a 66% turnout. Scottish junior doctors will strike on 12-15 July.