



For social ownership of the banks and industry

HOW TO GET THE TORIES OUT?

WITHOUT
THE NHS
I WOULD
BE DEAD



- » **Increase strike pressure**
- » **Make Labour fight for NHS**
- » **Build up street protest**

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How to get the Tories out



The Chartists, Britain's first great workers' movement from 1838 to the early 1850s, demanded parliamentary elections every year, not every five years.

One of the reasons why Karl Marx identified the Paris Commune of 1871 as especially democratic is that the representatives could be "recalled" – subject to new election – at any time when sufficiently many of their electors demanded it. Lenin later, in *State and Revolution*, identified that right of recall as a key democratic feature of the "workers' semi-state" exemplified by the workers' councils (Soviets).

In Britain today we have a Tory government able to do its varying will for three and a half years now, and for another year and a half if it wishes, without reference to the will of the voters, of whom on current polls only about 27% support it.

It was elected on a demagogic promise to "get Brexit done" – get it over with, whatever the merits and demerits – and of "levelling up".

"Levelling up" has disappeared. Brexit is seen as a fiasco even by many who backed it. It will get worse: checks on imports from the EU to the UK are due to start in stages in October 2023, January 2024, and October 2024.

Boris Johnson, the chief figure of the Tories' "electoral mandate", was formally condemned by Parliament on 20 June. Hardly any even of his remaining supporters among Tory MPs would turn up to defend him.

Voters have much less effect on the government's twists and turns than the big-business lobbyists and connections to whom the government answers every day.

This is a shrivelled democracy.

The only way to make the Tories go to an early general election is to raise strikes and street protests to a level which makes them find the country "ungovernable". The labour movement achieved that in February 1974, in the midst of world economic turmoil triggered by high oil prices. The Tories then ruling, though 3% behind in the polls, concluded that they had to gamble for a new mandate, and were narrowly defeated in the election.

For now the government is holding firm against the major public-sector strike campaigns over pay and conditions – rail, civil service, schools, health, etc.

It is using its remaining time to push through the Public Order Act, amendments to the Police Act 2022, the Illegal Migration Bill, and the Minimum Service Bill, a bout of regressive legislation more concentrated than even Thatcher managed.

And it is steadfastly refusing to budge on its starvation of the NHS budget,



which has the waiting list for NHS consultant-led treatment in England rising fast and steadily since mid-2020 to 7.42 million at the end of April. (The waiting list was two million back in 2010).

The public sector strikes so far have won some nudging-up of pay offers. That is all that could be expected from action done piecemeal, delayed, and scattered in drop-at-a-time fashion.

We will get something better when we move from drop-at-a-time to a vigorous flow.

And not just of strikes – of street demonstrations and protest rallies too. The "Corbyn surge" of left-wing mobilisation in 2015, which worried the Tories and led to the Tories almost being defeated in 2017, was generated by a rising tide of demonstrations about cuts, austerity, and the NHS in the years

before then.

The Corbyn leadership then dissipated that surge by failure to campaign, failure to organise its youth support, and wretched evasions on Brexit and antisemitism. That's another story. Strikes and protests aren't enough by themselves: we also need politics

Every extra contingent on a picket line or a demonstration can make a difference now. And the battle takes place in union, Labour, and campaign meetings too.

The Labour leaders round Starmer think they can win the next general election by promising little other than not to be the Tories. But those wretched politics sap mobilisation now, depress working-class hope and confidence, and give the Tories more scope to do their damage.

Solidarity works to rally activists in the unions, in the Labour Party, and on the streets to demand campaigning for the NHS with a scale and size comparable to the issues we face.

To push Labour to pledge to repeal all the anti-strike laws, and the Public Order Act, Police Act, and Illegal Migration Bill too.

To commit to public ownership of the energy industry, to lay the basis for a just transition to sustainable economics. To commit to tax the rich, rather than running scared of them.

Join us at Ideas for Freedom on 15-16 July, and at our local meetings, to discuss and coordinate. □

Inflation, disinflation, and exploitation



By Martin Thomas

Under capitalism, both inflation and disinflation (measures to slow inflation) hurt workers.

When prices go up, real wages go down, unless workers win wage increases to match. We have done that in some periods, or even won guarantees of monthly pay rises keeping pace with prices.

Disinflation, by cutting back public works and public services, by raising taxes, or by raising interest rates, generally leads to higher unemployment. Workers can fight back by demanding public services,

shorter work-weeks, and shifting taxes onto the rich. It's often more difficult than fighting the effects of inflation.

The current inflation comes from the rise in oil and gas prices since early 2021 and especially since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The effects are still working through, despite oil and gas prices sinking again since late 2022. It also comes from the "release" of purchasing power stashed up during the lockdowns.

At least one reason why inflation is worse in Britain than in the USA or Western Europe is Brexit, impeding trade between Britain and Europe.

High inflation is not a capitalist conspiracy. Capitalists prefer a low, steady rate of inflation. But when inflation flares, they seek to make work-

ers pay the cost.

Their standard answer to inflation these days is higher interest rates. Those are means to slow borrowing and investment, and thus ease upward demand-pressure on prices. At best they work poorly and with long delays. Meanwhile they push up mortgage payments (and, more indirectly, rents).

The government now has to offer high interest rates on its new borrowing because international financiers demand it. It has to pay high interest rates on old borrowing because (unusually among capitalist governments) it has borrowed a lot at interest rates linked to RPI.

Over the five months to



April 2023, the government paid out an average £9 billion per month in debt interest to financiers, an equivalent of over £100 billion for the whole year, comparable to the NHS budget.

That debt burden spooks the Labour leaders. We need to demand they turn to taxing the rich rather than continuing Tory austerity.

Socialists aim to replace

economic allocation by money and markets by "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need". In the meantime, we have no special fancy technique for stopping inflation. The workers' government in Russia in 1917-22 had roaring inflation; it mitigated

the effects in a socialistic way, by distributing essentials free, by introducing the world's first free public health service, etc.

The "cost of living crisis" is a crisis of capitalism. Essentially, it's about the capitalists and the government trying to mitigate the adverse effects of inflation for them by keeping down wages, worsening conditions, and squeezing public services. □

Postal workers to ballot from 22 June

By Ollie Moore

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has announced it will put its “negotiators’ agreement” with Royal Mail to a referendum of its members from 22 June, following two postponements. The union says it has negotiated additions to the agreement, including a further £900 non-consolidated lump-sum payment, and further clarity on the parameters within which the start and finish times for delivery workers’ shifts can be changed.

The Posties Say Vote No group, formed to mobilise for rejection of the offer, has said:

They want to stuff our mouths with gold, but a one-off lump sum won’t cover the prices that remain high next year. It’s pro-rata for part-timers, but



they don’t feed their kids or pay bills pro-rata! What remains are massive revisions [...], a big workload hike for deliveries [...], plus the two-tier workforce, cuts to sick pay, attendance procedure, ill-health retirement [...] and hundreds of suspended or dismissed reps who may or may not be reinstated.

All that makes it a terrible deal [...] In terms of finish times, it’s not clear how

set in stone these estimates are. Many are still not family-friendly, and flexing and possibly seasonal variation will extend these, as well as hiking the outdoor span for delivery workers.

We should remember the only reason they have renegotiated these extras – if they prove to be real – is due to the mass rejection of the deal by CWU members, and due to the workplace reps who voices their opposition in meetings with local officials and the national leadership.

At the very least the no vote wave has helped posties get at least another £900, even if it’s not yet a done deal [...]

We respect the fact that many CWU members will vote for this deal, believing it is the best we can get, or at least get under the current leadership after the experience of the last year.

Even with these “improvements”, if they come off, the deal sells our terms and conditions, unsustainably hikes the workload for the majority of CWU members, and weakens the union hugely, all in order to restore profitability to Royal Mail – in other words, to its millionaire shareholders. It’s Robin Hood in reverse.

If the deal goes through, it does not mean a secure or sustainable job. In terms of mail centres and distribution, all Royal Mail will say is that they “have no plans” to break up the company, sell off bits, close mail centres. The CWU is making this out to be a guarantee. It’s not.

And the clock is ticking to Spring 2025, when Royal Mail will come back pushing to cut the Universal Service Obligation (USO) – something that Dave Ward already says we might have

to accept. In the meantime, the union will have helped them construct a detachable parcel service, ready to be hived off into a separate company and handed to IDS.

They think they can buy us with another £900. We think postal workers and the postal service are worth more than that. We will continue to press for a no vote on this deal, rejecting the two-tier workforce, terms-and-conditions cuts, and other unacceptable concessions. □

• Full statement [@postiessayno](https://twitter.com/postiessayno)



Support the right to protest on campus!

Breaking news: the Student Cost of Living Campaign has been calling on the University of Sheffield to drop investigations and proceedings and end the use of private investigators against student protesters. We understand two students have been disciplined – reprimanded, fined, banned from the campus for three months – by the university for exercising their right to protest, after such an investigation.

More soon. Fight for the right to protest, sign the open letter: bit.ly/sheffield-open-letter. □

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

From 15 June: Leeds university workers (UCU) on indefinite strike against pay deduction

19-22 June: Workers at Queen Mary University of London (UCU) strike against pay deductions

20 June: UMW members at seven workplaces across London (UMW) 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 university staff (UCU) strike against pay deductions

29 June: Workers at the University of Durham (UCU) strike against pay deductions

2 July: Train drivers at Avanti West Coast (Aslef) strike

5 and 7 July: Teachers in England

(NEU) strike

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

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

August-September: Workers at Liverpool John Moores University, University of Edinburgh, University of Durham, and Liverpool John Moores University (UCU) strike against pay deductions (various dates)

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 15 May-12 June (in 6th form colleges) and 5 June-10 July (in schools), and NAHT 15 May-31 July, ASCL 19 June-31 July.

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

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

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

19 June-31 August: Junior doctors (BMA) re-ballot

22 June-11 July: Royal Mail workers (CWU) ballot on deal



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 22 June, 8pm: “State and Revolution” Zoom study group

Friday 23 June, 6pm: Stop the Ecocide, Make Russia Pay (demonstration called by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign), Russian Embassy, 6/7 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QP

Saturday 24 June, 8am: Defend drag queen storytelling, the Honor Oak Pub, 1 St German’s Rd, London SE23 1JG

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 □



The Morning Star still has time for Johnson



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

As a humiliated Boris Johnson pathetically claims “there is a witch hunt underway, to take revenge for Brexit and ultimately to reverse the 2016 referendum result” he receives support from what may seem an unlikely quarter: the Communist Party of Britain’s *Morning Star*.

Despite a front page headline on 16 June (quoting the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice) “Liar Johnson Unfit To Hold Office Again”, that day’s editorial lines up behind Johnson’s claims of an “establishment” conspiracy, by both Sunak and Starmer, to get rid of him.

Here’s some of what it says:

“Tory high command see Johnson as a maverick who served his purpose in defeating Jeremy Corbyn but is too egotistical and unreliable to tolerate long-term.

“Johnson’s claim that his ‘political assassination’ is about reversing Brexit is true in that respect. Brexit too was an insurgency, a vote against the advice of the Conservative government of 2016 as well as every party in Parliament, mixed in motivation but generally



Pic: @gewman

angry and anti-Establishment.

“Sunak is as keen to be rid of that kind of politics as Starmer is.”

Despite the growing danger posed by “a new right-wing populist movement” that may or may not involve Johnson, the MS insists: “Currently our bigger headache comes from those lining up to denounce [Johnson] – a Tory-Labour consensus on lowering wages, privatising services and restricting our political and civil rights.”

But this is far from the first time that

the *Morning Star* has suggested that Johnson’s brand of populism is somehow, sort-of... progressive.

During the Tory leadership contest of 2019, the *Morning Star* came close to backing Johnson against Jeremy Hunt, as (wait for it)... the candidate “who has ... the right ... to call himself a proletarian” (editorial, 2 July 2019). And if any reader at the time thought that was a joke, the same editorial seemed to praise Johnson’s proposed “pledge of a wedge to protect small businesses, farmers, fishermen (and presumably fisherwomen).”

Following Johnson’s victory, a *Morning Star* editorial (23 August 2019) suggested: “Where his coronation both poses a risk and presents an opportunity to the left is in his greater distance from the Establishment ‘mainstream’ and the already evident breach between him and parts of the permanent state”.

Then Johnson prorogued parliament, and the paper clearly sympathised: “By adding an extra few days to the habitual parliamentary break over the party conference season, he is hoping to avoid defeat in the Commons by MPs who clearly want to delay Brexit day yet again” (editorial, 2 September 2019).

The *Morning Star* went on to support Johnson’s withdrawal bill, stating (editorial, 21 October 2019): “this govern-

ment... has, against the expectations and manifest hopes of all those parliamentary renegades who have repeatedly found ways to subvert the popular will, reached agreement with the European Union. This is the actually existing Brexit. There is no going back.”

But the paper’s most bizarre moment of almost Nadine Dorries-level fantasising came in September 2020, when it seemed to believe, in all seriousness, that Johnson might bring in... a planned economy (!): I kid you not.

The paper portrayed Johnson’s clashes with the EU as about state aid rules. The editorial of 9 September 2020 claimed Johnson’s stance opened up the prospect of: “Massive state aid to support industrial development”, adding a chirpy: “What’s not to like?”

By now totally carried away, the same editorial went on to suggest Johnson might usher in something like ... the old USSR’s planned economy (!): “It evokes the rousing verse in *Red Fly the Banners Oh*, sung at many a union conference: ‘Five for the years of the Five Year Plan, and four for the four years taken’.”

I suppose that with that level of self-delusion, it’s hardly surprising that the people who run the *Morning Star* even now feel some sympathy for a poor, persecuted, anti-establishment “maverick”. □

What Washington can teach London about history



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Last week, on a visit to Washington, D.C., I spent some time in two new museums and walked away wondering why we don’t have museums like that in the U.K.

The first was the National Museum of African American History and Culture. This museum, established by an act of Congress in 2003 and finally opened just seven years ago, is enormously popular. It tells the story of the Black experience in America, from slave ships right up until the Black Lives Matter movement. One cannot walk through its many rooms and not be moved.

Some of the rooms warn the visitor: a thick red border around an image is likely to prompt strong feelings of discomfort. This was particularly true in a room about lynchings, where many images made for

difficult viewing. Equally moving were the videos and photos of the civil rights leaders, including Dr Martin Luther King and many lesser-known ones – Bayard Rustin, who organised the 1963 March on Washington and his mentor A. Philip Randolph were both given attention – though it was not mentioned that either was a socialist.

The main message of the museum infuriates all of Donald Trump’s supporters in its unflinching depiction of the horror of centuries of slavery, oppression and racism. To the American Right, the museum would be seen as a terrible example of “woke”. To the rest of us, it’s indispensable.

The second museum, also new but not nearly as crowded, was the National Museum of the American Indian. This massive museum at the heart of the national capital tells a painful story of conquest, betrayal and, ultimately, genocide.

I thought I knew my American history pretty well. Still,

I learned much – including the full horror of the “trail of tears”, which was the forced expulsion of vast numbers of indigenous people from their traditional homelands.

Visiting these two museums, I could not help but wonder if they would survive a second Trump term in the White House – indeed, I’m surprised they survived a first one. The strong negative message both museums conveyed – by telling the truth, I should add – is the opposite of the “make America great again” story told by the Republican Party (and not only by Trump).

But I also began to think about why we don’t have national museums in our capital about the history of the British Empire.

Liverpool has a museum about slavery, but that only tells part of the story. And there’s a narrative told by some British politicians that it’s a good story – a story of how moral leaders like William Wilberforce ended the slave trade and the positive role played by the Royal



Pic: CC BY 2.0

Navy in enforcing the ban.

Museums like the Imperial War Museum exist to teach a version of British history that culminates in 1945. One does not admire Spitfire aircraft at the RAF Museum or walk on the decks of the H.M.S. Belfast on the Thames to get a critical view of British history.

It’s almost impossible to imagine a large national museum in the centre of London that would take on the truth about the British Empire in far-away lands in Africa and Asia or the history of British rule closer to home, in Ireland.

The two museums I visited in Washington gave prominence to Nat Turner, a slave who led a bloody rebellion against his masters, and Sitting Bull, the

warrior chief whose troops dealt a shattering blow to the U.S. Army in the battle of Little Big Horn in 1876.

Can one imagine a museum here in Britain that would tell the story of Bobby Sands and the other Irish Republican prisoners and their hunger strike? Or the Amritsar massacre in India in 1919? Or the establishment of concentration camps during the Boer War?

The history of the British Empire provides just as many examples of oppression and resistance as does U.S. history, but there is little appetite to show these off here.

And yet, if we are to counter the false narrative promoted by Tory historians who carry on endlessly about the problem of “woke” history, maybe we need to consider doing what the Americans have done.

Maybe it’s time for a national museum about the British Empire. □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal opinion column.

Push Labour and unions on abortion rights



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

On 17 June abortion rights supporters marched in solidarity with a woman jailed for two years for breaking abortion laws. The protest in London was sparked when a 44-year-old mother of three was given a 28-month extended sentence earlier in week after taking abortion pills after the 24-week legal limit. She was between 32 and 34 weeks pregnant at the time.

Protesters marched from the Royal Courts of Justice to Whitehall, demanding release of the woman and an end to the criminalisation of abortion.

The same week people in Poland marched in at least 80 towns and cities to protest the death of a 33 year old

woman who was wrongfully denied an abortion that could have saved her life.

Abortion continues to be legal in Poland if the pregnancy poses a risk to the health or life to the pregnant person, or is a result of a crime such as rape or incest. However, in 2020, Poland's constitutional tribunal judged as unconstitutional abortion due to foetal abnormalities. In 2005, the then-director of the hospital in which Lalik died reportedly announced that the hospital would not perform any abortion as the procedure contradicted "God's law and the pope's teaching". No abortion has taken place at the hospital since at least 2018, the Polish *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported.

Both countries could and should see a resurgence of abortion rights movement. Further protests are planned in other cities. Sheffield Solidarity Group has called a demonstration to protect the right to abortion at Barker's Pool,

noon, Saturday 24 June. A model motion (bit.ly/mo-pe) has been produced for CLPs and union branches.

Dealing with abortion within criminal law restricts and stigmatises both those who request an abortion and the healthcare professionals who provide that care. Social reasons for women delaying seeking services include lack of recognition of pregnancy, family or relationship breakdown, domestic violence, sexual assault or rape, or denial of pregnancy due to social fears. Later abortion disproportionately involves teenage or vulnerable women. Nobody should face prison for a decision about their own body and health care. Nobody should be forced into unsafe abortion methods due to term limits preventing abortion by healthcare professionals later in pregnancy.

It is vital that Labour support progressive legislative change, including decriminalisation (which was in Labour's



2019 election manifesto), abolition of term limits and reform to allow women and pregnant people to control their own bodies. Labour must also support roll back of outsourcing and cuts in healthcare and support expansion of sexual health and abortion provision. Restricted provision and shortages mean women often have to wait weeks even after doctors have agreed they can have an abortion. This is despite the NHS advising that no one should have to wait more than two weeks for an abortion.

There is a real mood to reform abortion law. Labour and unions should harness that energy into local and national organisation for expansion of reproductive freedoms. □

North Sea: fight for the workers' plan



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

As we enter another hot summer and emissions hit an all-time high, the Labour leadership sought headlines with a series of feeble announcements on environmental policy. Labour's policies are an improvement compared to the denialists in charge of the Tory party, but far too timid as an answer to the ecological crisis.

Rank-and-file offshore workers and environmentalist groups have published a set of demands for a worker-led just transition. The [Our Power report](#) calls for a wage guarantee and an offer of free retraining for workers made redundant as the oil fields are decommissioned.

But at the beginning of June, Rachel Reeves watered down Labour's already inadequate flagship policy of borrowing £28 billion a year for green investment. She fears that government borrowing may "spook the markets", as with Liz Truss. She wants to reduce

the national debt, fear to tax the rich, and hopes the climate will wait for a better economic forecast.

Even before Reeves' wobble, the original £28 billion plan was inadequate. £6 billion of Labour's £28 billion is ring-fenced to retrofit UK homes with insulation and low-carbon heating. But figures from the government's Climate Change Committee put the total cost of retrofitting Britain's housing stock at £676 billion. Labour's £6 billion a year pledge may subsidise a few construction firms, but it will not create the infrastructure we need to produce climate resilient homes or meet emissions targets.

Reeves trailed her U-turn by reaffirming Labour's opposition to North Sea oil and gas expansion. This provoked criticism from the fossil capitalist trade body, Offshore Energies UK, and GMB union leaders, who issued near-identical statements complaining that Labour's plan creates a "cliff-edge" for the 200,000 workers.

Smith is right to complain that Starmer's plan for an energy transition lacks detail, but wrong to defend the status quo of unending expansion. Even conservative bodies

like the International Energy Authority recognise new fossil-fuel developments are incompatible with a liveable future. The jobs cliff-edge will not be avoided by allowing fossil capital to drive us over the climate cliff-edge.

If the GMB were serious about defending jobs, it would be promoting the *Our Power* report.

Weak

The ban on future licences is actually unnecessarily weak. The Rosebank oil field off Shetland is due for approval within weeks. If Starmer was serious about climate change, he would state clearly that Labour would revoke any licences that broke existing climate pledges. Given Labour's lead in the polls, such a statement would probably create enough uncertainty to scupper Rosebank.

The key problem for both the Labour leadership and the GMB officialdom is that they regard the fossil capitalists operating in the North Sea as people with legitimate property rights in their licences. Private operation of the oil fields means unending expansion and is clearly incompatible with rational ecological

management. The operations should be taken into common ownership and run according to sound ecological principles.

Labour does seek to set up one publicly-owned renewable energy company to rapidly expand wind, tidal and solar infrastructure. But one publicly company is not enough.

The *Our Power* report describes the offshore sector as the "wild west", with high levels of job insecurity, hyper-exploitation and unsafe working practices. Private ownership of the rigs, ports, and wind energy sector is the main barrier to secure, decent jobs and to a well-planned energy transition. We need to take these resources into common ownership for a planned and well-integrated transition.

Forecast

Last month, the World Meteorological Association revised its forecast upwards to say there is a two thirds chance of exceeding pre-industrial climate by 1.5°C by 2027. As environmentalist Lester Brown puts it: "We are crossing natural thresholds that we cannot see and violating deadlines we do not recognise. Nature is the time keeper, but we cannot see the clock... We are in a

race between tipping points in the earth's natural systems and those in the world's political systems. Which will tip first?"

By organising around the perspectives contained in the *Our Power* report, and building the industrial and political strength of an ecologically-conscious workers movement, we can lay the groundwork for a political tipping point. □



Activist Agenda

Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) have a deadline of 23 June for electing their delegates to Labour Party conference (8-11 October, Liverpool) and Women's Conference (7 Oct). Most will decide motions later (deadline for Women's Conference 14 Sep, for general conference 15 Sep), but some decide earlier. CLPs can submit a rule change instead of a motion, but must do that by 23 June. □

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

US bosses pursue child labour

By Lewis Joyes

The right and far-right in the US are emboldened and on the attack. Having already flooded state legislatures this year with hundreds of bills aiming to smash the rights of LGBTQ+ people, many of which explicitly target the rights of LGBTQ+ youth, the conservative right are likewise aiming for an unprecedented expansion of child labour. As the cost of living spirals, the right are waging amongst the most flagrantly abusive forms of class warfare; rolling back weak laws at the state and federal level to force kids from poor families into work.

Over the past three years, at least ten states have proposed or passed new bills that extend the hours minors [under-18s] can work, the occupations they can work in, lowering their minimum wages, and in the case of Arkansas, the removal of age verification checks and parental/guardian permissions to work. These bills appear concentrated in the “Midwest” states (such as Missouri, Nebraska, Arkansas and Iowa), regions of the US heavily dependent on industrial logging, meat-packing and manufacturing, are or were heavily backed by companies and industrial lobbyists, and presented largely by Republicans, though supported in many states by Democrats.

A good question to ask is “why now?”

There are three connected reasons. Firstly, hyper-exploitative age-dependent minimum wage laws mean that children are a cheaper form of labour. Secondly, over the past 20 years young people are increasingly opting to stay in school for longer. And thirdly, rising levels of child labour law violations across the US mean that companies are facing an increase in penalty fines.

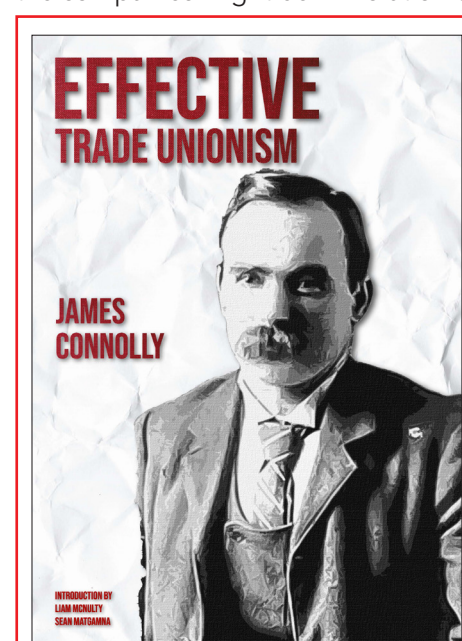
As reported by the Economic Policy Institute, in 2022 there were over 3,800 child labour law violations, a tripling of minors being employed illegally since 2015, at a net cost to companies of over \$4 million. The obvious solution for the business owners to avoid fines and maintain or extend profit margins is thus sweeping changes to the laws, to keep kids in work for ever-longer hours.

Fines

Currently, individual child labour violation fines cost companies up to an approximate measly \$15,000 (or around \$69,000 where a child is seriously injured or killed). But instead of tackling the root causes forcing working class youth into work, or simply outright banning child labour, Democrats in Congress have recently introduced a bill to increase this maximum federal penalty to \$700,000.

Although companies are likely to more energetically avoid violating child

labour laws, there appears no focus whatsoever from the Democratic Party to stop or reverse the erosion of laws the companies might be in violation of,



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

workersliberty.org/publications

nor provide adequate social support for young people at risk of hyper-exploitation. For the two dominant forces in US politics, this isn't a question of whether or not kids should be in the workplace at all, but how much companies should be forced to pay if their employment breaches flimsy rules, written by the interests of industry, and backed by members of both parties in their states.

Contradictory

The US right offers perhaps the most contradictory, double-edge view on children's role in society. In one sentence, they demand children be prevented from hearing stories from drag artists in the name of “protection”. Yet in the next, to defend profits and demand US economic growth, minors need forcing into ever-more deadly working environments and longer working hours.

175 years have now passed since the publication of the Communist Manifesto. The cotton mills, dependent on child labour, as analysed then by Marx and Engels, are now the logging forests and manufacturing/meat-packing plants of the current era. Their demands to tackle child labour exploitation in 1848 remain just as timely now: “Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form”. □

Biden fêtes “autocratising” Modi

By Mohan Sen

In 2005 the government of George W Bush banned Narendra Modi from the US for his role in the 2002 Gujarat massacres, in which thousands of Muslims were killed. Now, after nine years transforming India as a whole into an authoritarian ethno-nationalist regime, Modi is being welcomed by a supposedly progressive US government.

Despite warnings from South-Asian Americans and human rights organisations about the “fast autocratising” Indian government's “escalating attacks on human rights and democracy”, on 22 June the Indian prime minister will meet Joe Biden and address a joint session of the two houses of the US Congress. Biden and congressional leaders have made it clear they will be fêting Modi and not challenging him

on his disastrous human rights record. The White House's official statement cants about “our two countries' shared commitment to a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific”.

South Asian organisations and allies will be protesting in Washington and elsewhere in the US when Modi visits. We send them solidarity.

As an aside, but an important one: in boosting Modi, Biden et al are betraying democracy and human rights in Ukraine as well as in India. The BJP regime has refused to condemn Russia's war and practically supported it by buying huge quantities of Russian oil, up tenfold in 2022.

Hindu nationalist influence is even stronger in the US than in the UK. When Modi was embraced by Donald Trump at a Texas rally in 2019, the politicians on stage included six Democratic Party members of

Congress. One of them, Raja Krishnamoorthi, is an open supporter of the Hindu far right.

Prominent “progressive” Congressman Ro Khanna, the co-chair of Bernie Sanders 2020 presidential campaign, on economic issues far to the left of Biden, was previously sharply critical of Modi. Now he has moved so far that he was one of those who formally requested for Modi to address Congress.

Opportunism

It seems unlikely that Khanna has been won over to Hindu nationalism, and more likely he is behaving opportunistically for political advantage.

The warm welcome Modi is receiving in the US is not just a matter of Hindu nationalist influence. It is widely noted that the US government and political establishment see India as

a crucial counterweight to the Chinese regime (hence “Indo-Pacific”, etc) as well as an important economic “partner” for American capitalism.

We face a similar, if less

severe, problem here. Keir Starmer's Labour leadership has severely pandered to the Hindu right, despite Hindu nationalists aiding the Tories. □

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Junior doctors keep up the fight

By Sacha Ismail

Junior doctors fighting over pay held three more days of well-supported strikes on 14-17 June, with lively picket lines and a march and rally of 1,000 in London.

Among NHS workers fighting for a pay rise, junior doctors have so far waged the most determined campaign, both in terms of clarity of demands (they are clear they want a real-terms increase and a timetable for “pay restoration” to 2008 levels) and the number of strike days. But as a junior doctor centrally involved in the dispute explained in *Solidarity* 676 last week, the current level of action – three days a month, with more of the same on the cards – looks not enough to dislodge the government.

Another junior doctor activist who spoke to us this week expressed concern that their dispute could go the same way as the RMT’s on the railways, failing to escalate and losing momentum (though the BMA has done better than the RMT in terms of the number of strike days).

The junior doctors are now rebalancing under the anti-union laws, 19 June to 31 August, to extend their strike mandate. Meanwhile consultants – senior NHS doctors – finish their ballot over pay on 27 June, and may strike in late July.



The RCN nursing union’s rebalot for further strikes closes on Friday 23 June. RCN General Secretary Pat Cullen has publicly expressed doubt that they will make the legal turnout threshold, saying the anti-union laws will put the dispute in a “dead end”. It can’t have helped that Cullen and her leadership first tried to push through an extremely bad deal.

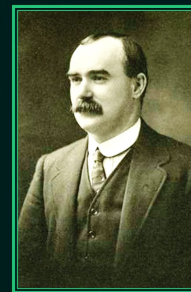
Meanwhile Unite is continuing strikes in the NHS (where it is mostly a minority union) over pay, with some Trusts striking in June (including some on the

14th, coinciding with the junior doctors). Unite says it is balloting to extend the strike to other areas.

Three NHS unions – Unite, Unison and GMB – are the Labour Party’s three largest affiliates, by far, but they are doing little or nothing to pressure Labour over the issue of NHS pay or the health service generally. In response to the pay disputes, Starmer’s leadership refuses to commit to anything, only repeating its pledge to recruit more medical and nursing students. As one striking junior doctor pointed out to the

Guardian, this is like responding to the problem of a leaky bucket by saying you’ll pour in more water. □

Liam McNulty



James Connolly Socialist Nationalist & Internationalist

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

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Free Russian internationalist Igor Kuznetsov!

By Sacha Ismail

In September 2021 Russian socialist and trade unionist Igor Kuznetsov was [arrested](#) for “inciting mass disorder” (though the Telegram messenger system!) Two months he was also charged with participation in an “extremist community”, the socialist organisation Left Resistance.

Now, in a move reminiscent of the [treatment](#) of dissidents in the late Soviet Union, Kuznetsov has been sent to a psychiatric institution. The Serbsky Centre to which he has been sent is the same institution that dealt with many Soviet dissidents.

Left Resistance, which has had other activists jailed, seems to have taken an extremely strong stand against Russian imperialism. As far back as April 2021 Kuznetsov predicted a Russian invasion of Ukraine, compared Putin



to Hitler and appealed to Russians to resist.

A Left Resistance manifesto states: “The genocide of the peoples of the Caucasus, launched in the 19th century by Tsarism, was continued by Stalin. Stalin’s regime is being revived by Putin. Thus, we are fighting not just Russian imperialism, but the serfdom and obscurantism of Tsarist-Stalinist-Putin imperialism. Moreover, the Putin regime’s aggression against Ukraine with the annexation of Crimea, against Syria with the bombing of civilians, with adventures

in Africa and Latin America after 2014 leads to increased national oppression against non-Russian peoples of the Russian Federation, to a policy of assimilation of non-Russian peoples and destruction of non-Russian languages in Russia.

“Russians have been turned by Tsarist-Stalinist-Putin imperialism into the empire’s main tool, and the culture of the Russian people has been perverted by imperialism and chauvinism. Without destroying Tsarist-Stalinist-Putinist imperialism and Stalinist-Putinist fascism, the Russian national revival and the revival of all peoples of the Russian Federation is impossible. This international struggle against Russian imperialism and fascism – has become the common national task of all peoples of Russia.”

Kuznetsov also wrote: “By defending Ukraine, we are defending rights and freedoms

for ourselves in Russia; the victory of Ukraine is the defeat of Ruscism in Russia and the coming victory of democracy over Ruscism in the Russian Federation. Ukraine’s defeat is our defeat and the intensification of the repression of Rus-

cism in Russia.”

Unsurprisingly other Left Resistance activists have also been imprisoned, notably [Darya Polyudova](#).

Free the internationalist socialists jailed in Russia! □

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Jews in the anti-racist imagination



Book review

By Daniel Randall

In *Outcast: How Jews were Banished from the Anti-Racist Imagination*, Camila Bassi seeks to reintegrate a critique of antisemitism into a critique of racism. Moreover, she makes a case for a more universalist, humanist anti-racism – a confrontation with racism that is also a critique of race. She does this through a confrontation with left-academic discourse around Jews, antisemitism, and Israel/Palestine.

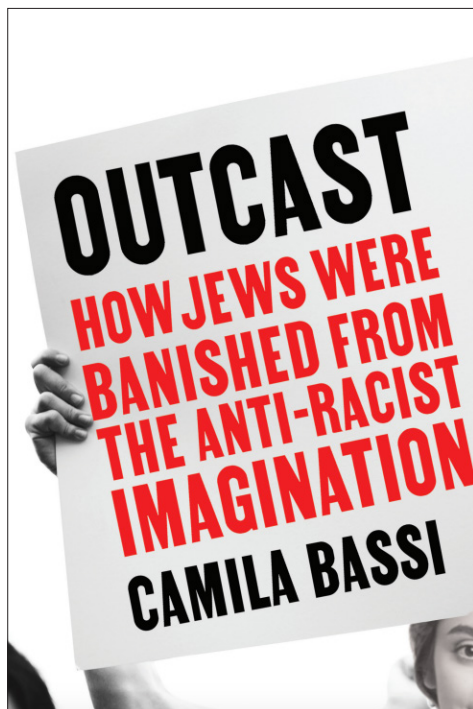
(A disclaimer at the outset: Bassi wrote a foreword for my own book on left antisemitism, and I provided a cover quote for hers. Both our books were published by the same imprint, No Pasaran Media. We are longstanding comrades in Workers' Liberty, and clearly have substantial agreement on this topic. Substantial – but not total, as I will gesture towards briefly later in the review.)

Corbyn

Although they are occasionally referred to, *Outcast* does not attempt to autopsy the debates around antisemitism in the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Its focus is on trends in left thinking that predate that period. Its central argument is that, by adopting what Bassi calls the "colonial model" of racism, the left has both limited the scope of its critique and made itself vulnerable to lapses into antisemitism. To oversimplify somewhat for the purposes of space, the "colonial model" contends that "race" and "racism" have more-or-less fixed boundaries: "race" is a dualistic taxonomy of "Black" and "white", and "racism" is what rich, powerful white people do to poorer, less powerful Black people. The accompanying historiography argues that racism was invented to provide an ideological justification for European empires' territorial expansion and colonisation.

This model not only precludes any understanding of antisemitism against (white) Jews as a form of racism, but also flattens out the complex history of Jewish, and indeed Arab, nationalisms – both shaped by experiences of oppression and by relationships with competing imperialisms – in Israel/Palestine to a simplistic dynamic of white Jews participating in the exporting of white-supremacist colonialism to the Middle East. Bassi attacks this model as limited and ahistorical, arguing that racialised "otherings" haunted Europe even before the inception of the modern concept of "race" – especially a "Jewish Other" and a "Muslim Other".

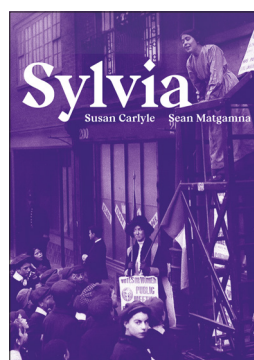
Drawing on the work of Marxist so-



ciologist Robert Miles, Bassi further argues that European ruling classes often also saw their domestic oppressed and exploited classes as a racialised, biological "Other". Bassi diagnoses a reconnection with humanism and universalism as the antidote to the political conclusions of the "colonial model", which, she argues, imply an identitarian politics of resentment more than a collective democratic politics of universal emancipation. Following the political scientist Wendy Brown, Bassi argues that a "politics of 'I am'" must give way to a "politics of 'I want this for us.'"

Zionism

The book will be of value to anyone interested in debates on the left, in both activism and academia, about racism, antisemitism, and Israel/Palestine. On this latter topic, Bassi does the contemporary left a particular service by seeking to rediscover the analysis of Maxime Rodinson. Rodinson was a French Marxist scholar who pioneered the analysis of Israel as a "settler-colonial state", but whose work has largely receded from view in contemporary Marxist thinking about the issue – in part because his conclusions do not gel with an "absolute anti-Zionism" which insists that Israeli-Jewish nationhood is a historical illegitimacy that must be extirpated as a condition of progress. Bassi's survey of Rodinson's work shows clearly how



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

a radical critique of Israel's colonial oppression of the Palestinians and advocacy of equality need not imply hostility to Israeli-Jewish national rights.

On a left where a veteran activist such as Diane Abbott can casually dismiss the oppression suffered by Jews and Roma people as akin to prejudice against redheads, arguments such as Bassi's are a necessary corrective. However, there is, perhaps, a danger of bending the stick too far the other way, so to speak. One cannot hold water in one's hands; a too fluid conception of the construction and reconstruction of "race" risk depriving it of any explanatory value whatsoever.

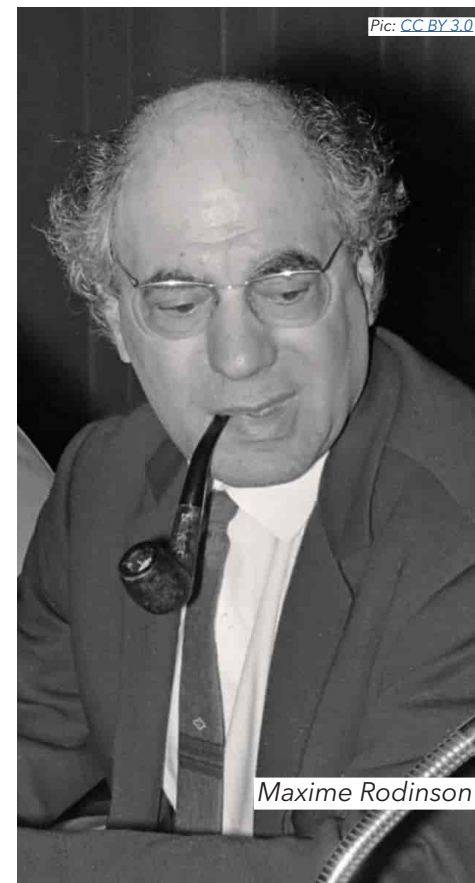
In my own book, *Confronting Anti-semitism on the Left: Arguments for Socialists*, I questioned whether antisemitism as it is most often encountered on the left can meaningfully be understood as a form of "racism". Leftists whose politics, by a series of logical steps, arrive at antisemitic implications because of conclusions they draw from historical narratives applied to Israel/Palestine do not, I argue, see Jews as a racialised Other. Indeed, they are often sincere opponents of that form of antisemitism. Their antisemitism is an ideological implication – more of a danger, as I have sometimes provocatively argued, to the left, in terms of the risk of political miseducation, than to Jews as such.

Racism

Bassi's contention (and, again, to oversimplify) is that the "othering" left antisemitism applies to Jews is so intense, and maps so clearly onto historic forms of racialisation, that it has a racist effect, regardless of whether or not its adherents conceive of it in consciously "racial" terms. I remain unconvinced on this point; to me, the confrontation with contemporary left antisemitism is still primarily a matter of unpicking historiographies and analyses of imperialism derived from Stalinist campism more than it is a matter of exposing sublimated anti-Jewish racial biases.

It is also a matter of material reality that Jews in contemporary Britain are not victims of racist oppression in anything like the same way as, for example, an African asylum seeker or even a British-born black person. Deepening our understanding of how Jews have been, and in some ways continue to be, racialised should not blur out distinctions in how racialised power structures function in contemporary society.

For me, another limitation of *Outcast* is its academic register. This is perhaps inevitable, indeed, a conscious choice, in a book written by an academic substantially focused on critiquing academic discourse. But I fear that choice may limit its accessibility and lead to it being read by fewer people than it



Maxime Rodinson

deserves. Nevertheless, the book represents an important confrontation with a limited and ultimately pessimistic anti-racism that ends up affirming the very social construction it should seek to dismantle. It is a powerful polemic for a much-needed reconnection with universalism, humanism, and consistent democracy. ☐

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Rail: escalating out of deadlock?



Off The Rails

By an RMT activist

Rail and Tube workers started the current strike wave, back in March 2022 (Tube) and June 2022 (rail Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and Network Rail). A year later, the Tube and TOCs disputes are deadlocked, and Network Rail has settled on a bad deal, but workers remain determined to defy government-directed attempts to restructure jobs and worsen conditions.

Representatives in the RMT union (the main union in the industry and the only all-grades union) from the main-line Train Operating Companies (TOCs) in dispute over pay and conditions met on 14 June, with a strong consensus for resuming strikes at an intensified pace.

Rail workers last struck at the end of May and beginning of June, with drivers in Aslef striking on 31 May and 3 June, and RMT members striking on 2 June.

RMT's dispute with the Rail Delivery Group, the umbrella body representing the TOCs, began with three days of strikes in June 2022. The dispute was run in parallel with a separate dispute involving RMT members at Network Rail, which ended in March when workers voted to accept a settlement. Although that deal improved on previous offers, it included a below-inflation pay "increase" and gave the employer leeway for cuts. RMT's leadership made no recommendation in the referendum on the offer, allowing conservative elements who wanted a way out of the dispute to set the tone in many areas.

The latest offer from the RDG involves a two-year process, with a 5% pay settlement for the first year conditional on entering into a process in the second year for restructuring pay and conditions. The employers want to consolidate current job roles into a single "multi-skilled" grade on stations. They also want to overhaul policies on attendance, sick pay, rostering parameters and more.

Some in RMT now believe the most

effective way to push for improvements would be to devolve the national dispute into a series of TOC-by-TOC campaigns. Although RMT is formally in dispute with multiple TOCs, the current dispute is effectively a consolidated campaign against the RDG, meaning any settlement will apply to workers across all affected TOCs. Advocates of this approach argue that the government is pushing the RDG's cuts agenda, and that bosses of individual TOCs are not necessarily as enthusiastic about delivering it, meaning disputes or negotiations on a TOC-by-TOC basis could lead to settlements that include some protections for conditions.

United

Off the Rails, the rank-and-file rail workers' blog and zine published by Workers' Liberty rail workers, has argued against this approach. Although an orderly retreat into TOC-by-TOC talks may be something into which the union is eventually forced, whilst there is a prospect of maintaining a single, united, national dispute, the fight should continue at that level, aiming to force national concessions from the RDG via intensified action.

There is an ongoing debate amongst union activists about the most effective form of escalation. Many argue for an ongoing programme of strikes on Saturdays, on the basis that, with leisure travel having recovered to pre-pandemic levels in a way weekday commuter travel hasn't, workers' main leverage is at the weekend. However, whilst a programme of Saturday strikes would represent escalation of a sort, it is unlikely that striking for only one day a week, even on a sustained basis, will force major concessions. More likely it will see the dispute simmer down into an attritional deadlock, as happened in several of the RMT's disputes against Driver Only Operation, where sustained Saturday strikes ultimately won little.

Off the Rails has argued for a programme of action that features Saturday strikes but also involves sustained strikes during the week. A recent circular to members from the RMT general secretary reported, somewhat cryptically, that, following the 14 June reps' meeting, the union's National Executive Committee (NEC) would be discussing ways to "diversify" the industrial action.

More encouragingly, the circular reported plans for "a jointly agreed meeting with Aslef [a train drivers' union, and the majority union among drivers] at national level, as soon as possible, to coordinate and work in solidarity." Until now, relations between the two unions have appeared to consist of bilateral communication between the respective general secretaries' offices, and little more. A joint meeting to dis-

cuss coordination, even if only at NEC level rather than anything closer to the workplace, would be a substantial step forward.

Aslef seemingly remains committed to consciously pursuing a low-heat, attritional strategy. Despite returning resounding votes for continued action across all TOCs in its latest re-balls, it has called only a one-day strike on Avanti West Coast on 2 July, in a TOC-specific dispute over changes to sick pay arrangements, and an overtime ban on London North Eastern Railway from 1 July, also in a TOC-specific dispute.

Aslef's GS Mick Whelan has acknowledged, in communications with members, that there are calls from within the union for escalation, and has implied that refusing to heed those calls is an indication of the "good faith" with which Aslef has approached negotiations with the RDG – good faith which has gone unrewarded.

Underground

On London Underground (LUL), both RMT and Aslef remain in dispute over attacks on terms and conditions, including pensions, and in RMT's case over staffing levels on stations and in other areas. The two unions struck together for the first time on 15 March, with RMT having struck eight times in total since March 2022. Under pressure from an effective RMT overtime ban, LUL bosses have recently reopened negotiations on station staffing levels, having previously insisted the 600 jobs earmarked for deletion were gone for good. But the company continues to roll out cuts elsewhere, with a root-and-branch restructure of Tube drivers' working conditions underway that could see shift times extended and open the door to a headcount reduction.

Transport for London, LUL's parent company, is still determined to deliver the pension reform it promised the Tories as a condition for receiving funding bailouts during the pandemic. Its current plan is to move the existing TfL scheme into the Local Government Pension Scheme, which has much

worse terms and could see TfL workers lose thousands of pounds in retirement. Meanwhile, separate but parallel disputes on LUL over pay are in the offing, with workers' current pay settlement having expired in April 2023. The company's latest offer is for a 4% increase, well below union demands.

In both the rail and Tube disputes, a strategy of sporadic action, usually only of 24 hours at a time and often with weeks or even months between strikes, has provably, verifiably failed to deliver gains for workers. The best that can be said for it is that it has slowed down employers bent on job cuts and restructures. But without an intensification of action to a level that could potentially force the employers back, that will only be a stay of execution. Step up the strikes! □

→ from back page

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August schedule

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Connolly on Ireland and



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

This instalment in our long-running series on Connolly (workersliberty.org/connolly) follows on from [a discussion of how Connolly sought to root socialism in a version of Irish history](#).

In his [foreword](#) to *Labour in Irish History* (early 1910, but already published in sections over some years) Connolly spelled out his fundamental ideas about the necessary link between national liberation and socialism in Ireland. They are suggestive of Trotsky's [development](#) of Marx's idea of "[permanent revolution](#)", which proved to be an accurate preconception of the dynamics within Russia of the revolution that placed the working class in power there in October 1917.

The fundamental idea that the bourgeoisie could not lead the bourgeois revolution in Russia, was in Lenin's exposition, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. But Lenin's political conclusion was that therefore the bourgeois revolution would have to be led by the workers and peasants – "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". Trotsky faced the fact that the workers and farmers were not political equals, and that the workers would have to lead the peasants and the revolution. It would therefore be a proletarian revolution spreading into countries ripe for socialism. Becoming an international revolution, it could compensate for Russia's unripeness for socialist transformation.

Connolly wrote:

"In the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must, perforce, keep pace with the progress of the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation, and... the shifting of economic and political forces which accompanies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservatism of the non-working-class element, and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class..."

"The result of the long-drawn-out struggle of Ireland has been, so far, that the old chieftainry has disappeared, or, through its degenerate descendants, has made terms with iniquity, and become part and parcel of the supporters of the established order; the middle class, growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of the eco-

nomic rivalry of England almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the political despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal, and have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism as against every sentimental or historic attachment drawing them to Irish patriotism; only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland.

"To the unconquered Irish working class this book is dedicated by one of their number".

It was Ted Grant whom I first heard say that Connolly had "anticipated" the permanent revolution theory of Trotsky. That Ireland could have and was having, in the Provo war (1970-97), "permanent revolution", later became the dogma of almost all the "Orthodox Trotskyist" groups in the world (though not of Grant), and even of the Socialist Worker current (*Ireland's Permanent Revolution*, by Chris Bambery, 1986). It meant that the Provo war and Provo victory could magically win over the Northern Ireland Protestants. It was never more than outright nonsense.

It is in the difference between Connolly's formula and Trotsky's that we can see what is mistaken in Connolly and in the latter-day Orthodox Trotskyists. Trotsky's exposition of "permanent revolution" started with a precise picture of social forces (workers, peasants, bourgeois, etc.) in the Tsarist Empire. Connolly's scheme, in so far as it was an analysis of Irish society, was not precise, nor developed clearly. The dynamic of the process that will put the Irish working class in the lead of the Irish struggle is nothing more material than "patriotism" and the desire for "freedom", which the middle classes lack because of their investments.

Patriotism

Connolly propounded an ideal "patriotism" defined by his idea that the measure of the progress of national liberation was the emancipation of "the most subject class" in that nation. That was an appeal to right and justice, and an attempt to convince nationalists that they should be socialists, but not a clear and objective assessment of forces in Ireland and within a "permanent revolution" that would drive the classes almost mechanically. Mainly it exhorted workers to be nationalists. It was Connolly and his ideas that made the links. In reality they were not otherwise present.

In addition, Connolly seriously misestimated the forces he itemised. He stood on the perspective of a revolu-

tionary social-national resolution of the age-old conflicts. Yet he lived in a world of unfolding national reform on the land, Britain acting from above, making small landlords from tenants (much to the surprise and dismay of Home Rulers like John Dillon, who feared land reform would take the political drive out of Home Rule). And in the revolutionary phase of the struggle with Britain (1916-21), the Catholic-Irish middle class and the Catholic Church would keep their place; in a civil war (1922-3) in which an alternative to the bourgeoisie would not be posed, they would consolidate their rule [1]. Then there would be another era of national reform under both the Free Staters and De Valera, culminating in effective independence for the 26 Counties.

In any case, once the revolutionary period had ended, Connolly's lucubrations lost all meaning except the idea that the working class is more nationalist than other classes. That idea merged into the current of mystical populist nationalism. Connolly himself had [introduced](#) the doubtful and very porous idea of "real" independence, or "real" freedom, or the real "reconquest of Ireland": "If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the Green Flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the socialist republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you... England would rule you to your ruin".

Connolly meant to convince revolutionary nationalists to become socialists; but this identification of socialism with "complete" national freedom, the equation of the degree of capitalist rule with the degree of English rule, made it quite plausible later to give "socialism" meanings other than working-class emancipation.

In Trotsky's exposition of permanent revolution, by contrast, a bourgeois revolution like that of France after 1789 was necessary for the peoples of the Tsarist Empire – an end to autocracy, the overthrow of quasi-feudal landlordism, the liberation of the oppressed nationalities, and the establishment of a democratic republic embodying "the rights of man and the citizen". All factions of Russian Marxists were agreed on this.

Lenin was not satisfied with the conclusion projected by the Mensheviks, that the revolution, being bourgeois, would have to be led by the bourgeoisie. He insisted that the general schemas were not enough. The reality had to be examined specifically. The Russian bourgeoisie was weak and tied economically to the landlords, whose financial bankruptcy from an agrarian revolution would also be theirs. The

Russian working class, concentrated in giant industries built up on advanced technology imported from Western Europe, was a great force, socially and politically militant and influenced and organised by Marxists. The bourgeoisie's fear of the working class, and their knowledge of what workers had done in European revolutions back to 1848, made them timid and compromising. The compromising English Revolution of 1688 was their ideal. They sought reform from above by a modified Tsarism, not the radical destruction of Tsarism and the whole archaic social and political system at the head of which stood Tsar Nicholas II. After 1880 they looked to the Prussian model of economic and political reform from above.

Reality

This social and political reality, and not an abstract "Marxist" (or what in Connolly is essentially moral) scheme, said Lenin, led to the conclusion that a thoroughgoing radical revolution that would lead to a bourgeois-democratic republic could not be led by the bourgeoisie. The paradox was that although Russia was ripe only for a bourgeois revolution, the Russian bourgeoisie did not want to, and could not, lead such a revolution. Lenin's conclusion was that the bourgeois revolution in Russia would have to be led by the workers and peasants. His model was the phase of the French Revolution in 1792-4 when, led by Maximilien Robespierre and stimulated by the needs of a desperate war of national self-defence, the Jacobins, at the head of the pre-proletariat, the sans-culottes of Paris, had pushed the revolutionary government considerably beyond what the bourgeoisie wanted. Robespierre, St Just, and the Jacobin terrorists had also stood for universal male suffrage.

Trotsky agreed with Lenin's analysis, but not with his political conclusion.

Lenin talked of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" that would force through the revolution and then be overthrown to give way to the social rule for which Russia was ripe, that of the bourgeoisie. Impossible, said Trotsky. It was not conceivable that the workers and the peasants would play an equal role in these developments.

The peasantry, scattered and atomised, is never independent in politics, he argued. It follows one or another of the town-based forces. In anything like what Lenin called the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", the peasants would be led by the proletariat – or it would be impossible.

And was it conceivable, asked Trot-

“permanent revolution”

sky, that the working class would lead a revolution, take state power, and not serve its own immediate class interests? He specified such measures as legislation for the eight hour working day; the workers’ proto-government, the St Petersburg Soviet in 1905, had already pronounced itself for this and roused the workers to enforce it by direct action. The workers would take power and they would hold power, carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois revolution but also pursuing their own direct interests and needing to establish social ownership of major industry in order to do that.

But, opponents such as Martov, objected, Russia was not ripe for socialism. A socialist workers’ government was not possible. Even if the Russian workers could take power, they could not inaugurate socialism.

Trotsky replied, and Lenin too in 1917, that though socialist measures would be premature if judged by the development of Russia’s economy alone, the Russian revolution would be part of a chain of revolutions which would bring into play such countries as Germany, where industrial development was, they thought, ripe for socialism. On the international plane, the Russian revolution could thus rise beyond its own inherent limitations, and create a worker-ruled, if relatively backward, part of a broader socialist federation.

So Trotsky alone could have managed without Lenin? No, wrote Trotsky in the diary he kept in 1935. After February 1917, initially the Bolsheviks supported the Provisional Government. When Lenin got back to Russia a major struggle to reorient the Bolshevik party was necessary to turn it towards the workers’ revolution. Lenin won that at the April congress. Trotsky on his own could not have done that. Had Lenin died in exile in January 1917, the Bolsheviks would not have done what only the Bolshevik party could do. In Trotsky’s opinion, the Bolshevik party without Lenin in 1917 would have played a reactionary role. Trotsky himself in 1917 had to concretise his own prophetic scheme and understand that it could not be made reality without Lenin’s Bolshevik Party which in fact, in 1917, adopted (though not by name) Trotsky’s 12-year-old views on the character of the Russian revolution.

Stalinism

Trotsky’s broader international perspective failed because the working-class revolution was defeated in Europe in the years after the end of the World War. Stalinist counter-revolution, with all its peculiarities, and not socialism, was the result in Russia itself; but

that is outside our subject here.

By contrast, what is wrong with Connolly’s approximation to “permanent revolution” is that it is not a concrete analysis of possible forces that can achieve what he wants. That national freedom is measured by the progress in liberty of the most subject class in the nation is true only when socialists do the measuring or, here, the exhorting. That economic development leads to “the conservatism of the non-working-class element, and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class” is true in general of advanced capitalist countries. It was, ironically enough, potentially true in north-east Ulster, where the working class was socially powerful – but only potentially true.

It scarcely had grip in the rest of Ireland, which lacked industry, and where, moreover, the peasants were becoming small landlords. It was not likely to be true for a very long time. If Connolly’s perspective here was a revolutionary perspective for the medium term ahead, it was not a perspective for Ireland on its own, not even if north-east Ulster were included in Ireland – or it was a perspective for decades ahead – an epochal perspective of socialism, with no particular connection to Ireland as it was in Connolly’s day.

Connolly’s second proposition, about Ireland’s chieftains having disappeared or “made terms with iniquity”, its middle class being tied to England by investments (overseas investment by Irish capitalists was by then sizeable), and only the workers fighting for Irish freedom, was no better grounded.

In historic fact, most of the “old chieftains” were replaced by alien landlords, never bound to the people by ties of affinity, affection or acceptance. Those landlords had, by the time Connolly was writing, been sloughed off and replaced by myriad little Irish landlords – who had already, for themselves and some of their offspring, “reconquered” Ireland, and would hold it against the other Irish. Like the old landlords presiding over evictions, these new landowners already presided over, and through almost all the 20th century would continue to preside over, an incessant mass eviction of millions, including most of their own surplus children, from the country itself. They were already in possession.

Connolly noted the “thousand economic strings in the shape of investments” binding the bigger Irish bourgeoisie to “English capitalism”. He had in mind, perhaps, especially the Unionist bourgeoisie of the north-east – and not only them, but those also who would identify with Arthur Griffith’s pre-1917 Sinn Féin programme of an

Anglo-Hibernian monarchy. And who, on the eve as they thought of all-Ireland Home Rule, had banded together to fight the workers whom Connolly, along with Jim Larkin, led in the Labour War in Dublin in 1913-4.

But the farmers and the middle class of the towns, organically tied to them by parenthood, consanguinity, trading and services, etc. and their clerical offspring, were the middle class that mattered in Ireland. Some of the bigger bourgeoisie of the towns and cities were Unionists, but the greater part of the middle class were not. They were behind “the Irish party” and Home Rule.

By identifying the problem as English capitalism, Connolly conflated capitalism and England, and defined away (or as “un-Irish”) Irish capitalism. That perspective also pushed him towards considering the workers of the north-east as socially alien because nationally alien – as not anti-capitalist because they were not anti-English.

Tautology

“Only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland”. Yes, if freedom is equated with socialism. But then what Connolly writes is a tautology.

And, in theorising, he skated over the vast evidence which he himself had repeatedly recorded it and commented on it bitterly, that the working class was very far from being politically or ideologically separated out from the divided Irish middle class, North and South, Green and Orange, Green-White-and-Orange alike, and very far from being at the head of the nation. Connolly wanted that, and posted it as an ideal, but the middle classes would be strong enough to keep that grip.

Connolly’s idea was that there could be a socialist nationalism, that socialist ideas could “invest” and subdue nationalism and turn the green red. He would use the same approach with Catholicism, producing a pioneering version of “liberation theology”.

Connolly’s “permanent revolution” perspective was in fact only general advocacy of socialism wrapped up in a retrospective on Gaelic-Irish history. His arguments were an appeal to the idealism of those who wanted an Ireland unlike the capitalism of England and Western Europe, a call on them to fight for socialism. Such people were numerous, though by 1910 increasingly disabused. They included the romantic elitist W B Yeats, who saw by the time of the great Labour War, and his poem *September 1913*, that the Ireland of his dreams was giving way to the hucksters’ Ireland.

What need you, being come to

sense,

But fumble in a greasy till

And add the halfpence to the pence

And prayer to shivering prayer, until

You have dried the marrow from the bone;

For men were born to pray and save:

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,

It’s with O’Leary in the grave.

Connolly’s stigmatisation of capitalism as “the English system”, and his hope that Ireland free would be different, were part of a complex of such notions.

There is more, however. Leaving aside the great flaws in Connolly’s conception, the fact remains that even as Connolly expounds it, and though he expounds it as an Irish nationalist unfolding, “permanent revolution” could not be a nationalist perspective. Any international perspective for Irish workers must depend heavily on British and European workers. Connolly in 1910 believed that an international socialist revolution was imminent.

In terms of an Irish movement of a “permanent revolution” sort, even as a plausible bit of “alternative history”, it could only have been by way of working-class leadership of the war for the land from 1879 by the most developed working-class forces back in the 1880s and after – by the mainly Unionist northern working class. But religion, “race”, national identity, townspeople’s hostility to the countryside (triply alien for Belfast workers), and the geographical concentration of the industrial workers in one corner of the island, all worked against that.

The other “alternative history” scenario would have linked the British working class and the Irish land war, in a variant of what Marx had postulated and the Social Democratic Federation of Britain had pursued into the 1890s. Both those possibilities were vanishing when Connolly formulated his schemes.

In no case was “permanent revolution” an Ireland-only, still less a nationalist-Ireland-only, perspective. It was not, even when it could be plausibly drawn out of real conditions in Ireland, ever be an Irish national scenario.

Yet “Trotskyist” dialects call “permanent revolution” what the others call “completing the bourgeois revolution”. □

[1] Ken Loach’s fine film, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, does not present a historically true account of the issues in the civil war, The Republicans in the civil war did not represent the workers’ republic, not even the infant Communist Party of Ireland.



Yes, Trump is fascist



Letter

I can't see where Dan Katz (*Solidarity* 676) is coming from with his pedantic insistence that Trump is not, as in truth he is, a fascist. Or where Katz is going with it.

Sure, we want accuracy and as far as possible, precision. We want to avoid demagoguery and using words in such a way that feeling is substituted for reason.

In office, Trump did his best to be a rules-free dictator. He broke every rule and precedent he felt he needed to. He has discredited the FBI and the CIA (the main trouble with that is that he wanted to make them his wholly pliant weapons and tools). Before 2016, and in office, he campaigned relentlessly against the institutions of the bourgeois republic.

Against real elections, for instance, that he might lose. Trump campaigned *against the election*: if he lost, that would prove it was rigged. He spoke, lied, and acted against the transfer of power peacefully, without which real elections would not be possible.

Everything is "fake". The journalists and judges who disagree with him are all "fake". The "deep state" controls everything he doesn't like – what he can't yet control to his satisfaction and at whim.

He has a mass party. The party is a personality cult. Trump is its self-worshipping Führer and seen as that by its members. It fought the last presidential

election not on a party manifesto, but left it to Trump to decide what its policies were.

They organised conspiracies and made an insurrection in Washington to stop the transfer of power from Trump to Joe Biden, in which police on duty died.

In office the electorate saw Trump ignorantly and dangerously pontificate on Covid while hundreds of thousands died. Incompetence, stupidity, indifference and foolish short-term self-regard ruled.

That was Trump's response to the worst pandemic since Spanish flu in 1918 – and after all that 74 million US citizens voted for Trump in 2020, more than in 2016, when he lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton and won only in the electoral college. A sizable part at least of that number will vote Trump in November 2024. I don't think he will, but it is possible that Trump will win.

Trotsky identified the fundamentals of fascism as the ability to mobilise masses of people on any mix of nonsense, including severe criticism of elements of the status quo, in defence of the status quo and especially against a self-controlling labour movement. They use as much violence as they need; they destroy, falsify, abandon what they think necessary to abandon or repudiate. The erection of some personality above the movement as supreme ruler is normal.

After the fascist victory the norm is for the extra-parliamentary forces to be taken into the state machine or otherwise subordinated to it (or unassimila-

ble, perhaps subjectively revolutionary, elements are purged: the Night of Long Knives in Germany in 1934). If they have time, the fascist movement becomes part of the strengthened state machine under an autocratic leader.

If that is a generally true picture then Trump already has a powerful fascist or fascistic movement.

If you say that Trump, in what he has done, said, tried to do, and urged others to do, is not a fascist, then you have to provide some other description. Maybe he believed himself a monarch with absolute power? That isn't a true or useful definition.

Trumpism is inchoate, but the elements swirling are fascist elements. There are a number of armed militias, such as those to whom Trump gave the order to "stand back and stand by". They took part on 6 January 2021.

The Trumpites have taken control of one of the main parties. They have control of many state legislatures and governorships. They are on the offensive. If he loses the presidential election in 2024, and if events let him do so, Trump will continue to say he won.

Meanwhile there is a Trumpite republican offensive against black rights and women's rights, against things thought settled half a century ago.

All these are elements of American fascism on the march and on the offensive. They are far more developed than Italian fascism was a year before it formed a government and five years before it turned that into absolute power.

Will US fascism develop something

like that? I don't know. Maybe Trump will go to jail. But there will be other Trumps. Trump threatens American bourgeois democracy now; but the point is also that Trumpism isn't Trump alone. The crisis of American democracy was made very sharp by Trump as president, but it didn't start with Trump, or with Trump losing the popular vote in 2016 and still becoming president.

Far more of a danger than to prematurely call Trump and the Trumpites fascist is to pretend that not a lot has changed. That isn't true.

The Trump Republican party has a majority in the House of Representatives and in many states. Trump has succeeded in creating a world free of fact, logic, consistency, medicine, science, a world of "alternative facts" and free-wheeling lies. It doesn't matter to his followers.

You can group fascisms into broad categories, like, say, clerical fascists, and that is useful. But no two fascisms are exactly alike. With many there are people to argue that they weren't fascists at all, like Maurice Manning on the Irish Blueshirts. The Italian fascists were not, on their own or early on, antisemitic: hundreds of Jews took part in their totemistic "March on Rome" in 1921. If the demonic Nazis were the model fascists, then what were Mussolini's people? Or what were they before absolute power, or as near as they came to it, in 1926?

Claureen Ryan,
London

Is Solidarity collapsing into XR?



Letter

I am alarmed that *Solidarity's* ecological politics is collapsing into a callow regurgitation of Extinction Rebellion and its offshoots.

First, Stuart Jordan continues his quest for natural laws leading us toward a nightmarish dystopia. *Last month* he suggested we're all doomed by entropy, or at least not getting far by recycling materials. Next the *Jevons paradox*, casting doubt on the use of renewable energy such as wind turbines

and solar power. Without renewables and recycling, few modern alternatives are left to fossil-driven capitalism, never mind for socialism.

Second, the paper carries another plaint by Zack Muddle, justified by the spread of diseases, to demand "we must seek to phase out almost all

animal production, and limit wildlife trafficking and consumption". Aside from erroneous assumptions about farming, this is a call for the bourgeois state to impose veganism as the only means of subsistence, irrespective of the tastes of billions of workers and peasants across the globe.

Both Jordan and Muddle share some common traits.

First, they share a deep-seated fatalistic determinism by all-powerful, trans-historical forces – overexaggerating natural laws and what they regard as the drives of capi-

talism. Marxist class analysis is glaringly absent.

Second, they diminish the necessary emphasis on human agency, through science, technology and centrally – working class action, which are at the heart of the socialist project.

Third, they end up with reactionary politics. Their demands do not mobilise workers to fight to improve their situation. Both effectively advocate reductions to working class living standards in the name of saving the planet. Their proposals have more than a whiff of authoritarianism.

Perhaps both claim they are speculating about the programme of a future workers' government, to make social-

ism more ecological. They need to take a reality-check. There won't be socialism without a self-confident mass working class movement, built around demands by workers to make their own lives better.

Of course any burgeoning labour movement has to put ecology at the heart of its politics. Socialists can play a useful role propagating for this. But it is not our job to uncritically promote liberal green austerity for our class. Socialists want class-conscious workers to fight for their own universal interests. Workers won't fight for socialism if it means self-improvement.

Paul Vernadsky,
London



Unison: after conference, turn to campaigning



By Katy Dollar

The National Delegate Conference (NDC) of the public services union Unison was in Liverpool, 13-16 June.

Local Government members are being balloted. Members in Higher Education and the Environment Agency have balloted and struck, and will be taking more industrial action over the next period. In spring, we saw health workers and ambulance workers striking, and a number of hospitals only just missing the ballot threshold to strike alongside their RCN colleagues. Health members accepted the poor pay 2022-23 deal, rejected by Unite and the RCN, but only following a huge campaign for "accept" by the right-wing leadership

of Unison's health service group executive (SGE).

Unsurprisingly Conference focused on the cost of living crisis and how to beat ballot thresholds to deliver effective industrial action. Conference debated a trio of motions on the cost of living: the first calling on the National Executive (NEC) to continue to prioritise campaigns on the issue, the second highlighting the compound effect of the crisis on private renters, and the third on the disproportionate effect of the crisis on Black workers due to the ethnicity pay gap. All motions were relatively uncontroversial.

The focus of the outgoing left NEC and its majority faction, Time for Real Change, at the conference was about delivering industrial action. The right of the union moved to block NEC proposals, helped by the heavy control which the Standing Orders Committee (SOC) has over proceedings.

The SOC was defeated when it counterposed a composite motion calling for the establishment of a project group to discuss winning ballots against the NEC motion on immediate actions to beat the thresholds, and the NEC motion was heard and passed. A motion on taking a one-off payment from branches with large reserves to resource the Industrial action fund and efforts to win ballots was defeated. In the debates speakers spoke about huge difficulties getting over the turnout threshold.

Conference passed policy on campaigning for repeal of the anti-union laws but SOC ruled out of order a motion from Camden Unison calling for support for branches or members defying the laws.

Policy was passed on campaigning for LGBT+ rights, abortion rights, organising black workers and outsourcing. A motion on the NHS passed, saying that

Unison should call a national demo and Unison delegates should vote for union policy in the Labour Party.

The left has narrowly retained control of the NEC and must now build active campaigns out of these policies. Last year too much attention and energy at NEC level was sucked into internal Unison issues which are important but will not inspire membership into activity.

Conference yet again failed to prioritise any motion on Ukraine for the international session. A motion on Boycott Divestment and Sanctions against Israel passed overwhelmingly, but with speeches against from Workers' Liberty supporters.

The new NEC has a very narrow left majority, but positive campaigns to reinstate funding, to win ballots, and to fight discrimination could pass in alliance with independents. □

Not just populist



As a regular reader of your newspaper I find you get most of the important things right like Ukraine and Brexit; but why do some of your contributors go out of their way to deny that Donald Trump is a fascist?

Dan Katz repeats the "Trump is not a fascist" mantra (*Solidarity* 676) maintaining instead that Trump is merely "a right wing populist". That view may have been plausible a few years ago, but what marks Trump out from the likes of Orban and Erdogan nowadays is that he has actually initiated a right wing insurrection which came close to succeeding in overthrowing the elected government.

That event is not mentioned at all in Dan's letter, but I feel the most apt to describe the events of 6 January 2021 as an attempted fascist coup. Trump was definitely involved in its planning and the leading participants were members of the various fascist groups. In this respect it was very similar to the attack on the French National Assembly in 1934 by the fascist leagues.

I appreciate that we shouldn't call everyone on the right "fascist", but fascism itself historically has been subject to many changes. Mussolini himself made it up as he went along

and didn't turn Italy into a one-party state until some years after he came to power. Some historians have even said that it is only possible to talk about fascism for Mussolini's movement.

In the 1930s, Trotskyists in the Socialist Workers' Party were of the opinion that fascism in the USA would take on specifically American forms and it was wrong to expect it to develop as a close copy of European fascism. They cited the Ku Klux Klan as a variant of fascism, the Klan's principal purpose being to suppress the Black population. Trump has history with the Klan, as had his old man. He is personally a fascist.

Dan says "if elected in 2024 Trump would be more destructive and dangerous than during his previous presidency." We'd all agree to that, but what form would it take? A wholesale purge of the civil service and the FBI and their replacement with Trump loyalists would certainly be one of the things on the cards. US government and society would move in a much more authoritarian direction for sure.

This is why I think it incorrect not to call Trump a modern day fascist. He should not be considered "ordinary" bourgeois politician of the 'populist' persuasion who won't change things fundamentally if he gets a second term. □

Wesley Harding,
Liverpool

Let's hear more from Harper



Bravo to *Solidarity* for the interview with Joanna Harper, who is an authoritative voice on trans rights and sport (676). Let's hope the paper carries more interviews and articles of this quality on these important matters.

Harper is right about the current climate of hostility towards trans women and men, which socialists are duty-bound to oppose vigorously. However this context cannot rule out tackling difficult concrete questions. Sport is not simply a wedge issue to attack trans rights – it is also a mass participation activity where equality, fairness and inclusion matter to billions of people.

Harper makes two significant points that deserve more coverage in the paper. First, she accepts that trans women have "advantages" that "certainly exist" in sports. *Solidarity* should explore the extent of those advantages and their significance across a range of sports. Harper's forthcoming Loughborough study referred to in the interview will hopefully shed some light on this.

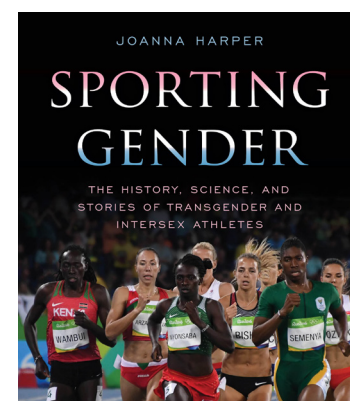
Second, Harper argues

that "reducing testosterone to typical female values via hormone therapy mitigates the advantages of having gone through a testosterone-fuelled puberty – mitigates, does not eliminate". Again, it will be interesting to read Harper's new research when it is published – and any other evidence on these under-researched questions.

Both points go to the heart of the discussion about any rules excluding trans women from women's sports. But if both propositions are true: (i) that trans women have significant advantages in sports and (ii) that hormone therapy only mitigates, but does not eliminate these advantages; then some rules for trans women are necessary for women's sports.

Harper concedes this point, at least to some extent, when she concludes that, for elite athletes, "trans women should bring their testosterone to female-typical values".

I think Harper is mistaken to draw a distinction between elite sports, where some rules should apply, and grassroots sports, where she argues for self-identification. Nobody gets to elite level unless they participate at lower level events. Millions of children and adults take part in grassroots sports



and care just as much about the fairness of competition.

If the physiological differences are significant, then surely any rules would apply beyond elite level to much of the grassroots. Whether it is football, rugby (league and union), cricket, athletics, tennis or any other sports – both for participants and spectators – fairness matters. Missing out on the podium or scoring the winner is also a matter of equality for those teams and individuals involved. □

Maxine Carpenter, London

More online

Ukraine: whose reconstruction?

Alternatives to the official plans: bit.ly/u-rec

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- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
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- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
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Documentary with the pain stripped out

By Kayden Jones

My *Imaginary Country* is a documentary by legendary director Patricio Guzmán on the 2019-2022 Chile protests in response to a subway fare increase in Santiago.

The documentary has been available in Chile for a year, but it has only recently been released in the UK. It demonstrates how these protests reflected broader societal issues such as rising living costs, unemployment, and huge inequality, with David-and-Goliath confrontations on the streets between protestors armed solely with stones and police equipped with shotguns and armoured vehicles. The bravery and sacrifices of Chile's working class are awe-inspiring, and Guzmán deserves credit for depicting them in such vivid and heartbreaking detail.

It's unfortunate that the documentary's politics are so poor. Unlike Allende's election, which was portrayed as a party-based revolution, the current movement is portrayed as a true grassroots revolution of the people. Many times, the movement's effectiveness is linked to its lack of leaders and capacity to function as a social organism without hierarchy.

This concept devolves into farce as the film concludes with a campaign rally for Chile's current President, Gabriel Boric. Guzmán uses crowd photos that are comparable to earlier protests

to demonstrate that Boric is a continuation of the popular movement.

Boric has failed to release political prisoners and has continued Chile's murderous policies against the Mapuche people. The sequence resembles a political campaign advert rather than a documentary. Thanks to the policy of no leaders and a rejection of organisation, Boric, a pseudo-left charlatan, was able to win the leadership and smother the protests.

Guzmán also draws a positive parallel between the Constituent Convention, convened by the government in reaction to the revolt, and the Chilean Parliament before Pinochet's coup in 1973. I'm sure the younger Guzmán, who made *The Battle of Chile*, saw that Parliament as a hive of scum and villainy. Guzmán portrays the assembly as the voice of the people, with members from all walks of life, including the Mapuche. However, it became a diversion of the people's rage at the state in the hope of replacing Pinochet's dictator's constitution. What should have been a document created and owned by the people was co-opted to the abandoned halls of the old parliament.

A chess-playing constituent assembly member is interviewed in the documentary. It is telling that when asked what the worst-case scenario would be, she stated the rejection of the new constitution by the people and the restoration of the right. She could have been

predicting the future.

Because the Convention was cut off from the people who had brought its members there, it was simple for the capitalist-owned media to tear the new constitution to shreds in the referendum. The biggest party in the new Constitutional Council is the far-right Republican party. Guzmán was using the chess analogy to show the pawns were the most powerful piece, representing the Chilean people's strength. He should have used the forced analogy to show how utterly outmanoeuvred and entangled the left had become, checkmate.

What makes this documentary even more agonising is that this is Guzmán's second revolutionary situation. Instead of learning from Allende's government and Pinochet's dictatorship, he makes a saccharine feel-good film. Given that the documentary is just now being screened in the UK, surely some context at the end of the video could have been included. Any observer unfamiliar with current events in Chile would believe the left had triumphed when in fact it had suffered a loss.

The left does not need more phoney victories; it needs painful lessons. I would still recommend this film to anyone interested in learning more about the 2019 protests, but I would start with Guzmán's older and better films, or at the very least some reading on Chilean politics. □

An empire massacres its own troops



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

On returning to their country in 1944, Senegalese troops (called "tirailleurs") who fought for France, the colonial power at the time, found themselves herded into a detention camp. Ousmane Sembène's moving 1988 film *Camp de Thiaroye* captures the intense sense of betrayal felt by these troops.

They are surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers. There are many complaints about the treatment they receive and particularly the lousy food. A representative is nominated to speak to the French commanding officer, who

flatly refuses to do anything. When the Senegalese troops are finally due to leave the camp they discover that they will receive only half of the wage arrears owed to them.

They take over the camp by force, capture a French general and hold him hostage. After negotiations it is agreed that the arrears will be paid in full. It looks as if the troubles of the Senegalese soldiers are over, and they can now go home. However, on the night of 30 Nov-1 Dec a deadly final chapter is played out.

Based on real events, the film won the Special Jury prize at the 45th Venice International Film Festival but was banned in France for ten years. □

• Online: Myths of Cinema no.3, "suspending your disbelief". bit.ly/myths-3

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Mass pickets at Amazon

By Ollie Moore

The latest round of strikes at Amazon's BHX4 warehouse in Coventry, on 12-14 June, saw mass pickets of nearly 500 workers. Activists report that morale amongst workers remains high, with new workplace leaders stepping up to join the organising group. Further strikes are planned, but with no dates set.

Ballots for industrial action at other Amazon sites in Mansfield and Rugeley returned large majorities for strikes, but missed the 50% turnout threshold. GMB plans an immediate re-ballot at Rugeley.

The union estimates that Amazon is spending between £1.3 million and £2.6 million per month on obstructing the unionisation drive, mainly via the costs of employing new starters, which Amazon has done to inflate the workforce figures and push GMB's membership back below 50%. GMB organisers report considerable success in recruiting those new starters to the union.

Labour leader Keir Starmer was questioned by Amazon strikers at GMB's recent congress, including around whether a Labour government would make union recognition a condition in public procurement. □

UCU boycott nears the crunch

By a UCU member

As the marking and assessment boycott in universities comes to a head, management are persisting with their hard line. The University and College Employers' Association is still refusing to negotiate, and at local level managers are demonstrating that they care more about giving students a pretty graduation ceremony than about properly assessing degrees. It is very possible that they are breaking consumer law, but as many universities have discovered with employment law, it is easy for management to break the law and hard to hold them to account when they do.

At Glasgow, around half of undergraduates have been told they will not have degree classifications at the time of graduation; in Cambridge it is likely that over 50% of 4,500 undergraduates will not graduate this summer. At Queens University Belfast over 750 students have been told their degrees are not confirmed, while Strathclyde is issuing "provisional" degrees without honours based on marks in years 1-3

of the four-year Scottish degree.

Elsewhere, management are employing non-expert markers in place of the tutors who designed the courses and assessments. This poses particular risks for students in highly-specialised subjects, where there may be only a handful of people in the country properly qualified to assess their work. In other cases results are being scaled up algorithmically from earlier marks, meaning students will get no credit for improved achievement in their final semester.

Meanwhile, in response to pay deductions multiple branches have called strikes. Leeds UCU is on indefinite strike as of 15 June. At Sheffield the branch is organising a wage-sharing scheme after management locked out staff refusing to mark on 100% pay deductions. Several universities struck on Friday 16 June, including Liverpool John Moores, Bristol, Queen Mary University of London, Edinburgh, Keele, Heriot Watt and Durham. Some strikes continue this month; Durham has a further strike scheduled on 29 June and is one of several branches that have called action for September.

Bristol's strike coincided with an Open Day, and its Unison branch are also taking five days of action in June. Other Unison strikes this month will hit Liverpool, Liverpool Hope, Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan and Winchester, and further branches are being balloted for action in the autumn. Campaigns against job cuts continue at UEA, Kent and Brighton.

It's worrying, however, that these local struggles risk being undermined by a leadership that has so badly handled industrial relations with its own staff that the Unite branch of UCU is now balloting for action. This follows a decision by the UCU General Secretary and senior management not to extend the contracts of two postgraduate organisers, despite Congress voting to expand the work they do, yet another anti-democratic move by the union leadership.

• UCU members opposed to the Stop The War position on Ukraine adopted narrowly at Congress last month have set up a network. Model motions are being drafted in several branches. More: bit.ly/ucuukr

Schools to strike again on 5 and 7 July

By Patrick Murphy

The National Education Union (NEU) National Executive on 17 June agreed to call strikes on 5 and 7 July, with a demonstration outside Parliament on 5 July, to push further for an inflation-proof and fully funded pay rise in England.

Annual Conference decided on three strike days after the exam period had ended. It is never good to see the Executive overturn Conference decisions, and, to make it worse, the proposal for three days was put to Conference in an urgency motion from the Executive itself, originally from the national officers.

There was no real explanation for this change, only mention of issues we were all aware of at Easter (loss of three days' pay, problems with late summer, prospect of more serious escalation in autumn with other unions).

The proposal put to the Executive by the national office was for just one strike day. Some of us argued to stick with the Conference decision and call three. We lost that but it helped to persuade people that we needed at least two.

The context for action is broadly very positive. The three other unions representing teachers, including leadership unions, are balloting for strikes to start in September. The NEU is part-way through a reballot of teacher members, and the indications are that the thresholds will be met and the ballot won. The NEU is also balloting support staff for strikes on

funding and working conditions.

There is every prospect of a significant escalation after the start of the new term in September.

Meantime the teachers' pay review body (STRB) has submitted its report to the Secretary of State Gillian Keegan, who is sitting on it and refusing union demands to publish. This may be because it recommends more than either the government's initial suggestion (3%-3.5%) or their pitiful offer in April (4.5%). *The Times* has reported that the STRB recommends a 6.5% increase.

A big part of the NEU agitation in the run-up to the July strikes will be a demand that Keegan publish the report and her response. To force her to do that would be a success, but 6.5% is still a real-terms pay cut, it does nothing to improve the 2022-3 pay award, and there is no indication that it would be either accepted by government or fully funded.

We need to build the July strikes, win the teacher and support staff ballots and then escalate in autumn. □

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

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No more refugee shipwrecks! Open the borders

By Pete Radcliff

With deaths of likely more than 600 refugees off the coast of Greece on 14 June, we are seeing the consequences of the policy that the Tories are introducing to the UK.

The closing of almost all legal routes for refugees. The arrest of any refugee getting through and their incarceration in camps with conditions even worse than the worst prison. All of these are planned for by the UK government. They have now been in place for nearly seven years in Greece.

The boat that sank 50 miles off the Greek coast, the Andrianna, had, by the testimony of survivors who heard them being being counted on, 750 on board, from Pakistan, Afghanistan, many from Syria, and others. One relative from Pakistan, who earlier lived in the UK, said nearly his whole village was on the boat.

I spoke with Syrians living in Germany who on hearing of the shipwreck had driven down to in Kalamata in Greece, where the 102 survivors were taken.

They themselves had braved the long and arduous journey, much on foot, from Syria seven years before.

The women and children left behind were not considered up to such an uncertain and unpredictable journey and had spent years separated from the men, many in the refugee camps on the borders of Syria.

The Andrianna looked like the best hope yet for reunion with their loved ones following the EU's Fortress Europe policies. The over 100ft in length, was seen as being safer than the

smaller boats from which over 25,000 have died since 2015 in the Mediterranean.

The boat set out from Tobruk, on the eastern tip of Libya, bound for the Adriatic – reportedly Italy, possibly Albania, not Greece. Many would have known of boats landing in Greece being pushed back and migrants being beaten up by border police.

In one case in 2021, a cargo ship containing 329 refugees was dragged back and forth for four days between Greece and Turkey by Greek (Hellenic) Coastguard after the ship had broken down a few miles off Crete but not allowed to dock so migrants could get off.

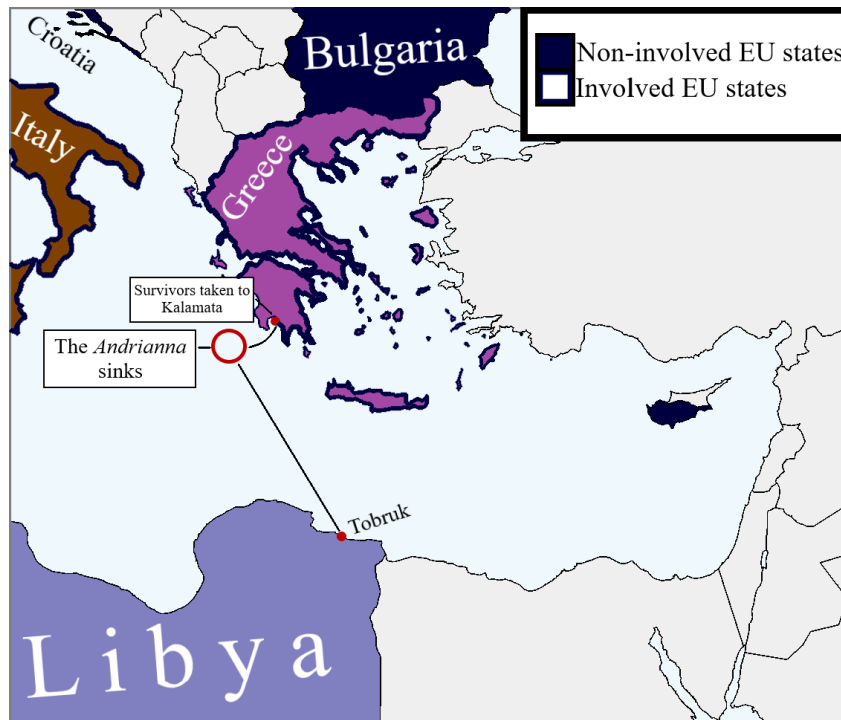
Many of the facts of the sinking of the Andrianna are disputed by the Greek Coastguard, but undeniably they knew the boat was in distress off the Greek coast. It was dangerously over-crowded and that few life-jackets were being worn.

Legal

Passing merchant ships had provided food aid but feared legal action if they were to bring these desperate migrants on board their ships.

Former Prime Minister Tsipras has blamed the Greek government and the EU of having turned "the Mediterranean, our seas, into watery graves".

Those rescued from the sea by a passing liner were taken to the port of Kalamata where they were dumped in a warehouse by the Greek Coastguard. An operation to cover up was begun. As the huge liner, unusual in this primarily merchant port, and the story of the ship-



wreck, circulated, many flocked to the port to give whatever help they could to the survivors. News reports started to get out through the helpers and the relief agency staff as they arrived. But then the police and Coastguard took control.

The survivors still in Greece, about 70, have been taken from Kalamata to one of the worst refugee camps in Greece at Malakasa, where there is no electricity, appalling food and poor water supply for the 900 refugees held there.

Protests have been held across Greece against the complicity of the Greek Coastguard and the EU border monitoring force Frontex. The largest in Athens, numbered in the tens of thousands, with massive banners calling their government's and the EU's actions mass murder.

There have been many protests in Greece over the last five

years at its asylum policies and the appalling refugee camps, but nothing of this scale.

How long this mood of protest goes on, and whether it will lead to dissent amongst workers in the Coastguard (before 2016 they had a very humane record of asylum rescue but the personnel may well have changed), we will see.

The protest to be backed up by international working class solidarity and not only from within the EU states. The Greek protestors and most Greek people are acutely aware of the role of the UK government in creating this problem. It was after all the Cameron government, whilst still in the EU, that started Fortress Europe. It is now Sunak's government which is closing routes down for refugees that might otherwise relieve the pressures on Greece. □

Campaign opposes PCS climbdown

By a PCS member

As we write, many PCS activists are preparing for a branch based campaign meeting, to be held on Monday 19 June, that will seek to cohere opposition to the settlement of the civil service pay dispute and the abandonment of our claims.

Although it is a branch based campaign (info: @PCSSayNo), one that seeks to reach out to all opponents of the leadership on this single, critical, issue, it is right to note that it is the PCS Independent Left which has driven this non-sectarian approach.

The PCS leadership continues to squeeze all oxygen from the dispute. They hope that, with each week that passes without any nationally led action, a greater number of members will conclude that the campaign for our pay and job security demands is dead.

The PCS leadership is still trying to dress up and flog, as the basis for calling off our dispute, a 2 June package of Government measures that were not all new, that in important respects had previously been dismissed by the leadership as inadequate, that did not in any single aspect constitute an offer to the national union, and that does not come near to meeting our claims.

At a Facebook live meeting with PCS members and representatives on Monday 12 June, the PCS leadership turned to the old right wing tactic of suggesting or implying that the very large number of activists who oppose the calling off the dispute are out of touch with members.

These are the same activists who delivered record mem-

bership turnouts in successive industrial action ballots, record "Yes" votes for industrial action, and record picket line turnouts. Many of them are young people who threw themselves into a strike campaign for the first time in their lives and are the future lifeblood of PCS.

Virtually nobody "in the ranks" is saying that the Tory "package" is a good package. The level of disappointment and anger will grow as the problems with the minor Tory concessions, such as they are, become more apparent.

For example, it emerged on Friday that the Department for Levelling Up, citing the government's own guidance, will only grant part time staff a reduced unconsolidated lump sum payment, pro rata to contracted hours, instead of the full £1,500 that the Tories have given departments "discretion" to pay. It seems that departments may do the same.

This is despite the fact that the £1,500 is supposedly to be paid in recognition of the high inflation pressures that all civil servants have been experiencing, irrespective of the number of hours staff work. Part time staff throughout the civil service and the wider economy are overwhelmingly female.

Yet the PCS General Secretary, Mark Serwotka, the Left Unity President Fran Heathcote, and overwhelming majority of NEC Left Unity members, signed off on the £1,500 payment as a basis for dispute resolution without insisting that the lump sum be paid in full to all members and without any equality impact assessment. □

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THURSDAY

Walking Tour: The 1926 General Strike in Southwark

Meet at 6:30 at Tooley Street entrance to London Bridge Station

From 4 to 12 May 1926 nearly two million workers in Britain joined a general strike.

FRIDAY

Film showing: Joyland

7pm at Indian YMCA, W1T 6AQ.

Joyland by Saim Sadiq (2022) explores patriarchy, religious conservatism, sexism, transphobia and sexual and gender liberation through the story of one relationship. Plus a short discussion of struggles facing trans people in Pakistan and the UK, with British-Pakistani filmmaker Faryal Velmi and NEU activist Christie Neary.

SATURDAY

11:30-1:10

Solidarity with Ukraine: Denys Pilash (Sotsialnyi Rukh), others TBC. Ukrainian workers continue to resist the Russian invasion and simultaneously attacks by Ukrainian bosses. How can we support them?

Fighting sexism in the labour movement: Mel Mullings (RMT activist), Ruth Cashman, and others. Recent investigations exposed endemic cultures of sexist harassment and bullying in the TSSA and GMB unions. Women in other unions also experience sexism. How can we confront these problems as part of transforming the movement?

Other sessions: Working-class revolt in France, with **French socialists** from the New Anti-Capitalist Party; the politics of

anti-racism, with Ralph Leonard and Sara Lee, others TBC; the **Portuguese Revolution** of 1974, with Alex Fernandes

2:00-3:30 plenary

Reviewing the **strike wave**, with Rhian Keyse (UCU NEC), John Moloney (PCS AGS), Pat Murphy (NEU NEC), Elaine Jones (NHS worker, Unison NEC), and Jane McGuire, Abellio shop steward and Unite EC (all p.c.). 2022-3 has seen the biggest upsurge in workers' struggle for a generation. What are the lessons so far? How can we build sustained power at work?

3:55-5:20

Socialism and mental health:

Hel Spandler, editor of *Asylum: a magazine for democratic psychiatry*, and Stuart Jordan, mental health nurse and union activist. How does capitalism impact mental health? What can socialism offer?

Woman, Life, Freedom – the revolt in Iran:

Azadeh Neman (Iranian women's and labour rights activist, NEU member) and Jill Mountford. Mass protests swept Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, arrested for allegedly violating hijab laws. Where is the movement now, how can we support it?

Other sessions: How **racism** functions – Jocelyn Cruywagen (Lambeth Unison Black WG), Mel Mullings (RMT Black & Ethnic Minority MAC), and Nish Karunaratne (all p.c.); Worker-led transitions – activists from **aviation workers'** group Safe Landing; perspectives for **the left** – speakers from Workers Power, Workers' Liberty, and the Green Party (p.c.)

5:35-7:00

The right's war on "woke": Prof. Cath Fletcher. Why have the Tory government and wider right focussed "culture war" attacks on trans rights, on critical attitudes to Britain's imperial past, and on anti-racism? How can the left fight back?

China's working class today:

Zhongjin Li, co-editor of *China on Strike: Narratives of Worker Resistance*, Kevin Lin, Managing Editor, *Asia Labour Review*, and Chan Ying. China's working class is the largest in the world. This panel will discuss its shape, recent struggles, and how we can support Chinese workers.

Other sessions: Resisting oppression in Modi's **India**, with Kumar Nerlakanti and Lotika Singha; The legacy of **Connolly**, with Liam McNulty, author of *James Connolly: Socialist, Nationalist, Internationalist*, and Conor Costick (Independent Left Ireland); **why the working class?**, with Steve Chapman

SUNDAY

10:30-12:00

Marxism and neurodiversity:

Janine Booth, Sarah McCulloch, and Robert Chapman.

The struggle for reproductive freedom:

speakers TBC. Reproductive rights are under attack in many places. This session will discuss worldwide struggles for freedom and choice.

Other sessions: Sergei Eisenstein's **Battleship Potemkin**,

with John Cunningham; **Outcast:** *How Jews were Banished from the Anti-Racist Imagination* – Camila Bassi and Daniel Randall; What will **socialism** look like? with Danielle Mayes

1:00-2:30

Not So Black and White:

Kenan Malik and Camila Bassi. Writer and activist Kenan Malik's new book, *Not So Black and White*, offers "a history of race from white supremacy to identity politics."

Building a new left in Israel:

Asaf Yakir of the Jewish-Arab socialist movement Standing Together discusses the prospects for a left resistance to the most far-right government in Israel's history – to fight for equal rights, including to self-determination, for Palestinians and Israelis.

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