

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



MAKE UNIONS FIGHT! TURN LABOUR ROUND!

» **Tax rich to save NHS**

See inside

» **Repeal anti-strike laws**

» **Public ownership of energy**

Take the wealth from billionaires

For democracy and
equality - public
ownership and control

Pages 6, 7

The continuing strike wave

Doctors, universities,
local government, and
more

Pages 13, 15

Labour's NPF report

Warm words for the
working class, hard
pledges for business

Page 2

A "Finnish road" to socialism?

Is Finland 1917-18
more a model than
Russia 1917?

Page 8

The ideas that Starmer wants to ban

Turning things round in Labour



Keir Starmer has had a 15 to 20% poll lead over the Tories for a year, since the Liz Truss episode in September-October 2022. As with Blair in 1994-7, many people in the labour movement will go along with him if only not to rock a boat which could end a decade and a half of Tory rule. But an audible left-wing minority voice in 2023 will be a vital marker for the future.

We are realistic about this. A lot of the “soft left” and “centre”, even people like Neal Lawson and Jon Cruddas, are scornful of Starmer. We thought maybe they would push him somewhat off his Blair-tribute path before now. It didn’t happen.

There has been much talk about a new “left of Labour” party. But so far we see the [Transform coalition](#), with almost no non-electoral activity, little electoral activity, and poor politics.

Blair never realised his plan to break Labour’s link with the unions and, as he himself put it, “correct the defect from [Labour’s] birth” which separated Labour from the old Liberal Party in the early 20th century.

He did, however, shift Labour’s structures from a dominance by union officialdom (from 1928 to 1980, Labour Party HQ was some floors in the head office of the TGWU union, a forerunner of Unite) to a dominance by a new category of political apparatchiks. The union leaders were and are subject to at least some democratic scrutiny within their unions and at Labour conference; the apparatchiks are not.

The apparatchiks are numerous and well-funded – through official pay-

ments to the parliamentary opposition (dating from 1975, but upgraded in 1993 and 1999), MPs’ offices (money for which has increased over the decades), and sometimes outright donations by wealthy people (think Sainsbury). They move to and fro between Labour politics and think-tanks and NGOs (and sometimes posts like Rachel Reeves’s at the Bank of England).

The balance shifted a bit under Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn, but only a bit (the unelected Leader’s Office remained a powerful factor). Starmer is shifting back again to the dominance of back-office people like Morgan McSweeney and Matt Pound. The axis is showing Labour “pro-business”, as Starmer puts it himself (while still calling it “the party of working people”).

Blair had favourable world-market economic conditions when in office, and increased spending on the NHS, on schools, and on tax and pension credits. Starmer faces a time of economic dislocations, debt overhang from Covid, and unrealistic schedules from the Tories for paring down government debt which he has promised to match.

His anxiety to give “certainty” to “business” by ruling out increased taxes on the rich means continued rundown of the NHS and public services and continued pauperisation of many people dependent on benefits. His anxiety to placate “red wall” vote-switchers (rather than seek to convince them) means a “social conservative” profile which can rule out left-wing social policies with no tax cost.

In Blair’s early days, the unions were dominated by “new realist” leaders who would do almost anything for Blair as long as he ended the long period of Tory rule. Today most union leaders,



despite their largely-poor record in the current strikes, are in broad terms on the left.

But at the 2022 conference the union leaders gave Starmer an easy ride, prioritising topics for debate which would minimise dispute. For 2023, CWU and FBU (but not Unite) have put motions seeking to tighten up Labour’s “New Deal for Working People” policy; Aslef and TSSA have called for keeping rail ticket offices open; Unite calls for public ownership of the whole energy industry, or at least the National Grid, but that must be read together with Unite’s push for licensing more fossil-fuel fields in the North Sea; other union motions are bland.

Agitation

Historically, unions have pushed Labour to the left when pushed themselves by rank-and-file agitation within the unions and by pressure from the local Labour Parties, even if only in the form of getting motions on the conference agenda which unions then vote for because their own congress policies tell them to.

Only an interlocking process of self-assertion by both unions and local Labour Parties will push a new Labour government even into opening up possibilities. That is what we work for.

The sober fact is that the strike wave since June 2022, the biggest for a generation, has not yet really increased union political activity or shifted it leftwards. Unions have made no big mobilisations for the political aims of restoring the NHS or defeating anti-strike laws, let alone against the Tories’ attacks on civil rights (Police Act, Public Order Act) and asylum rights (Illegal Migration Act, Borders Act).

It takes time for new young activists, generated by the disputes, to reshape the union structures and spur on the older activists. How much time? That is not fixed. It depends on what the most dynamic and undaunted of the already-organised left activists do to help.

Inside the local Labour Parties, the falling-away of Corbyn-era “returner” activists may have bottomed out. Membership figures have nudged up slightly. New activists may start to come

in as the general election approaches, wanting to get rid of the Tories but also to reverse the Tories’ legacy.

That is not sure. More activists may yet disperse by way of resigning or offering themselves up for expulsion just for the sake of one-off local “protest” election candidacies (Driscoll for North East Mayor, Corbyn in Islington North). But we will seek to rally activists who have stuck to it since 2020 to prepare the necessary left kickback from within the unions and the Labour Party to a Labour government set to govern as “pro-business” in times where “pro-business” means the ruination of public services in the name of “fiscal discipline”.

What we can do at the conference and in the coming months is make the left more visible and audible; extend its broader alliances on many issues (NHS, anti-strike laws, housing, Europe, asylum rights, decriminalising abortion, and more), and quite possibly score some victories on some of those; make sure the left is prepared to take the chances of the next political explosion in the labour movement, as we really were not in 2015.

In 1931-2 the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci argued that socialists must work with a “dual perspective”. He got the wording from the 1925 Fifth Congress of the Communist International, where it was only a fudge or equivocation. He developed it, however, into a useful discussion of combining an “urgent” understanding of the need for rapidity and radicalism with a “patient” understanding that only transforming the existing labour movement will suffice, not any short-cut gimmick. We know there will be explosions; we don’t know when; we can’t create them at will; but we must never rule ourselves out by tacitly accepting stillness and stability.

“The active politician is a creator, an initiator; but they neither create from nothing nor do they move in the turbid void of their own desires and dreams. They base themselves on effective reality, but what is this effective reality?... [It is] a relation of forces in continuous motion and shift of equilibrium...”

“If one applies one’s will to the creation of a new equilibrium among the forces which really exist and are operative... one still moves on the terrain of effective reality, but does so in order to dominate and transcend it (or to contribute to this)”. □

Strikes

2-4 October: NHS consultants and junior doctors (BMA) and NHS radiographers (CSR, 3 October only) strike

3-4 October: Barnet Council mental health social workers (Unison) strike

4-6 October: Cleaners at the University of the Arts London (GMB) strike

6-9 October: Vanderlande Industries baggage handlers at Heathrow Airport (Unite) strike

10-12 October: Barnet Council mental health social workers (Unison) strike

10 and 18 October: Royal Society of the Arts workers (IWGB) strike

12 October: Cleshars East London Line engineers (RMT) strike

14 October-20 October: Go Ahead

North East bus drivers (Unite) strike

18 October: Workers at Imperial College (UCU, Unite, and Unison) strike

20-30 October: Vanderlande Industries baggage handlers at Heathrow Airport (Unite) strike

Ballots

From 6 September: Further Education college workers (UCU) ballot for industrial action over pay and conditions

13 September-mid-October: Engineering construction workers (Unite) ballot for strikes

22 September-19 October: Rail workers at multiple Train Operating Companies (RMT) re-ballot to renew mandate for action over pay and conditions

More strikes: bit.ly/ro-up □

Solidarity 686

Solidarity 686 will have masthead date 18 October, then we’re back to our usual weekly schedule. □

Populist right threatens Ukraine support

By Dan Katz

An anti-Ukraine, pro-Putin party has won the Slovakian general election, held on Saturday 30 September. Robert Fico's pseudo-left, populist Smer party won 23.3% of the vote.

Progressive Slovakia, a liberal, pro-EU, and pro-Ukrainian party won 17%.

The Hlas party, led by a former Smer member and initiated as a breakaway from Smer, came third with 15% of the vote. Hlas could allow Fico to put together a workable coalition.

Slovakia is a member of both NATO and the European Union and so has the possibility of helping Putin in his war against Ukraine by obstructing aid for Ukraine.

Fico, an unpleasant demagogue and anti-vaxxer who is opposed to LGBTQ+ and migrants' rights, promises

to end all military aid to Ukraine. Fico has blamed "Ukrainian Nazis and fascists" for provoking Russia's President Vladimir Putin into launching the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. A recent poll suggests that only 40% of Slovaks believe Russia was responsible for the war in Ukraine. 50% believe the US is a threat to Slovakia.

Fico was prime minister 2006-10 and 2012-18, but was forced to resign in 2018 following the murder of an investigative journalist, Jan Kuciak, who was investigating corruption involving leading figures in Fico's party.

Fico is an ally of Hungary's right-wing,



Robert Fico

populist Prime Minister, Victor Orban. Last month Fico admitted, "We see Viktor Orban as one of those European politicians who do not fear to openly defend the interests of Hungary and Hungarian people. He puts them in the first place. And that should be the role of an elected politician, to look after the interests of his voters and his country." (Reuters)

A Fico-led Slovak government would presumably bloc with Orban in the EU, and with PiS (Law and Justice), the governing party in Poland, should PiS win next month's elections in Poland.

Polish parliamentary elections take place in on 15 October. The PiS-led United Right coalition is standing at around 35-39% in the latest opinion polls, and Donald Tusk's pro-EU centre-right alliance, Civic Coalition, stands at around 30%. A new far right party, Confederation, is placing PiS under some pressure and is likely to win about 10% of the vote.

PiS is under pressure from the far right over support for Ukraine. In an effort to shore up its base in the Polish countryside PiS has loudly conducted a dispute with Ukraine about Ukrainian exports of grain and agricultural products.

A ban on Ukrainian grain sales to five

Eastern European EU states ended on 15 September. The European Commission then ruled that Ukrainian grain sales should be allowed across the EU. Poland, Hungary and Slovakia reacted by unilaterally imposing bans on Ukrainian grain imports, a move which is designed to protect their own farmers, but which broke EU rules. Ukraine responded by filing a complaint against these states at the World Trade Organisation.

On Wednesday 20 September Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki retaliated by saying, "We are no longer transferring weapons to Ukraine." He subsequently backtracked a little and negotiations began with Ukraine on a grain sales licensing procedure, proposed by Ukraine.

No doubt the PiS has conducted this dispute theatrically with the intention of shoring up its voter base. But the shifts in Poland and Slovakia come at the same time as pressures rise in the USA to reduce arms supplies to Ukraine and seek to impose a rotten deal. Ultra-right Republicans got approval for more supplies excluded from the Congress "debt ceiling" deal of 1 October to avert a government shutdown. Short-term new approval will surely be negotiated, but it's a warning. □



10am-6pm. Tickets and further details including individual session times at bit.ly/atr-sf

Wind back Brexit!

By Rhodri Evans

The Tories have recently postponed checks on imports from the EU to the UK for the fifth time, fearing the inevitable effect in raising prices. But those checks are likely to come in 2024.

The Tories have also stalled on wholesale scrapping of environmental and labour safeguards derived from the EU. But that is what they want to do. That, for them, is the whole purpose of Brexit.

The revisions to the Northern Ireland Protocol are only a way to fudge, for a while, the inescapable conflict between wanting a "hard" border between the UK and the EU, yet a "soft" border between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and Ireland (part of the EU). The conflict will be sharpened as the UK moves away from EU-agreed regulations.

As socialists, we want lower borders. Higher borders between the UK and the EU make extra obstacles to workers' unity between countries, and among migrant and "local" workers

even within countries. That is why we backed Remain in 2016, and why we joined the anti-Brexit marches.

Whatever the dreams about "Lexit" (a left "Brexit"), it hasn't happened and isn't going to happen. Opinion surveys show the majority know that the only way out from the Tory-designed Brexit path we've been set on is to reverse Brexit, even if most of that majority are for now too beaten-down to think that possible.

Rejoining the European free-movement area, rejoining the Single Market, and rejoining the Customs Union, are still relatively accessible because the Tories have not dared to go far yet with their Brexit plans. Norway is in the free-movement area and (mostly) in the Single Market; Turkey is in a Customs Union with the EU. And we also want to be part of EU-wide democracy, and of a cross-border working-class battle to take EU-wide democracy beyond its present miserable level. So the aim must be to rejoin the EU. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 11 October, 6pm: Sheffield Workers' Liberty students: reproductive rights, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Broomhall, Sheffield, S3 7HG

Thursday 12 October, 6pm: Workers' Liberty students: the strike wave on campus. Meet at Leon café, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

Sunday 15 October, 11am: "Geoengineering" online discussion group

Sunday 15 October, 1:45pm: Rebel Footsteps, a radical walk through New Cross, meet Richard Hoggart Building, Goldsmiths

Tuesday 17 October, 6pm: Workers' Liberty students: The fight for free education, online meeting

Wednesday 18 October, 6pm: Sheffield Workers' Liberty students: workers' struggle in Turkey, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Broomhall, Sheffield, S3 7HG

Wednesday 18 October, 7pm: Workers' Liberty London Forum. Climate Action – what role for workers and socialists in fighting climate crisis? Indian YMCA, Fitzroy Sq, London, W1T 6AQ

Thursday 19 October, 3pm: Tubeworker/Off the Rails monthly meeting, online

Thursday 19 October, 6pm: Workers' Liberty students: All the rage! Socialist feminism today. Meet at Leon, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

Wednesday 25 October, 6pm: Sheffield Workers' Liberty students: what is socialist feminism? University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Broomhall S3 7HG

Wednesday 25 October, 7pm: Lewisham Workers' Liberty: why read the Communist Manifesto?, New Cross Learning, 283 - 285 New Cross Rd, London SE14 6AS

Thursday 26 October, 6pm: Workers' Liberty students: why the working class? Meet at Leon, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

Saturday 4 November, 10am: All the Rage! Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E1 5QJ

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



Russell Brand's friends on the (supposed) left



By Jim Denham

Those who've leapt to the defence of Russell Brand following the *Dispatches* and *Sunday Times* allegations have included the predictable far-right or misogynist grotesques: Elon Musk, Tucker Carlson, Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate, Tommy Robinson, Alex Jones, Katie Hopkins ... etc, etc.

But there have also been supposedly "left wing" figures whose immediate reaction has been either openly to defend Brand, or at least to cast doubt upon the evidence revealed by what appears to be a painstaking four-year-long investigation that notoriously risk-averse British libel lawyers obviously cleared for publication and broadcast.

The loudest cry from those (on both left and right) who don't want to simply come out as supporting Brand has been "innocent until proven guilty!" (Yes, but we still have a right to make informed balance-of-probability judgments, without having to wait until a criminal case has been heard and guilt has been established "beyond reasonable doubt").

That's been the response of "anti-Zionist" campaigner Jackie Walker (whose tweets also manage to make the issue all about herself), the antisemitic pro-Putin ex-MP Chris Williamson and "left-wing" commentators Thomas Fazi and Jonathan Cook – who have also combined "innocent until proven guilty" with a strong dash of conspiratorialism, echoing the response of Tucker Carlson and Alex Jones.

The pro-Putin/pro-Assad Grayzone website has – predictably – gone for full-on conspiratorialism, with leading light Max Blumenthal tweeting: "If Russell Brand had just made the requisite celebrity pilgrimage to Zelenskyy and kept his mouth shut about the Covidians he would have dodged this bullet. Whatever the merits of the allegations might be, this much is obvious."

Of course, no list of supporters of misogyny and conspiratorialism would be complete without George Galloway, who has used his Youtube Mother Of All Talkshows to suggest that Brand's (pro-Putin) stance on Ukraine and opposition to "the lockdown" and "compulsory vaccinations" are really behind the allegations.

But perhaps the most vociferous (certainly most verbose) defender of Brand has been one John Wight, a failed Hollywood actor and male model, on re-



cord for his "absolute" anti-Zionism and support for a Putin victory in Ukraine.

In two articles on the Medium website, Mr Wight claims that "in the wake of Me Too, the presumption of innocence when it comes to sexual violence against women has been sacrificed on the altar of misandry", complains that "the women concerned chose to air their accusations in the pages of the Murdoch press rather than to the police", and concludes that "interestingly, and oh so pertinently, on the level of social mores and public morality surrounding sex, Brand's current fate shares similarities with that which befell Oscar Wilde."

Mr Wight is the boxing correspondent and regular contributor on a range of other subjects for the *Morning Star*. Other defenders of, and apologists for, Brand include several people who've written for, been quoted approvingly by, or supported by, the paper in recent years: Jackie Walker, Chris Williamson, George Galloway and Max Blumenthal to name only the most obvious.

So perhaps it's no surprise that the paper felt it necessary (on 20 Sep) to publish a piece entitled "Russell Brand is not on the left and should not be defended by it". Actually, it's not a bad article except that it makes its argument hang on the fact that Brand is "not left-wing" – begging the obvious question: "and if he were left-wing?" □

Ukraine

In a *Morning Star* article on 28 September the same John Wight used the (undoubtedly shocking and disgraceful) presence, during a visit by Zelenskyy to the Canadian parliament, of an elderly Ukrainian who'd fought in World War II under Nazi command, to denounce Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion as "the continuation of Himmler's project to 'cleanse Ukraine' of all but its mythologised pure Ukrainian stock". This is pure Putin propaganda. And there is no reason whatsoever to think Zelenskyy was aware in advance of this man's presence or of who he was. □

"A human being trying my best"



By K Harris

I've always seen my sex and gender as an accident of my birth. Something that was handed to me. Since I didn't feel like a boy/man I sort of accepted it.

Since I was a child I've fought against gender stereotypes. I hated being told that I couldn't be good at something because I was a girl. (To be clear, I made my share of ignorant comments when I was growing up, but not of the sexist variety.) I strongly identify as a feminist and that hasn't changed. I've faced a lot of discrimination, misogyny and sexual violence as a girl and

woman – or as someone perceived that way.

Until recently I'd thought, OK, I'm a butch lesbian woman who hates being stereotyped, but basically I'm one of the sensible cis lesbians who aren't unhinged transphobes. Then I started to allow myself to identify as gender non-conforming or genderqueer and started using she/they pronouns. Being a "they", even only sometimes, has felt like a worn-in old pair of boots, whereas being a "she" has felt like a pair that's a size too small. Something I could put on and cope with but couldn't be described as comfortable.

I've realised that a humming sense of discomfort as I go through life can't only be attributed to being angry at how women are treated, even though that's huge. A portion

is because I don't feel like a woman. Can I explain why in a logical manner? No. Obviously women are all varied and all feel differently. There isn't a universal experience of womanhood, just as there isn't a universal experience of being trans. I've no real idea why some of us feel this way and some of us don't. But, at the same time, my desire to be who I am now outweighs my desire for other people's approval or comfort.

Support

My experience is, compared to most trans people, one of huge privilege (or, more accurately, lack of oppression). My partner is supportive. My employer will be supportive. My friends will be supportive. I have a strong network of people who will not only be not

bothered about it but will be actively lovely about it.

I'm also extremely lucky that I don't feel the acute level of dysphoria that a lot of trans people feel. I wouldn't say I'm cosy-comfy in this body but it's sort of whatever. I don't feel like I urgently need medical support to change my body, which is very different from many trans people. It means I automatically have it easier.

What I do know is:

- When well-meaning people call me "the lady" or "miss" in public out of politeness, it makes me feel a little bit sick.
- When I hear "they" about myself, I feel happy.
- I don't feel connected to my birth name but feel connected to something more gender-neutral.
- I would love to have a more masculine face and jawline.

(The thing is, though, testosterone is a real roll of the dice: it could largely skip this and just give me a hairy back instead.)

• It would be a lot less annoying (from an administrative perspective) to continue with the same pronouns, name and presentation, but on some level it seems to be causing me pain and discomfort.

• If I could start living "authentically" now, it could make me much happier in the long term.

There are varying views among non-binary people, some of which are a bit annoying. We're all different people just trying to live our lives. But I want people to know that I don't think I am better or more evolved because I feel this way. I am just a human being trying my best. □

Ukraine's labour movement defiant



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

As I walked around Kyiv last month on a beautiful, sunny morning, I began to notice the scaffolding in the city's squares. I asked Tristan Masat what was going on. Tristan runs the Solidarity Center office in Kyiv, representing the American trade union movement. He told me that they were statues, covered up to protect them from bomb damage.

Later, near Tristan's offices, I saw an exposed statue with no protection around it. It was the graffiti-covered statue of a Red Army general on a horse. No one I asked could remember his name. Later had lunch with an activist in a small Georgian cafe. We could see the statue from where we sat. She told me that this statue had long been covered up by protective scaffolding. The protection was removed by the Ukrainians when the war broke out. There was some hope that Russian bombs might solve the problem of what to do with this relic of Soviet rule.

You cannot understand the war taking place in Ukraine without knowing its history. This was made very clear to me in a conversation I had with Olesia Briazgunova, who works for the smaller of Ukraine's two national trade union centres, the KVPU. I suggested that there were some similarities between the situation in Ukraine today and the Spanish Civil War.

Olesia stopped me right there, and asked if there had been genocide in Spain. I said there hadn't been. She said, well there's genocide here – and

the Russians have been trying to wipe out the Ukrainian nation for a very long time. I immediately thought of Stalin's terror-famine of the early 1930s, which the Ukrainians call the Holodomor, and which they rightly consider an act of deliberate genocide. I have to admit that she had a point.

History surrounds you in Kyiv. You hear it in conversations, you see it in the street names and you breathe it in the air. The Solidarity Center is located on a street formerly named after Stalin's Communist International. It was renamed in honour of Symon Petliura, a leader of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1919-1920 and a deeply controversial figure in the country's history. The statue of Lenin that stood in Kyiv when I last visited is now long gone.

In addition to renaming streets with Soviet connections, the city seems to be removing much of its Russian history too. At one point I was directed by Google Maps to Pushkin street. But Pushkin street no longer exists; it has been renamed.

When I interviewed Georgiy Trukhanov, the leader of the 1.2 million member teachers' union in Ukraine, about their relationship with the teachers union in Russia, he told me that those Russian teachers were partially guilty here. Guilty of what, I asked. All the Russian soldiers currently fighting in Ukraine, all of them, studied in Russian schools, he said. They were taught to be what they have become – killers and rapists.

The war has united Ukrainian society as never before. The unions are fully signed up and mobilised. The president of the FPU (the larger national trade union centre), Grygorii Osovyi, told me that 20% of Ukrainian trade

union members were now serving in the armed forces. Trukhanov told me that teachers could not be drafted as they are considered essential workers – so thousands of them have volunteered.

I spoke with many union leaders about the situation in what Ukrainians call the "temporarily occupied territories". Teachers are furious that the Russian occupiers have essentially banned the Ukrainian language from the classroom. Many workers have fled those territories and unions are doing an amazing job of helping them, collecting aid, providing accommodation and much more. Union offices I visited were full of boxes of aid, including plastic sheeting to replace windows destroyed by Russian artillery. Mykhailo Volynets, a former miner and head of the KVPU, told me that there was an urgent need for bandages. In the Solidarity Center offices, Natalia, a mine worker from the Donbas, was helping to organise transport for the many boxes of aid, including sleeping bags and children's toys, jamming the front room.

Amid all the horrors of the war, there are occasional bits of very positive news. While Putin has weaponised homophobia in Russia, in Ukraine, there has been a huge shift in public opinion regarding LGBTQI people, many of whom are serving at the front. This is a part of the world where homophobia has run rampant, and even turned violent, as we have seen in countries like Georgia. But in Ukraine, the war has helped change attitudes in a positive way.

I spoke with Ukrainian socialists, with young workers who organise couriers, with aviation workers and railway workers. I was interviewed by women mem-

bers of the nuclear power workers' union – who are staying at their posts at Europe's largest nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhya, now under Russian occupation.

The message I got from everyone could not have been clearer: The Ukrainian labour movement and left stands fully against the Russian invasion. They want and expect solidarity from the labour movement and left in other countries. They enormously appreciate things like the visits of leading trade unionists, including the American Federation of Teachers' Randi Weingarten – and the donations they have made, such as generators. They are looking forward to the visit of European and international trade union leaders in early October.

Despite my earlier conversation with Olesia, my thoughts returned to Spain. The many young men and women who have come over to Ukraine to join the fight are inspiring in the way that the International Brigades were some 90 years ago. The Spanish Republic was defeated in large part because the democracies failed to come to its aid, while Franco's fascists were fully backed by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This cannot be allowed to happen to Ukraine.

Putin's regime in a fascist one, and the war on Ukraine is an illegal, imperialist war. Ukraine is not a perfect society, and its government is not a perfect government. Nor was the Spanish Republic. But in the fight against fascism, we need to ask ourselves – in the words of the old trade union song – which side are you on? □

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

Gove sends commissioners to Birmingham

By Daniel Round

On 19 September, the ironically titled Levelling Up Secretary, Michael Gove, announced he would be sending in commissioners to take over the running of Birmingham city council. The commissioners will very likely oversee the plundering of Birmingham, with the sale of council assets such as landmark buildings, job cuts, and funding cuts that will massively impact the charity sector.

Two observations. One, for years the argument from the Labour Right and the official Left has been that Labour councils shouldn't actually re-

sist implementing austerity (as with Lambeth and Liverpool councils in the 80s) because the Tories will send in the heartless commissioners who would cut even deeper. Well, in Birmingham's case, this has happened anyway due to effective bankruptcy, despite the centrist Labour council toeing the line on austerity over the last decade. Wouldn't it have been better if the largest council in the country had actually put up a fight and resisted implementing the cuts? It may have resulted in the same outcome, but at least it would have demonstrated some labour movement fight, and it could have acted as

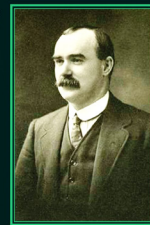
a catalyst for wider struggle against damaging cuts across the country. If a joined-up approach had been built across a number of major Labour councils in the 2010s, it could have forced the Tories to back down (or more).

Two, Birmingham now looks set to become the scene of a grand Tory experiment in "crisis management" of a major city. The expectation is that Birmingham will lose its share in the airport, the state-of-the-art library (only a decade old), much of its land, and possibly some heritage buildings. Council workers will be worried about swingeing jobs cuts and attacks on pay and

conditions. It is imperative that the labour movement is organised in response to this likely scenario, and the unions

must be ready, as they have been in the bin workers' and homecare workers' disputes, to resist all coming attacks. □

Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist &
Internationalist

This book discusses Connolly not just as an Irish hero, but traces how he was shaped by and responded to the international socialist and labour movement of his time. It traces his influences and influence through a transnational network of working-class activists, socialist agitators, and revolutionary nationalists. 412 pages **£25** □

workersliberty.org/books

Sunak: profit before environment



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

A part from the personal interest he and other leading Tories have in fossil capital, Rishi Sunak calculates that there are votes to be won by championing reckless individual advantage in the face of climate breakdown. That explains his announcements on net-zero policies and the Rosebank oil field.

The Tories' original net-zero plans were not ever sufficient for meeting Paris climate targets. Further, the Paris climate targets in themselves are not sufficient to avoid 2°C+ global heating: that requires creating a global carbon drawdown industry in addition to halting emissions. The government's own Climate Change Commission said in June that the government had credible

plans to meet only 20% of its net-zero targets; the Good Law Project was already preparing a legal challenge.

Now Sunak has said he wants to delay the ban on sales of new internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to 2035 instead of 2030. He also wants to push back the ban on new coal, oil and LPG boilers to 2035 from 2026. He further wants to lift the requirements on landlords to insulate their properties.

He also claimed to be stopping a number of policies that do not exist: taxes on meat, taxes on flying, forcing households to use seven different bins, and compulsory car sharing. Sunak claims that net zero policies will be a "burden" costing "families" "£15,000 a year". Most mainstream analysis suggests the opposite, given the rising cost of fossil fuels.

The main opposition to Sunak's announcements has come from a parliamentary consensus that represents the more rational section of the capitalist

class. Keir Starmer, as mouthpiece for this consensus, has been at pains to stress that the announcement creates an unstable business environment that is inimical to economic growth, rather than to defend the net-zero policies on their own terms as measures to protect our future selves and future generations.

Just as Boris Johnson's original ban on ICE cars was designed to attract post-Brexit investment, Starmer's net-zero policies are all draped in nationalist rhetoric of creating a "clean energy superpower".

In the name of a "stable business environment", Starmer has claimed it as "a matter of principle" to honour the Tory decision to drill the Rosebank oil field in the North Sea. Starmer gave fossil capital a free pass to exploit these reserves for profit, when he could easily have stopped that.

All these political forces will drive us deeper into the climate crisis, at slightly

different rates of acceleration. The climate crisis requires not just light-touch policy to influence investment decisions, or to nudge the market towards electrification and solar energy, but a wholesale reorganisation of economic life.

The working class needs control of the means of production so we can direct our work towards satisfying human needs whilst restabilising the climate. □

Ecuadorians vs oil

On 20 August 2023, after years of campaigning, the people of Ecuador voted in a referendum to stop oil extraction in the Yasuni National Park, an Amazonian region. Ecuador is far poorer and far more dependent on oil exports (36% by value of its total) than the UK. Even though the Ecuadorian government is [seeking to circumvent it](#), the vote shows campaigning can win. □

£30 billion for NHS? Here's how

By Colin Foster

According to a new report by Alec Haglund of the Intergenerational Foundation, £30 billion each year of extra social spending could be covered just by taxing unearned income (from dividends, sales of assets, rents, etc.) at the same rates as wages.

Haglund's calculations do not even consider taxing wealth as such, just taxing income from wealth.

The nett [cost](#) of granting the junior doctors' 35% pay catch-up demand all at once would be about £1 billion a year (nett meaning cost to the government of higher wages minus increased income to government from taxes paid on those higher wages).

Error

Something like the deal accepted by the Scottish junior doctors (12.4% this year, plus commitments to catch up over time) would cost a few hundreds of millions.

It's all "rounding error" compared to the £30 billion. The real reason for the Tories' stubbornness against public service pay rises is that they want to use the economic turmoil to strengthen profits as against wages, and the real reason for Labour equivocating is that the Labour leaders don't want to annoy capitalists.

Someone on £60,000 a

year all from dividends pays a 10.8% effective tax rate, while a graduate on £35,000 pays 22.5% including their student loan repayment. The £60,000-a-year person is still on a lower rate (18.7%) if their income is all from rents on property they own.

Unearned income has lower tax rates than wages, and higher tax-free allowances.

The disparity is growing. Income from gains on selling assets was £80 billion in 2020-1, but little over £20 billion in 2007-8. The tax take from that income was £12 billion in 2020-1, little up on the £8 billion in 2007-8.

Bosses

More and more, top bosses are paid in forms which enable them to classify the income as "capital gains" rather than as "wages".

The rising trend of income from wealth, as against income from work, was one of the themes of Thomas Piketty's book *Capitalism in the 21st Century* (2014).

Socialists seek to make major wealth publicly-owned and democratically-controlled, so that production can be geared to the welfare of all, and ecologically sustainable. While we are gathering strength for that demand, the modest call for taxing unearned income equally is also useful. □

War moves wipe out Armenian enclave

By Michael Baker

After a one-day war initiated by Azerbaijan, the republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) has dissolved its borders, state structures and military. It has effectively wiped itself off the map. Most of its population has fled.

The disputed ethnic-Armenian territory inside Azerbaijan had been blockaded for nine months. On 19 September, after demanding that Armenian troops evacuated the territory immediately (there was no proof of Armenian military in Artsakh), Azerbaijan began firing missiles and gunfire was heard throughout the area.

Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan announced almost immediately that the Armenian military would not be coming to the aid of Nagorno-Karabakh. With no help from outside, and a starved, under-equipped army and population, Artsakh had little option but to agree to Azerbaijan's terms.

Talks over the following few days saw an immediate demilitarisation and, shortly after, the dissolution of the Artsakh parliament and borders. By the end of September, over 100,000 Artsakh refugees had arrived in Armenia – almost the entire population of the region. It was not hard to guess why so many fled, as

videos surfaced almost immediately of Azeri soldiers tearing down all Armenian-language signs, and fears of ethnic cleansing that have been present throughout the last nine months suddenly became a much more real possibility.

A major obstacle for many Artsakh residents trying to flee was a complete lack of resources: with electricity only recently returned, and deliveries of food and fuel coming in, people were forced to queue at temporary distribution centres before being able to escape to Armenia. On 25 September came the salt in the wound of the invasion: one of the fuel tankers at a temporary distribution centre exploded, wounding 200.

Azerbaijan is clearly hoping to use this victory to leverage further gains in the region. On

25 September, President Aliyev met with Erdogan in the exclave of Nakhchivan, a portion of Azeri territory on the western edge of Armenia. The talks between the two leaders almost certainly involved plans to force Armenia to agree to the long sought-after Zangezur corridor, a route from mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan that, coincidentally, would cut all land ties between Armenia and Iran, a regional rival to Azerbaijan.

This has been a tragic end to a blockade that should never have started. It is a bleak consolation to the people of Artsakh that they have regained access to the food, resources and medical care they have been denied since last December. □

• Background article in *Solidarity* 684, bit.ly/nk-684



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Asylum: Starmer panders to Tories

By Ben Tausz

Conservative Home Secretary Suella Braverman's xenophobic rhetoric and anti-refugee policies escalate. Braverman's latest claim is that suffering from anti-gay or anti-women discrimination is no valid reason for seeking asylum. We urgently need firm political opposition, fighting for an alternative based on sanctuary, free movement and working-class solidarity.

Instead, the Labour leadership continues to pander to the panic manufactured by the racist right. Starmer's team repeatedly claims that the government has allowed migration to get out of control, and promise they would more competently "get a grip" on the border to "stop the boats".

Positively, they would scrap the Rwanda scheme, restore the right (removed by the Illegal Migration Act) to claim asylum on arrival, and resume processing asylum claims. This is all necessary, but only rewinds border policy back a couple of years.

Worse, it's coupled with devoting more resources to accelerating deportations, and fast-tracking returns to supposedly "safe" countries. They propose India as "safe", ignoring the violent persecution overseen by Modi's far-right government.

Starmer also promises to negotiate a

deal with the EU to enable the UK to send back people arriving irregularly, in return for accepting a share of refugees. This means deporting refugees to countries that already host more per capita than the UK.

He makes much of demanding a "crackdown" on smugglers – even though it's already refugees facing criminalisation, induced to steer the boats while the smugglers keep their hands clean. More broadly, a "crackdown" approach is as futile and destructive as Prohibition or the War on Drugs. People take dangerous routes because legal routes are unavailable and tight policing blocks safer irregular routes. So the crackdown itself creates the smugglers' business opportunities.

Starmer and his team couch all this in aggressive rhetoric, pandering to the nationalist xenophobia whipped up by the "take back control" right. Most recently, Starmer absurdly declared he wants to treat small boat channel crossings on a par with terrorism, and denounced his critics as "un-British". Frontbencher Nick Thomas-Symonds followed up by pronouncing migration "totally out of control" under the Tories, insisting Labour is "a patriotic party who wants control of our borders".

Toying rhetorically with paranoia about uncontrolled migration as an existential threat, and framing advocates

of wider free movement as enemies of the people, risks inciting racist attacks and political violence. And it validates and entrenches the myths, fears and framing stoked by the racist right to advance their cause.

Labour members and unions must push back, by voting through policies drafted by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and submitted to Party

Conference by multiple CLPs, and campaigning for these policies even if Starmer's leadership won't. The core: restore and extend free movement; expand migrants' rights including safe, legal routes for refugees; end raids, detention and deportations; equal access to social security, public services and voting rights. □



Hundreds of garment workers and supporters demonstrated in Leicester on 1 Oct to demand the industry continues production in the city, providing sustainable jobs with decent pay and conditions. The protest was organised by NGO Labour Behind the Label, supported by the Active Wesley Hall community centre, Leicester and District Trades Council and Leicester East MP Claudia Webbe (who spoke). More on the campaign and how to support it: bit.ly/leic-g. Photo: India Labour Solidarity.

Take the wealth from the billionaires



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Labour's current policy, as outlined by the National Policy Forum, is hobbled by refusing to tax the rich, beyond closing a few loopholes. A small wealth tax, or even making the tax rate on "unearned" income equal to that on "earned" income, could raise more than enough to fix up the NHS. The Labour leaders' commitments to retain Tory tax policies, with only marginal tweaks, to stick to arbitrary Tory targets for cutting government debt, and to keep military spending high, mean continued ruination.

Inequality of wealth has risen recently in many countries, more than inequality of income. Income flowing from wealth looms larger and larger.

Wealthy people get income

from the shares and bonds they own because capitalist companies make profits, distributed through dividends, share buybacks, or just increased share prices. All that comes from the surplus value which accrues to capital because labour-power is sold as a fixed quantity – at a price around a "living wage" which enables the working class to be able to work again the next month or the next week – but it is "consumed" by the capitalist who buys it as a quantity to be varied by workplace pressure.

By pushing workers to work harder and faster, by closing up the "gaps" in the working day, and sometimes just by imposing long work-weeks, the capitalist stretches the new value generated by labour (i.e. by capital "consuming" labour-power).

In today's capitalist society, sizeable income is also extracted from workers through financial channels, by extracting interest on mortgages and

other debt from workers.

The incomes of the wealthy are not "wages of management". Capitalists pay managers above the rate for ordinary workers because they want to buy loyalty, but generally people who actually manage production are modestly paid. The big pay-outs go to top bosses who know little about production. CEO "wages" at a level of millions or tens of millions a year are not really wages, but pay-outs from surplus value.

The incomes of the wealthy are not compensation for "risk". The capitalist system does not reward "risk" in general. Insecure and dangerous jobs are not better paid than more secure jobs. Anyway, a rich person with a diversified "portfolio" of shares, bonds, property, etc. runs lower risks than a worker.

Nor does capitalism reward "abstinence" or

"time preference" in general. The capitalist class is not rewarded for "abstaining" from doing what it couldn't do even if it wanted – instantly eating up all its wealth. Anyway, the worker who waits to the end of the month for their pay "abstains" more.

The wealth of the wealthy is not a contribution to the common productive power made by rich people out of public-spiritedness from stocks

built up through their own efforts. It is the accumulated result of decades or centuries of workers being paid less for our labour-power than the new value added by our labour.

Socialists want the large concentrations of wealth to be taken into public ownership and under democratic control. We favour compensation (state savings bonds or the like) for the middle-class people and better-off workers who own a

few shares, and having small businesses continue with strict rules to protect their workers and encouragement for them to become co-operatives.

Public ownership and control of major productive wealth can end the spiral which generates wealth, luxury, and power at one pole, and poverty, overwork, insecurity, and ruined public services on the other. □



Bristol XR Youth's bus campaign has forced steps in the right direction. West of England's metro mayor, Labour's Dan Norris, has commissioned a report on bringing buses under public franchise, giving more public control. □

Revolution: the “Finnish road” vs the “



Book review

By Simon Nelson

There is much to be gained from reading Eric Blanc's *Revolutionary Social Democracy: Working-Class Politics Across the Russian Empire (1882-1917)*. But within the valuable information and explanation of what some lesser-studied parties were doing is an argument in favour of what Blanc refers to as “orthodox Marxism” which doesn't hold.

Blanc's central thesis is simple: up to 1914, there was a classical Marxism of the Second International, exemplified by Karl Kautsky, its most able theorist. At the end of the war, the Russian Revolution provided a “Bolshevik” model, then promoted by the Comintern, which was of use only in autocratic conditions like those of Tsarist Russia, and which has hindered socialist parties ever since.

Blanc's argument may have value against versions of “Bolshevism” which model themselves on the “Bolshevisation” of 1924-5 (taking Bolshevik civil-war improvisations as a universal model) and in stressing the huge democratic dimension of socialist revolution (against those on the left who effectively agree with the right-wing description of October 1917 as a “coup”, only approve of that). But his attempt to rehabilitate the “orthodoxy” of the pre-1914 socialists fails.

Blanc cites the Finnish Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the “Finnish Revolution” of 1918 as proof that “orthodox Marxist” parties can be revolutionary in parliamentary states. The facts he presents about Finland do not bear that out. In the ramshackle Tsarist empire, Finland had unusual autonomy. After 1905 it gained its own elected parliament, with votes for men and women over 24. It was the first country in Europe to win votes for women. The Finnish SDP became the biggest socialist party in the world in proportion to population, and in 1917, with 84,000 members, was larger than the Bolsheviks. The SDP won a majority in parliamentary elections in 1916. The Tsarist regime stopped the parliament from meeting. After the February revolution, the parliament met. But the SDP, a broad party with a strong right wing and centre, flouted its previous rule against coalitions with bourgeois parties, and formed a coalition.

In July the SDP pushed through the Finnish parliament a law for autonomy in all but foreign and military affairs. Confident after the “July Days” in St Petersburg, the Provisional Government dissolved the parliament and called new elections on 1-2 October which

gave the SDP only 45-46% of the vote and parliamentary seats.

Bourgeois parties formed a coalition government. It set about reconstructing a state machine, suppressing the popular militias which had grown since February and affirming a bourgeois Civil Guard. It accelerated its efforts after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia recognised Finland as independent. In January 1918 the left pushed the SDP into an uprising to save the popular militias and resist the Civil Guard. Because of German and Swedish intervention, and the difficulty for the Bolshevik government in St Petersburg to give aid, the right had won the civil war by April, with much bloodshed.

Even in January, the SDP stated its aim as a socialist democratic parliamentary republic. But the “parliamentary road” did not work in Finland. And the SDP's eventual tactic was more “insurrectional” than the Bolsheviks' in late October in Russia. (Finland: uprising against a government claiming a base in an elected parliament. Russia: dispersal of the unelected Provisional Government so an elected assembly could take power).

Blanc accepts that the Russian Revolution was successful. (It later degenerated; but the Bolsheviks always said it would degenerate unless it spread to other countries). And, as John Marot has commented, wryly, in his review for *Tempest*: “Only Lenin's partisans and those willing to follow their lead proved to be truly revolutionary, dedicated to achieving victory, at all times and everywhere. Those who did not, the social democratic parties that remained faithful to pre-1914 Kautskyist orthodoxy, turned out to be counter-revolutionary. Blanc shows this to be the case everywhere in the land of the tsars. It is the signal merit of his contribution. His book deserves the widest audience for that reason alone.”

Kautskyists

Kautsky would balk at the idea that he was the architect of the Russian revolution, but Blanc twists his thought to fit the mould, claiming that the Bolsheviks were Kautskyists until, after their revolution, they rationalised local expedients into a false universal model.

As other reviewers have noted, Blanc makes a habit of referring to the “democratic revolution” to encompass both the bourgeois-democratic revolution and socialist revolution. He portrays Lenin as the loyal disciple of Kautsky, but sees the non-Stalinist revolutionary left as stuck trying to follow the post-1919 Comintern down a dead-end of “Bolshevik re-enactment”.

Kautsky wrote much of value, and was on the left of the German Social Democrats (SPD) and generally an ally of Rosa Luxemburg until about 1910-12.

But he then shifted to the “centre” of the SPD. Blanc doesn't deny the shifts, but makes little mention of debates with the SPD before 1914. Blanc mentions Luxemburg little and does not cover Luxemburg's 1910-11 critique of Kautsky's attitude to mass strikes and of his proclaimed “strategy of attrition”.

The pioneer Russian Marxist George Plekhanov and later Kautsky outlined the basics of what Blanc terms the “democratic revolution”, but it was not a one-size-fits-all. In Russia, the democratic revolution was seen as anti-feudal, while in the West, it was anti-capitalist. Russia had no parliament until the feeble and undemocratic, indeed token, Duma after 1906, and it had nothing like the “civil society” that existed in Britain or even semi-demi-autocratic Germany.

The “democratic revolution” in Germany was understood on all sides to be a socialist revolution of a particular type. Kautsky often let it be assumed that a democratic revolution in Germany – sweeping away the Kaiser and three-class voting, giving full powers to the only-consultative elected assembly, etc. was necessarily socialist. In Russia, Plekhanov and others were clear that it meant establishing a bourgeois democratic republic. As Lenin put it, an “American” rather than a “Prussian” bourgeois development.

Kautsky, the “Pope of Marxism” in the heyday of the Second International, presented the German SPD's electoral advances as showing that the existing capitalist state, particularly its legislative bodies, could be used to achieve socialism. He hinted that this might not be smooth and peaceful, and that a doomed bourgeoisie would lash out in its last days, but the conclusion for now was almost always to continue moderate tactics in the expectation that conditions would surely get better. The successes of the German party could be extended across Europe.

Blanc fails to register the clear difference between the Bolshevik party by the time of the 1917 revolution and its social democratic counterparts, in particular the effects of the split among the socialists over World War One and the subsequent reconsideration by the internationalists like Lenin of their previous acceptance of Kautsky (after and before 1910) as an authority. (Kautsky had a “centrist” position on the war).

Blanc has to argue that the Bolsheviks were fighting for a “democratic revolution”, not socialism, in 1917. Blanc follows the argument of Lars T Lih about a continuity between the Bolsheviks before and after Lenin's return in April 1917: that the Bolsheviks in 1917 neither broke from their previous positions nor intended, by “all power to the soviets”, anything different from the previous “democratic revolution” per-

spective. Blanc argues, unconvincingly, that the Russian Revolution was really all about seeking a permanent democratic form of government in place of autocracy, and so there is limited scope for it as a model in countries which have existing democratic institutions, though imperfect.

Duncan Hart, in his review, counters Blanc with quotes from Lenin and Trotsky. In September 1917, Trotsky wrote in *Pravda*:

“[T]hose who are of like mind with Comrade Martov, in opposition to us, deny the social-revolutionary character of the political task. Russia, they declare in their platform, is not yet ready for socialism, and our function is necessarily limited to the founding of a democratic bourgeois republic. The whole attitude is based on a complete rejection of the international problems of the proletariat. If Russia were alone in the world, Martov's reasoning would be correct. But we are engaged in carrying out a world revolution, in a struggle with world imperialism, with the tasks of the world proletariat, which includes the Russian proletariat.”

Catastrophe

In *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It* (October 1917), Lenin wrote:

“Either we have to be revolutionary democrats in fact, in which case we must not fear to take steps towards socialism. Or we fear to take steps towards socialism, condemn them in the Plekhanov, Dan or Chernov way, by arguing that our revolution is a bourgeois revolution, that socialism cannot

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Russian”? Labour’s NPF, certainty, and class

By Colin Foster

be ‘introduced’, etc., in which case we inevitably sink to the level of Kerensky, Milyukov and Kornilov, i.e., we in a reactionary-bureaucratic way suppress the ‘revolutionary-democratic’ aspirations of the workers and peasants.”

Blanc elides the experience of the war for not just the Russian proletariat but the international workers’ movement. The Russian Revolution itself would then have an even more significant impact on the consciousness of the most advanced sections of social democrats.

The exponents of “All power to the Soviets” argued for a government of workers and peasants, with the bourgeoisie shut out. The Bolsheviks – Lenin, for example, in *State and Revolution*, written in summer 1917 – concluded that this amounted to a new type of state, a workers’ state, a temporary institution on the road to communism. Blanc essentially ignores this last argument. The early Third International’s political views constituted a theoretical advance beyond those of the pre-1917 Bolsheviks and other revolutionary social democrats. It was based on the experience of the 1917-21 working-class revolutions, defeated and successful. Kautsky, by contrast, came to chair the Commission of Socialisation formed by the German SPD during the German Revolution of 1918-9, essentially as a ploy to counsel workers to wait until the experts reported to the scheduled National Assembly on when and what to socialise.

Third International

Contrariwise, parties that, in Blanc’s opinion, adhered to Kautskyist revolutionary social democracy during the 1917 revolution joined the Third International as founding members: the Latvians, the Polish Socialist Party (Left), the SDKPIL, and the Finns. (Blanc scarcely mentions the Bulgarian “Narrow” SDP, later Communist Party, which was probably closer to the Bolsheviks than any other party until its eclipse in the mid-1920s. Bulgaria was not in the Tsarist empire, but had many links with Russia). To make the case that 1917 was not a validation of “Leninism”, but rather of a wider revolutionary social democracy, Blanc emphasises the plurality of revolutionary groups in the Tsarist empire during the upheavals around 1917. Yet he attributes no similar agency to those very same parties in creating the Comintern, whose ideologies he attributes solely to “Leninism”.

As a result, Blanc’s defence of Kautskyism is unconvincing because his main goal is to discredit revolutionary socialists in the Bolshevik tradition and reject the political conclusions drawn after 1917 by the same people he is researching (the Latvian, Polish, Finnish etc. revolutionary socialists). □

The “final” National Policy Forum report going to Labour Party conference in Liverpool, 8-11 October 2023, is mostly 112 pages of warm words evading clear commitments.

The conference Delegates’ Briefing says that the facility to “refer back” items from the NPF report, established since 2017, will not be available, on the pretext that (for the first time since 2017) this is a “final” report and so there is nowhere to “refer back” to. Delegates will still seek to remonstrate by voting against sections of the report and passing motions stating clear commitments or contradicting the report.

The sharper language in the report is mostly where it seeks to give “certainty” to big business. (No “certainty” for the working class!)

It is “non-negotiable”, the document says, that “Labour will not borrow to fund day-to-day spending, and we will reduce national debt as a share of the economy”. There will be “no return to freedom of movement”, i.e. immigrant workers will depend on employer goodwill for visas. “Labour will not return to the [EU] single market or customs union”.

The gist, however, is that the Labour leaders plan neither to raise taxes on the rich (bar closing the “non-domiciled” loophole and a couple of others – tax exemptions for private schools, “carried interest”) nor to raise borrowing to cover such tasks as restoring the NHS. And not to cut military spending, either. So, almost no cash for public services other than hoped-for tax revenues from hoped-for “growth”.

The clearest things remaining are:

- ramp up public capital investment into the green economy to £28 billion a year in the second half of the Parliament at the latest
- more than double onshore wind capacity, triple solar capacity and quadruple offshore wind capacity
- upgrade every home that needs it to EPC (energy efficiency) standard C within a decade
- bring railways into public ownership as contracts with existing operators expire or are broken
- repeal the Trade Union Act 2016 and the Minimum Service law; allow electronic balloting for disputes.

There are studiously vague words about decriminalising abortion: “Labour believes that abortion is an essential part of health care which is highly regulated and should not be subjected to custodial sanctions”.

The NHS gets only warm words. The document makes much of better preventive medicine, but scarcely promises new resources.

The document commits to a “Fair Pay Agreement in the adult social care sector, empowering workers and the trade

unions that represent them to negotiate fair pay and conditions... underpinned by rights for trade unions to access workplaces”. (That is about all that remains of the talk of new legislation to force bosses into collective bargaining, touted as a clever “alternative” to the policy repeatedly reaffirmed by Labour and TUC conferences, of repealing the Thatcher anti-union laws).

Beyond that, the talk of a National Care Service lacks specifics.

Many of the items from the “New Deal for Working People” now have softer language. The document promises “basic individual rights from day one for all workers”; but now only to “strengthen” statutory sick pay, to “move towards a single status of worker” (covering gig-economy people), to “ban exploitative zero hours contracts”. It does talk of “ensuring everyone has the right to a contract that reflects the number of hours they regularly work, based on a twelve-week reference period”.

In a welcome specific, presumably a sop to the GMB union, the document promises a review into the jailing of Cammell Laird workers (after the 1984 shipyard occupation in which Lol Duffy, a longstanding Marxist and Labour candidate in Wallasey in 1987, played a big part).

Supposedly “Labour will reform the water industry so that it delivers for consumers and the natural environment by using regulatory powers”. No commitment to take utilities, or Royal Mail, back into public ownership, let alone to take the whole energy industry (extraction, generation, wholesale, retail) into public ownership to enable planning and to harness for social spending the ultra-profits made by better-placed energy companies. (The report proposes a publicly-owned GB Energy alongside the private operations).

Instead of committing to repeal the Illegal Migration Act, the Police Act, and the Public Order Act, the document notes only that Labour opposed “measures in the Public Order Act like suspicionless stop and search and the offence of being equipped to lock on and argued they should be removed by the government. In government, Labour would seek to change these provisions”. Only “seek to”?

There is a heading in the document about “legal routes” for asylum-seekers, but under that heading no indication of how those “legal routes” for reaching the UK will be established. Mostly, the document just promises to process asylum applications faster.

The document promises “the biggest wave of insourcing of public services in a generation”, but without specifics. It notes that councils have been crushed by Tory cuts, but promises only that “as Labour grows our economy and improves our public finances, we will ensure that councils are enabled”.

Nothing much beyond warm words is offered on benefits. Outside the document, Labour leaders have said that they plan to continue the Tory two-child benefit cap which they previously denounced.

Instead of pledging to end the “Right to Buy” scam which is still depleting council housing faster than new units are built, the document says “Labour will seek to decrease the number of social homes being rapidly sold off through right to buy without like-for-like new social housing being built to replace them”.

The document promises a “Renter’s Charter” and (as the Tories have already promised) to “abolish ‘no fault’ Section 21 evictions” of private renters, but drops previous talk of legally limiting rent rises.

It says that “Labour has defended the triple lock [on pensions] when the Conservatives have sought to break their promises”, but since the document was published Labour leaders too have refused clear commitment to the triple lock.

The document promises to “end discrimination against trans people, non-binary and gender diverse people, and ensure they are treated with respect and dignity in society” and says that “the current process of gender recognition is intrusive, outdated, and humiliating”, but follows up with nothing more specific than that Labour will “modernise, simplify and reform the gender recognition law”. That replaces previous talk of gender recognition by “self-identification” (as already in place in eleven countries in Europe, and in Argentina, Colombia, etc., without bad results), and Labour leaders have indicated a process involving only one doctor instead of two.

The document says nothing about transgender health care, where provision is thin and waiting lists are enormous and getting longer.

The document promises to “end the system of headline grades” from Ofsted, but not to return academies and free schools to democratic local authority control, nor to reverse cuts, nor to end the destructive “exam factory” orientation of schooling.

It says “Labour will fix the current broken tuition fees and loans structure”, but nothing is clear here except that we know from other sources that the Labour leaders now intend not to abolish tuition fees.

In 2021 Labour conference voted to “refer back” a section of the NPF report because the document said nothing about neurodiversity. This final text still says nothing.

There are warm words about adopting the “social model” rather than the “medical model” of disability, but neurodiversity is not disability. □

Biden, Trump, Starmer, and strikes

By Tom Harrison

The next US Presidential Election is thirteen months away, and the winner will be either Joe Biden or Donald Trump, unless unforeseen circumstances cause one or the other or even both to drop out. This "choice" is deeply unpopular, with approval ratings for both candidates currently stuck at the low 40% mark.

Far more popular than either Trump or Biden in America today are trade unions. They are said to enjoy 67% approval ratings among the public at large, and 90% among under-30s. There's also high support for unions striking, whether it be film and television writers or United Auto Workers. It's little wonder that the presidential rivals have sought to don the "friend of the workers" mantle.

Joe Biden made his pitch by joining a UAW picket line in Michigan, which was deemed a historic first for a US President. He spoke in support of their strike

for higher wages and shorter hours and denounced corporate greed. Although Biden's pro-labour stance has to be taken with a dose of salt considering his behaviour towards striking rail workers in 2022, he has been trying to advance legislation making it easier for unions to organise and bargain collectively, only to be stalled in Congress.

Whatever his shortcomings, Biden joining a picket line represents a marked contrast to leaders of the Labour Party in Britain who are supposed to represent the interests of organised labour. Keir Starmer has been notably absent from picket duty during the ongoing strike wave here and tried to stop other Labour MPs joining too. Neil Kinnock earned notoriety for failing to join pickets during the miners' strike of 1984-5 until a brief token visit near the end.

Even more picket-line-averse is of course Trump, whose courting of the union vote has reached levels of fakery only he alone is capable of. He hasn't

gone to a picket. The management of a non-union car-parts factory hosted a wider-public meeting for him. Nathan Stemple, president of the non-union company, said: "Some of our colleagues... reached out to us and said that the [former] president was looking for a location to host this event. And we were more than willing to do so".

"Hope your leaders at UAW will endorse Donald Trump", was part of the message, as if it were a UAW meeting. But it wasn't! Journalists found people among the 400 or so present holding "Union Workers for Trump" signs weren't actually in a union. It's a sure bet some got paid for their participation. Mostly Trump talked down the UAW action and ranted against electric vehicles.

Trump is something new with his demagoguery, but the Republican Party has long been the more anti-labour of the two major capitalist parties in the USA. In 1981 Reagan sacked striking air traffic control workers en masse, decer-

tified their union, and had their leaders led away in handcuffs.

Trump's own term in office produced nothing but retrograde outcomes for the working class. Substantial health and safety requirements at work were rolled back and measures were invoked to make union organisation difficult if not impossible, particularly in the gig economy. His Supreme Court appointees made numerous anti union rulings. None of this was surprising given Trump's history of illegal labour practices as a real estate developer.

The unpopularity of the present US party system combined with the majority support for unions and strikes begs an obvious question: why isn't there a Labour Party in America? Establishing one might be a way out of the sclerotic political system that presently reigns. Clearly along with all the other democratic rights socialists must defend and advance is the right of workers to organise unfettered in their workplaces. □

Veolia workers strike for pay

By Ralph Peters

Over 50 members of the GMB union at three plants of the multinational Veolia in Notts began a strike for pay rises on Monday 25 September. Despite a half-yearly turnover of £23 billion and huge profits, the company has paid most workers only the national minimum wage over the 13 years of its operation so far.

Notts County Council manages a contract involving Veolia and several district and borough councils to process recyclable waste from local authorities in its area.

The strikers are picketing in the way it should be done: challenging every lorry that tries to gain entry, successfully turning back sympathetic local government refuse workers and others that could not or would not cross the line.

The local Ukraine Solidarity Campaign organised a support demonstration outside the Mansfield plant on Friday 29 Sep.

Veolia has used every legal



threat they can. They have threatened the GMB workers with disciplinarys if they are seen on pickets at Veolia plants other than their own or are seen supporting Ukraine during the picket. They have implied legal action against the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign for drawing public attention to their Russian activities and the GMB's opposition to them.

The company clearly fears publicity and the dispute spreading. Many Veolia workers across the country will suffer from similar exploitation. The Tory council hides from accounting for its inaction. But the GMB workers and the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign will need to continue their strike and solidarity challenges. □

Break Veolia's Russian links



By Ralph Peters

One of the countries Veolia operates in is Russia and local Ukrainian campaigners are demanding they end their collaboration with the Russian regime.

At the last Notts County Council meeting, Labour councillor Mike Pringle called for the council to demand Veolia's withdrawal from Russia and take action to resolve the dispute.

The Tory council leader, Ben Bradley who is also the MP for Mansfield, claimed dishonestly that there was nothing that the council could do about the dispute, and claimed to know nothing of the Veolia Russian connection. However, eight months ago the Tories had been told that the contract with Veolia could be terminated if it brought the council "into disrepute" as the Russian connection does.

In January, Veolia used the excuse that its activities in Russia are not in support of the war. This time Veolia UK claims that it has "no legal, financial or operational" ties with the Russian Veolia despite being both parts of the Veolia Group. □

Veolia and boycotting Russia



By Dan Katz debate

The GMB union is campaigning in Nottinghamshire against low wages being paid by the waste and recycling company, Veolia. GMB organiser Mick Coppin says: "[Veolia] expect local workers to do dangerous, difficult and smelly work for the minimum wage. Our members can no longer afford to heat their homes."

The workers are striking for better pay. All socialists and

trade unionists should actively back them.

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC) has supported the workers but added a demand that Veolia, a multinational, end its operations in Russia.

The USC points out that GMB members have a record of backing Ukraine. Indeed, the GMB has played an important role in the labour movement in advocating for backing Ukraine.

However, the USC demand that Veolia should pull out of Russia is mistaken. If Veolia did pull out of Russia it would make no difference at all to Putin's war. The blanket sanctions

policy against Russia has not worked, and will not work.

Veolia is providing services that have no bearing on Putin's ability to wage war on Ukraine. Veolia does not sell weapons to Russia.

Not all damage done to the Russian economy is positive, or helpful to our international struggle.

It is not the job of socialists to try to unpick the world economy. Attempts to do so, if successful, would take us backwards towards tightly defined political-trading blocs, and, inevitably, make the world an even more unstable and fractious place. □

How to help Myanmar

By Hein Htet Kyaw

The purpose of this article is to provide the opinions of Burmese leftists on the issue of how the global left could help Myanmar. To do so, I have reached out to four different leftists in Myanmar, each representing a unique left-wing tendency.

The first person I contacted was comrade Theo Maung, a democratic socialist who is now serving in a revolutionary militia for the Burma Revolutionary Army, a left-wing militia group. Theo expressed that it would be valuable to have technical and tactical support, such as education on modern agricultural and livestock technologies. With the access to technologies stated above, the militias can not only support themselves but also protect the communities they belong to, Theo said.

I also reached out to comrade San Shar, a regional political lead from

People's Liberation Army of Burma Communist Party (PCB). He shared his view: "western imperialism needs to be condemned and Chinese imperialism should be critically analysed when it comes to Myanmar's revolution". He chose not to give comment on Russia's imperialism on Myanmar.

Comrade Zaw Khu Zun, former General Secretary of Leftist Youth Organization (loosely affiliated with the PCB), currently a renounced Bolshevik-Leninist, also contributed his views for this article. Zaw Khu Zun is expecting more solidarity strikes and demonstrations from the international left regarding Myanmar's issue. He mentioned that the demonstrations should focus more on the capitalist corporations that are colluding with the military junta for their business.

"Such demonstrations will resurrect the public awareness on the Myanmar issue", he stated. According to

the reports from "Justice from Myanmar", there are a number of western companies, especially German and Israeli companies as well as Asia-based companies from Singapore and South Korea, supplying weapons and technologies to the military junta. Such companies should face severe consequences for the involvement of genocidal massacres and inhumane treatment against the ethnic groups actively committed by the military junta.

Comrade Yoe Thit Aung, a life-long egoist anarchist, also expressed his views as well. He argued that local left and international left should work together for a common purpose of public awareness. Since people tend to listen more when someone with similar political background is sharing an experience, he is hoping for more political platforms internationally. He said: "people all over the world have lost interest in Myanmar's situation. So, we need to

assist fostering people exchange networks and mutual aid platforms with the international appropriate left-wing tendencies to resurrect the international awareness of the people on Myanmar's issues".

To sum up, revolutionaries in Myanmar need military grade weapons and tactical support regarding the military struggle. Politically, since there are some fundraising events happening all over the world, the international left can assist the fundraising movements to secure a solidarity relationship with the Burmese community for further political movements. People from Myanmar all over the world need to be informed about the possibility of a democratic socialist society free of exploitation, oppressions, and alienation. In this way, Myanmar people who have decided to settle in the respective countries can be recruited for the revolution that seeks a democratic socialist society. □

A critical eye on Nancy Fraser



Debate

By Michael Baker

At a discussion on Nancy Fraser's *Cannibal Capitalism* as part of the ongoing South London Socialist Feminist Reading Group, we reached very different conclusions to Stuart Jordan's review for *Solidarity* 680. We thought it would be worth highlighting the key disagreements to open up some discussion.

Fraser is right that capitalism is structurally entangled with questions of racial injustice, crises of social reproduction, and ecological disaster. There is a tendency within left circles to say that these things are important for the "health" of our movement; that the left must be anti-racist, feminist, and so forth because these things are simply "right". This evades exploring the actual relationship between these various phenomena, and Fraser is right that displaying the structural interaction between racism, sexism, climate collapse and the capitalist mode of production is an important task for the

modern left. However, Fraser's actual analysis of most questions has major flaws.

Perhaps the most glaring example is the chapter on "expropriation". Fraser argues that the Marxist movement has focused on wage exploitation at the expense of analysing expropriation: brute capture and enslavement that continues alongside the wage relationship, not just the initial "primitive accumulation" capitalism required to get going. This creates a tiered system that also acts as a "colour line" in global politics (richer nations get waged labour, poorer ones are simply subject to "expropriation"), which is the structural basis of modern imperialism and racism.

This is wrong in almost every aspect. The relationship between wage-slavery and enslavement, the nature of imperialism, and the role of accumulation and expropriation, have been central topics to the history of the Marxist movement. She is wrong that these practices split along "colour lines", and that "expropriation" (a term she defines incredibly vaguely) is the primary cause of modern-day racism. By expanding "expropriation" to

include unwaged housework and socially reproductive labour, as well as seemingly incorporating all forms of individual and national debt, the term loses almost any meaning.

Social reproduction is Fraser's strongest topic: her chapter tracing the history of the move from a "family wage" to the "double earner" family, and the growth of American middle-class families employing houseworkers from poorer countries, pushing the burden of unremunerated labour further down the "food chain", is genuinely insightful. She does, however, have a tendency to insist that Marxists haven't considered these questions before, which is untrue, and her book would benefit from discussing those prior debates.

This links to Fraser's insistence that Marxism is an overly "economistic" mode of thinking, which blinds Marxists to other forms of social crisis. Perhaps the central claim of Marx's late work, *Capital* in particular, is that the primary failure of bourgeois economics is its inability to see economic relations as social ones. (For an example of Social Reproduction Theory being applied in a manner that

uses Marxism more fruitfully, I would recommend Tithi Bhat-tacharya's [article](#) *How Not to Skip Class*, another former text discussed in the Socialist Feminist Reading Group). The focus on the working class is not because Marx was obsessed with "economics", but because he saw the class as the structural "weak point" of the capitalist system, with a collective power in the workplace that other groups lack.

Fraser's book is not particularly interested in providing practical answers or suggestions for the current movement. Prescriptions at the end of each chapter are kept very vague, shying away from recommending engaging with

any particular political structures, movements or activities. This is a shame: for a book addressing the modern feminist, anti-racist and ecological movements, it would be useful to look at the political forms those movements have taken. In particular, an analysis of modern NGO politics and the obstacles that stop activists fighting for systemic changes through NGO structures would have made *Cannibal Capitalism* a much more useful text. This could also allow for an analysis of when, why and how the labour movement has (or hasn't) engaged with questions of race, gender and ecological crises. □



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- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, by the bulletin-makers □

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Missing element on TUC



Letter

I thought it was noteworthy, and in need of explanation, that Dan Katz's report of the resounding vote for solidarity with Ukraine at TUC Congress (*Solidarity* 684) did not mention the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC).

From working with GMB, Aslef and NUM to ensure pro-Ukraine motions were submitted, to organising a fight in various unions over the vote, to a high-profile social media campaign generating awareness and pressure, USC's role was central.

In two unions where Workers' Liberty did, indeed, play a crucial role in winning strong stands (PCS and, in an impressive turnaround, Unison), the comrades involved worked closely with USC, as well as, I'm sure, with the AWL's Ukraine organiser. In Unison, which was crucial to the big victory we won, AWL

members worked with other USC supporters as well as with the campaign's trade union officers and others.

USC's role was even acknowledged officially by it being mentioned in the final composited motion passed – which some in the TUC hierarchy will not have been thrilled about.

It was acknowledged too by our opponents and enemies, some of whom launched an aggressive online campaign against USC in the run up to and after the vote.

The role of USC was also illustrated by the impressive breadth of the platform at its TUC fringe meeting – which Stalinists and supporters of George Galloway attempted to physically disrupt.

AWL members and supporters have played an important role in various aspects of USC's work. Close involvement with USC benefits AWL as well as the campaign. It was disappointing as well as a little bizarre to see the report ignore USC. □

Sacha Ismail, London

Opposing “no platform”

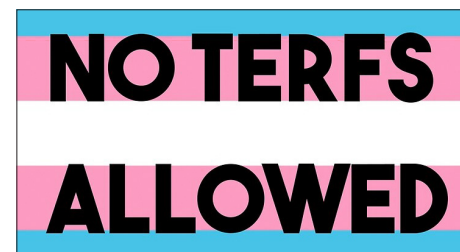


Letter

If I've got it right, the court decided that Sarah Jane Baker's “punch Terfs” words in her speech at Trans Pride were no more intended or likely to lead to violence than the banners of the old Class War anarchist group [like](#) “We Must Devastate The Avenues Where The Wealthy Live”. And they were a soon-regretted heat-of-the-moment outburst, not a planned banner.

We campaign against Sarah Jane being jailed (indefinitely and despite being acquitted!). Despite Keith Road (*Solidarity* 684) it won't help to define away the (“rhetorical”) call for violence against opponents or doubters who are feminists. Not against *all* women, of course, but specifically against women opponents or doubters.

Workers' Liberty [resolved](#) in 2018:



“We advocate that... issues be discussed in a rational and empathetic way and are addressed through such debate rather than through bureaucratic moves, censorship, no-platforming and violence related to this issue. There are a number of terms which are sometimes used unhelpfully, either to shut down debate or used inaccurately, simply for rhetorical force...”

“Terf” is now irredeemably a scatter-gun swear-word. The call to “no-platform” “Terfs” remains current and should be opposed. □

Martin Thomas,
London



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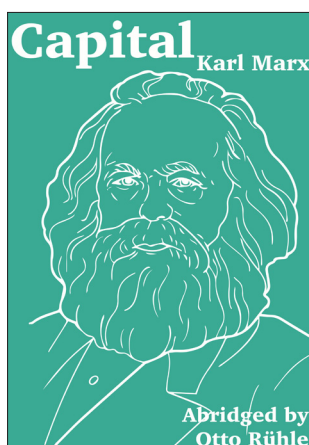
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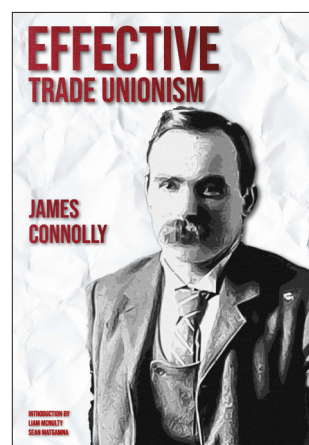
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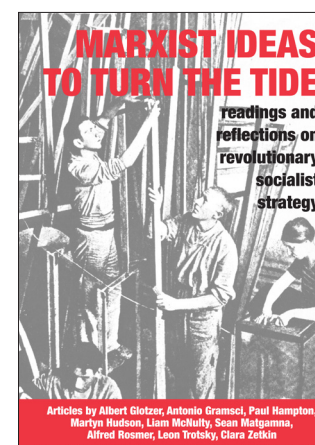
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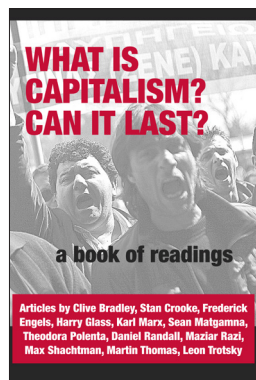
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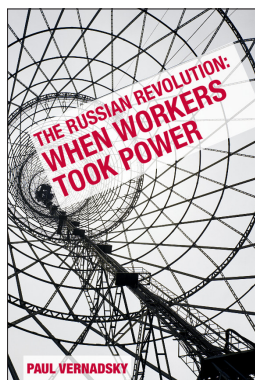
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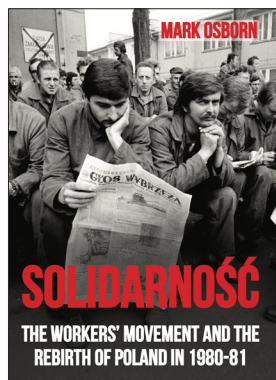
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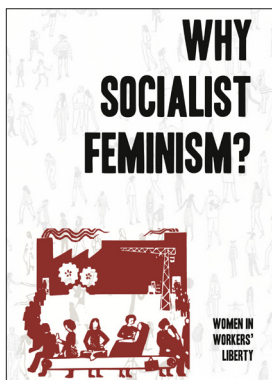
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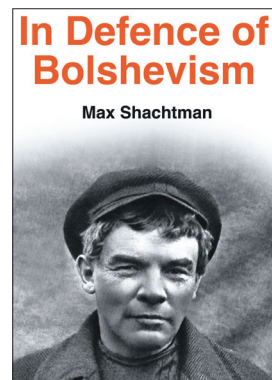
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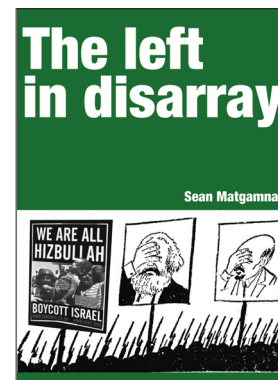
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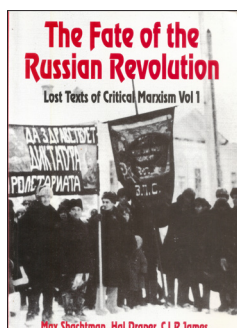
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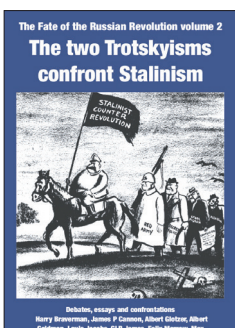
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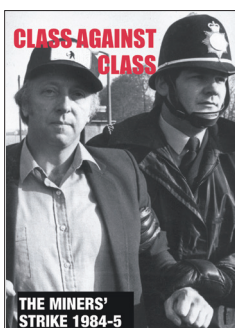
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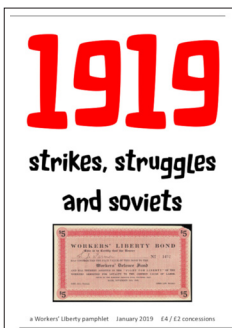
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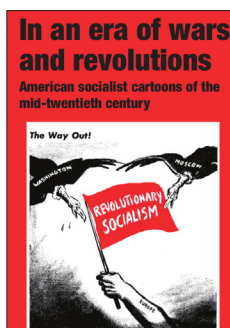
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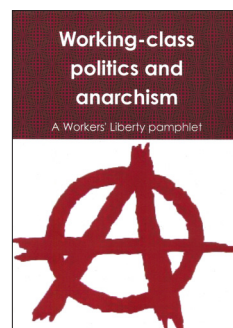
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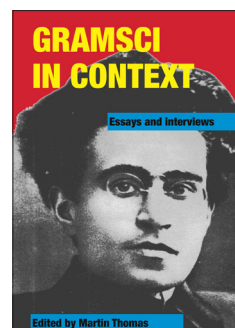
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PCS: fall-out from “Left Unity”

By a PCS member

Having killed the national campaign for cost of living pay awards back-dated to 2022, the Left Unity (LU) faction leadership in the civil service union PCS is now presiding over below-inflation civil service pay awards for 2023.

Yet they are keeping up the pretence that they have merely “paused” the campaign. It is a tactic they hope will help them win the elections for General Secretary (GS) and Assistant General Secretary (AGS) (nominations close 16 Oct, voting 9 Nov to 14 Dec): facing both ways to win the support of members who wanted the campaign to continue and of members who did not want to strike.

In doing so, LU is leaning heavily on the outgoing GS, Mark Serwotka. But his 23 years of leadership have – for all the spinning – been marked by failure:

- Historically low level of national membership.
- 15 years of pay decline.
- Endemic low pay.
- Abolition of pay progression.
- Reduced annual leave for civil servants recruited since 2013 and an hour on the working week for those working in London.
- Less sick pay.
- Pension age up from 60 to 67.

- An ill-managed “national office” that does not provide adequate support to members and representatives.

When Serwotka stood for GS in 2000 he dismissed his opponent as a “well paid” official (Serwotka is now on £103,000 per annum!) who held senior office while members were coming under attack. By his own test, Serwotka has failed. This year LU has delivered the worst pay outcomes in the public sector.

PCS Independent Left (IL) members, including AWL supporters, will be supporting the IL/Broad Left Network (BLN) campaign to re-elect IL’s John Moloney as the AGS and to elect Marion Lloyd as GS.

Revenue and Customs

The 21 September [announcement](#) by 27 Revenue and Customs (R&C) LU supporters that they are resigning from LU “with immediate effect” is an important, symptomatic, development. These activists are based in 12 R&C branches, include seven members of the R&C departmental committee, and have decades of LU membership between them.

They have rightly decided that the union leadership is not serving the members, citing its lack of respect for democracy, failure to consult branches over important changes, poor bargain-

ing, lack of national support for lay representatives, and basic inefficiency. They are calling for other LU members to sign their statement, to “act now and help us create the union we deserve!”

Less importantly, but again symptomatic, the Socialist Workers Party has (possibly!) announced its split from LU after years serving as courtiers to the now-retiring Serwotka.

The SWP has [declared](#) the choice in the GS election – between Marion Lloyd and LU’s Fran Heathcote, the National President – to be a poor one, although they failed to campaign within LU for an alternative candidate. But they passively conclude: “In the end, we say it will be more likely to grow future strikes if Lloyd wins, and that is how we think PCS members should vote.”

According to SWP members, the three SWP members on the union National Executive have therefore all resigned from the “party” and will be campaigning for Heathcote! It is unclear whether the remaining SWP members will openly campaign for Marion Lloyd to defeat Heathcote and accept expulsion from LU.

What is clear is their denunciation of Marion Lloyd for supporting John Moloney’s re-election, with the lie that the “... Alliance for Workers’ Liberty urges on support for Nato in the

Ukraine war.” The truth is:

- The SWP “condemns” Putin’s invasion of the Ukraine while campaigning for the Ukraine to be denied the weapons it is demanding and needs to defend itself. They are indifferent to Ukraine’s right to self determination.

- AWL supporters in PCS, as elsewhere in the labour movement, (successfully) campaigned for PCS affiliation to the Ukrainian Solidarity Campaign (USC), for solidarity with Ukrainian trade unionists, and in opposition to the SWP’s effectively pro-Putin position.

- The SWP has been heavily defeated on this issue within PCS, in part because of Serwotka’s support for Ukrainian self determination and the USC.

John Moloney has donated well over £100,000 to the PCS Fighting Fund from his outrageously high PCS salary, has a record of achievement on behalf of PCS members, and is the only senior official to have opposed the derailment of the national campaign.

All very different to his LU opponent in the AGS election: the senior, well-paid, long-term PCS official Paul O’Connor.

Which possibly explains why the SWP are disgracefully silent on whether they will support O’Connor or will be abstaining. □

Regrouping on council pay

By a Unison member

The April 2023 pay round in England and Wales local government is not yet settled. No increase has been paid, but the three unions are failing to coordinate. This makes the case for one workplace one union, as Workers’ Liberty has fought for. Immediately we need to build unity on the ground across all three unions.

After a ballot between 23 May and 4 July, Unison, the largest of the three unions, decided to take no action. 75% voted for industrial action to improve an offer of £1,925 (£2,352 for London members), but the ballot fell short of the Tory 50% turnout threshold in the overwhelming majority of councils and schools. Unison’s representatives on the National Joint Council rejected action in the councils and schools which beat the threshold, so in effect Unison proposed to the other two unions to close the 2023-4 dispute and move onto 2024-5 pay negotiations. Unite, the smallest of the three unions, ran a

staggered [ballot](#) between 13 June and 28 July. It obtained some legal mandates and has started [action](#) in 23 councils. At the last minute GMB has decided to ballot some of its council and school workers on action (12 Sep to 24 Oct, five months after the due date). The disunity in balloting, let alone in action, can only confuse and disorient members. We do not know what the top-level talks and rows between the unions were.

Unison has rightly agreed to meet with Unite and GMB in late October to discuss next steps. Unison missed the opportunity to coordinate action with Unite in September in some areas, as some had proposed, and to build on the stronger branches to re-ballot and reach 50% more widely.

Even though one union for all local government workers looks some way off, this shows the need; we will push for cross-union links to discuss how to save this dispute and how to prevent similar next year. □

Camden traffic wardens win

By a Unison shop steward

Camden’s outsourced traffic wardens have won a decisive pay rise after 59 consecutive days on strike.

They voted overwhelmingly to accept a deal netting them £15 per hour backdated to April 2023, £15.90 next year, and the year after either £16.50 or RPI, whichever is highest.

£15 falls short of their original demand of £15.90 this year, but is a genuinely inflation-busting 18.1% increase on their previous wage of £12.70. The deal also looks likely to track or outstrip inflation in years two and three. It puts them at least among the best-paid outsourced traffic wardens in the country.

In this strike wave, only extended or indefinite walkouts have successfully defended or improved real-terms wages against inflation. The wardens’ strategy contrasts starkly with the unsuccessful, stop-start, “marathon not a sprint” approach promoted by some

“left” union leaders. The wardens built strong organisation through previous disputes, and kept democratic control throughout this strike. They placed pressure to ensure that the leaders of their union, Unison, would authorise indefinite action. They sent shop stewards into negotiations, and discussed each offer from the employer collectively, in general meetings.

They piled extra pressure on both Camden Council and its private outsourcing contractor, with consistent picketing, public protests and exposing bosses’ eye-watering pay. While negotiating, deliberating and voting on offers, they kept the strike solid rather than surrendering momentum by pausing action.

In all these aspects, the wardens have set an example from which the wider labour movement should learn.

The three-year deal will expire along with the service’s outsourcing contract. The wardens are already planning a

campaign demanding that the Labour-run council bring them in-house at that point. This will boost their terms and conditions, and the closer incorporation of a well-organised group of workers, with recent experience of successful militant action, will boost the whole Camden workforce. □

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“” What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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Trackwork in winter and summer



Diary of a railworker

By Matt Shaw

Besides cold, snow is another demon in railway track work. Either it's really fine stuff that gets in everywhere despite your wet weather gear, or the big wet flakes that hit you in the eye and cause you to swear you'll find a nice cosy inside job.

Often when you set off it all looks pretty easy with a fine, crisp, sunny morning and the work all lined up. But as you arrive, the clouds start to build and before you know it, the first flakes start to drift down and you realise just how far it is back to the depot.

Also, it's not just getting back to the depot. Most people, when I started on the railway, relied on the buses in Sheffield to get home. You would start to worry as you approached Sheffield's outskirts and no buses could be seen.

Sheffield's bus service was like another part of the weather forecasting machine. They were only taken off the roads if the snow was too bad for them to handle, which, to their credit, wasn't often. Many an argument broke out when we were far away in the sticks and the ganger, out of a misplaced sense of loyalty to the railway, insisted that we stopped on the job right up to time, despite the fact it was really throwing it down.

In summer, the reverse of winter's wind chill was very calm, still days, when the heat would just start building up. On the track, with no shade, the ballast acted as a giant heat sink. If you were up there, digging a trench or laying the dreaded cable troughing, then you had to take care not to get really bad sunburn or dehydrated in fairly short order.

Nowadays, we are given bottled water and sun screen, but in the bad old days if you talked about sunburn you were considered to be less of a man. Especially for those of us with a fair complexion, skin cancer became a serious concern. I've been lucky so far, but there have been several of the guys I worked with who've had scares.

Thunderstorms can be a risk if we ever got caught out by a storm setting upon us out in the open. Trying to get back to the relative safety of the van with lightning coming down around you can give you a burst of speed to challenge Usain Bolt in the 100 metres sprint.

In the High Pennines, at a place called Dunford Bridge, the lines go through the Woodhead Tunnel, but before you get to there, you need to go up and over the moors. One time, we knew there was going to be problems as one storm had already passed, leaving several track circuits failed.

Off we set from Penistone, in light rain, however, it soon became torrential with hail appearing but we pressed on, climbing up to the top of the moors before starting to drop back down. I had

never been above a storm but that was where we were.

You could see the flashes of lightning below us, in the clouds while we were on the road above them. Not one of my better days, as I've always had a fear of lightning and being in the open.

The opposite of all this inclement weather was the site of a fine sunset or sunrise, truly a spectacle to warm your heart after a long shift. Sunrise, in particular, after a long night shift, has the power to lift you up and makes up for some of the shit that has gone before.

I now live near the coast, and my route home takes me along the sea front where the sun looks like it's coming up out of the sea. A better homecoming is hard to find. □

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

Black soldiers in the Civil War



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

It is something like 160 years since the citizens of Boston watched the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment march through the town on their way to fight for the Union in the American Civil War. There was something very special about the event: the six hundred strong 54th was one of the first all-Black regiments in the Union army.

Glory (directed by Edwar Zwick, 1989) follows the 54th through its training period, its first combat experience at the battle of Antietam to the bloody assault on Fort Wagner, a Confederate stronghold at the mouth

of Charleston harbour. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (Matthew Broderick) was the real life commander of the 54th – a white man, as were all the commanders of Black units in the Union army.

In the ranks, the film focuses on Private Silas Tip (Denzel Washington) and Sergeant Major John Rawlins (Morgan Freeman), both of whom struggle to get the raw recruits into shape and overcome the prejudices within the Union ranks. Many whites believe that Black soldiers cannot fight in a disciplined army but Shaw believes strongly in the ability of the men he commands and volunteers the 54th to lead the attack on Fort Wagner.



The Fort is heavily fortified and can only be attacked by accessing a strip of sand and shingle about one hundred yards wide. All the soldiers know that some of them will die in the assault. They march into battle cheered on by the white Union soldiers who now see that their prejudices were unfounded. The fighting is ferocious on both sides. Neither gives an inch and ultimately the 54th is forced to withdraw,

having lost half their personnel, including Gould. Fort Wagner held out as a Confederate stronghold till the end of the Civil War, but the bravery of the 54th ensured that more Black regiments were recruited to the Union cause.

Ultimately, over 180,000 Black-Americans volunteered to fight, many of them escaped slaves but also, as with the 54th, a large number of free-men born in the North.

Glory is without a doubt the best film about the American Civil War and a powerful antidote, if one were still needed, to the vacuous mythology of the glorious Old South as portrayed, for example, in that waste of celluloid and crinoline: *Gone with the Wind*. □

Doctors need expanded support

By Sacha Ismail

Two thousand mainly young doctors and other health workers rallied in Manchester on 3 October, during Tory party conference.

Striking junior doctors and consultants, members of the British Medical Association (BMA), were joined by members of the Society of Radiographers, also on strike on 3 October.

"Full pay restoration" is a much better use of the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army" than "Oh Jeremy Corbyn". It sounds impressive shouted across St

Peter's Square. The BMA is fighting for a clear timetable for restoration of real-terms pay to 2008 levels.

Speakers at the protest put emphasis on the shift of the BMA from a professional association to a trade union, and to the growth of grassroots activity.

The BMA and its members have put up far more fight against the Tories than any other union. The question is what it will take to push the government further.

Coordination between junior doctors, consultants and now radiographers is

progress. What other possibilities are there for coordination, and can action be significantly escalated?

How do we renew and expand wider labour movement support for the BMA, which does seem to have faded as the dispute drags on? There were striking university support workers from Unison at the Manchester rally, but few others.

And on the political field, how to budge the Labour Party, whose leadership is steadfastly refusing to back the doctors?

Socialists in the BMA and elsewhere



need to seriously discuss these questions, while building the strongest possible support for the strikes and picket lines. □

UCU re-ballots amidst ferment

By a UCU member

After a summer of confusion over strategy and unacceptable delays to a national re-ballot of members in the long-running University and College Union (UCU) dispute over pay and conditions, 42 branches struck in the week from 25 September.

The week was originally planned to be a national strike. An emergency meeting of the union's Higher Education Committee decided to allow branches to opt out. That left 42 to fight on, many in pursuit of local fights against punitive deductions of pay for the Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB). The MAB ended in September when the industrial action mandate ran out.

To cut a long story short, both the original planned national action and

the opt-out swerve, whatever criticisms can be made of it, were responses to the mess caused by a series of missteps and anti-democratic manoeuvring by the union's leadership in the last year. The latest confusion has recently led to a number of branches passing motions of no-confidence in UCU general secretary Jo Grady.

Those motions are reasoned political criticism and attempts to hold a well-paid elected General Secretary to account. But Chris O'Donnell, a leading member of Commons, the faction that backs Grady, calls them misogyny.

Quoted in the *Sunday Times* (1 October) O'Donnell said: "Jo Grady is by any measure the most successful general secretary of recent times. What we are witnessing here is an aggressive and misogynistic attack by the Socialist Workers Party and the far left within

the UCU." Activists in the union should, of course, condemn any sexist personalised attacks on Grady or any other woman in an elected position. O'Donnell is using a charge of misogyny divisively, and, no doubt, timing it to help Grady escape responsibility and to boost her re-election campaign – one that will begin immediately after she's spent time touring the country to get the vote out in the delayed re-ballot on industrial action (20 Sep to 3 Nov: the general secretary election will be in early 2024). He is wrong to do so.

Grady could have avoided a backlash if she had not obstructed the decisions and industrial strategy formed by elected committees – which included sustained industrial action and implementation of MAB earlier on in the last academic year – and let that strategy run its course. With hardline anti-union

bosses, there is no guarantee that the democratically-agreed strategy would have fared better, but at least something more like the collective will of the union would now be taking responsibility for any results.

Meanwhile, the UCU is running its re-ballot (to 3 Nov) to continue the dispute and all efforts need to be focused on winning that.

At the same time some Unison higher education branches are [striking](#) (mostly 2-3 Oct) over 2022-3 pay and revving up for 2023-24. This is a national dispute. Only a minority of branches opted to ballot and got over the threshold. Nevertheless, from where Unison organisation in higher education used to be, the trend is positive. □

Maintaining action could have won more



RMT's decision to cancel Tube strikes planned for 4 and 6 October is a serious misstep. Although the threat of the strikes has forced some concessions from London Underground (LUL), they are not sufficient to justify calling off action, still less to justify formally settling the stations-staffing elements of RMT's dispute.

Coming hot on the heels of the last-minute cancellation of strikes in July, a culture is developing on the job where both bosses and union members are beginning to see the naming of strikes as an idle threat.

RMT has not struck since 15 March, and now on two occasions has called action only to cancel it for concessions that, whilst real, can hardly be described as meeting union demands.

The threat of strikes forced some con-

cessions; it stands to reason that a programme of hard-hitting strikes (not just sporadic 24 hours here and there, but a sustained programme of action) could have forced even more.

The settlement the union has accepted includes the reinstatement of 126 of the 600 jobs cut from stations throughout 2023 (along with 74 reinstatements already agreed, for a total of 200); the withdrawal of plans that could mean displacement for some staff, guaranteeing the lowest grade of station staff will be promoted to CSA1 within 12 months of their start date and a commitment that no further cuts will be made on stations as part of LUL's commitment to the Department for Transport to deliver hundreds of millions of pounds of "savings".

These concessions are meaningful. They will make a real difference to the work/life balance of staff at the locations where positions are reinstated.

Could we have won more by striking? And what about other elements of our

dispute, such as protection of earnings for other staff displaced by an upcoming restructure?

Perhaps more significant than any individual detail in the settlement is the fact that RMT's acceptance was conditional on the union settling our dispute around these issues. This means that, in formal terms, we are no longer in dispute over station staffing levels, or any element of the CSS/CSM restructure. As far as LUL is concerned, we have now "accepted" all of that.

We will have to free ourselves from that formal constraint, declare a new dispute, and launch a new ballot before we can take any further action on any stations-staffing issue.

Our current ballot mandate expires soon anyway, and the union will be launching a new ballot – in all likelihood, with a concurrent ballot on LUL pay taking place at the same time. □

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UAW: standing up against corporate greed

By Bernie Sanders

Today [26 September], in my view, is an historic day. For the first time in American history we have seen a president of the United States of America stand on a picket line and make it clear that he is supporting the working class of our country. And that is a very big deal.

A week ago Friday, I was also in Detroit, with the United Automobile Workers. I was there to stand up to the extraordinary level of corporate greed that we are seeing in the automobile industry today.

In the first half of 2023, the Big Three automakers made a combined \$21 billion in profits, up 80% from the same time period last year. Over the entire decade, the past decade, these same companies made some \$250 billion in profits in North America alone. Last year, the Big Three automobile companies spent \$9 billion not to improve the lives of their workers, not to make their factories safer, but on stock buybacks and dividends to make their wealthy executives and stockholders even richer.

While many of the workers in the automobile industry are struggling to survive financially, last year, the CEO of General Motors made \$29 million in total compensation. The CEO of Ford made \$21 million, and the CEO of Stellantis over \$25 million.

The people who run these companies are doing phenomenally well while their workers are falling further and further behind. There was once a time when a union job in the automobile industry was the gold standard for the working class of

this country. They did better than any other manufacturing worker in America. Unfortunately, those days are long gone.

The average starting wage at the Big Three today is around \$17 an hour, and that's less in a number of non-union auto plants around the country. And no matter how long you have worked at the automobile industry, and some of these workers have been there 30, 40 years, the top wage is all of \$32 an hour.

Over the last 20 years, the average wage for American autoworkers has decreased by 30% after adjusting for inflation. The reality is that autoworkers at the Big Three are earning less today than they did 15 years ago.

That's why these men and women are standing up and fighting for economic justice. What the UAW is fighting for is not radical. It is the totally reasonable demand that autoworkers who have made enormous financial sacrifices over the last 40 years finally receive a fair share of the record-breaking profits that their labour has produced.

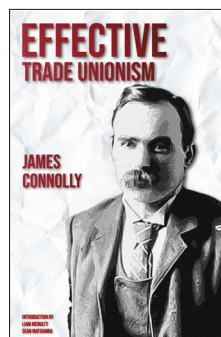
What the UAW is fighting for is not just for automobile workers, really. They are fighting for every American in this country. What they are saying is that we have got to end the unprecedented level of corporate greed that we see every single day where the people on top are doing phenomenally well while working-class people and middle-class people are struggling.

Today in America, where we have more income and wealth inequality than we have ever had, where we have more concentration of ownership than we have ever had, 60% of our workers are living pay cheque to pay cheque. We have a half a million people literally sleeping out on the street, 85 million people who are either uninsured or underinsured [for health care]. We have 45 million people struggling with student debt.

We have an economy that is doing just great for the people on top, not doing well at all for the working class or the middle class of this country.

The UAW is standing up and fighting for an industry that works for everybody. They want an economy that works for all. I want to applaud the UAW for what they are doing and to make it clear that, in my view, they are fighting for every working-class American. □

• Bernie Sanders was speaking on 27 September



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That

is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

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Pic: @uawregion6

Auto workers' strike spreads

By Lewis Joyes

The UAW (United Auto Workers) strikes in the United States have now spread from 3 to 20 states, with 38 parts distribution centres now added to the mix.

Despite being highly profitable outlets, most of these 38 centres are small shops, and so their introduction only adds another 5,000 workers to the strike; 18,000 total in a union with over 140,000 autoworkers in the three affected companies; Ford, General Motors (GM), and Stellantis (who subsumed Chrysler).

Although the UAW has yet to flex its full might, progress has been made, the most in negotiations with Ford, with additional gains in GM, but less so with Stellantis. Both Ford and GM have reportedly committed to removing some wage tiers, and Ford, to ensuring permanent contracts to all workers beyond 90 days of employment, the right to strike over possible future plant closures, and the reinstatement of annual cost of living increases.

Whilst these are significant wins so far, they still fall well-short of the union's aims, and are unequally spread over the three employers. As the strike momentum builds, so will the confidence

of the rank and file. They need empowering to run this dispute, and bring about rapid, lasting contract benefits.

Trump and Biden clearly see the UAW dispute as central to winning so called rust-belt states (that effectively are the key presidential battlegrounds). Trump held a rally billed as for auto workers on 26 September, and Biden "walked the picket" on 26 September (both in Michigan, where some of the first UAW pickets were held).

It feels very much like public support is well behind the UAW, and so both see this as a key campaign opportunity. The UAW leadership have not (yet) endorsed Biden, but Shawn Fain (UAW president, yes there are too many presidents here) criticised Trump last week, pitting the interests of striking workers against the likes of Trump.

It would have been great if some UAW workers got the chance to ask the self proclaimed "most pro-union president ever" why he supports workers in this strike, but crushed the railworkers less than a year ago, and how else he's using his inordinate leverage to put pressure on their employers. □

• More on Biden and Trump and the strikes, p.10



Solidarity

For a workers' government

LABOUR, DEMOCRACY, AND ROSEBANK

Activists from Workers' Liberty and supporters of *Solidarity* will be at Labour Party conference and women's conference, 7-11 October in Liverpool. We'll be there to help the efforts of Labour Left Internationalists, Free Our Unions, the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, India Labour Solidarity, and more; to sell literature, seek discussions and contacts.

There will be demonstrations for the NHS and for abortion rights on Saturday, for free education on Sunday. And agitation over the new Rosebank oil-field licence, following a flurry of protests since the Tories' long-expected 27 Sep decision and Labour's reaffirmation that will not revoke such licences.

At 2022 conference, with the acquiescence of the unions, Starmer had almost everything his way. Even then, we were able to have many useful discussions, to make many contacts, to show people that there is still a left willing to speak out.

In 2023 the "unity to win the election" line will again push the ballot for the twelve topics for debate towards the bland and "safe". The leadership wants to bring back (next year) the pre-2019 rule where CLP motions have to be "contem-

porary" (about events in a short and recent timeslot), and under which, some years, huge numbers were ruled out of order.

The National Policy Forum report finalised in July was published online only on 15 September, with no publicity, and denying the facility (available since 2017) for "reference back" of items in the NPF document.

CWU and FBU have submitted motions to tighten Labour's New Deal for Working People policy, and Unite one for public ownership of the energy industry. Other union motions are mostly bland.

Housing (council-home building, ending the "right to buy" scam, rent controls) has most motions from CLPs (46), followed by benefits and the two-child cap (20). Ten CLPs have submitted on migrant and asylum rights, three with relatively strong motions, so the chance of debate is better than in 2022.

There was almost nothing on Brexit in 2022. This year 16 CLPs have submitted. Seven follow a very weak model from the Labour Movement for Europe, calling for little more than "reducing paperwork". One from Edinburgh Central calls for restoration of European free movement, rejoining the Single Market and Customs Union,



and a direction towards rejoining the EU. Of nine CLP motions classified under "health funding and structures", the strongest calls for returning all privatised sections to public control, and ending outsourcing, an inflation-busting pay rise for NHS staff, and a long-term real-terms rise in NHS funding.

Several motions to Labour women's conference on 7 October call for decriminalisation of abortion (as in Northern Ireland, and by repealing sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 law). Women's conference may send that on to the general conference (but no clear text on the actual availability of abortion, worse in Northern Ireland than in England, seems to have got onto the agenda). □

• Labour Left Internationalists on the motions document: bit.ly/4p-23