

**& Workers' Liberty**

# **Solidarity**

**For social ownership of the banks and industry**

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# **BUILD UNIONS NOT BORDERS**



Photo: Gemma Short, @g\_for\_gemma

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## **Women's Fightback**

16-page *Women's Fightback* for International Women's Day 2020, also available to buy separately

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# Bernie Sanders' Cuba problem



**Sanders campaign**

By Eric Lee

As the possibility grows of Bernie Sanders winning the Democratic nomination for President, his opponents are looking for vulnerabilities that can be exploited.

This shouldn't be difficult, as Sanders has been politically active for some six decades. Surely he has written or said something embarrassing during that period.

But after trawling through the various archives, they have found very little to work with. Until now.

Last week, the attention of the mainstream media focussed on things that Sanders had said about Cuba in the past.

It seems that many years ago, Sanders made reference to two achievements of the Castro regime: raising literacy levels in the country and creating one of the best health care systems in Latin America. When pressed on these comments by CNN's Anderson Cooper, Sanders doubled down and said, "We're very opposed to the authoritarian nature of Cuba but you know, it's unfair to simply say everything is bad... When Fidel Castro came into office, you know what he did? He had a massive literacy program. Is that a bad thing? Even though Fidel Castro did it?"

When asked about the dissidents Cuba's Communist government has sent to jail, Sanders replied that "we condemn that."

Later, he said that his view differed little from that expressed by former President Barack Obama, whose efforts to end the blockade



and engage with Cuba have been reversed by Donald Trump. In March 2016, Obama said that "The United States recognizes progress that Cuba has made as a nation, its enormous achievements in education and in health care."

But this did not stop Sanders' critics, and not only Republicans, from attacking him for being an apologist for Castro. One British writer blasted him in a Facebook post, saying that Sanders "has a record of being a bit soft (and a bit daft) on anti-western dictators", comparing him to Jeremy Corbyn.

This view is, I think, unfair to Sanders.

The first thing to say in Sanders' defence is that what he says is not wrong. Or as he put it, "facts are facts". Literacy rates in Cuba did rise dramatically following the 1959 revolution. And Cuba does have the best health care system in the region.

But it's not that simple. While

people in Cuba can now read, they have been very limited in what they can read. The regime has never tolerated dissent, and strictly limited what kinds of books can be published or sold in the country, as well as print and online media. It is true that there are some exceptions, such as Leonardo Padura's 2009 book, *The Man Who Loved Dogs*, which is sympathetic to Trotsky. But for many years, such dissident writing was banned.

## COMPLEX

The problem with what Sanders says about Cuba is that it's complicated. Yes, the regime has done a few good things. But overall, it is a repressive society, noted for a lack of human rights and ugly forms of prejudice, including state-supported homophobia. This means that when discussing Cuba, one is required to display an awareness of the complexities.

Sanders has shown that he can do this, as his views on Israel and Palestine have shown. He does not see the world in black and white. In fact, his understanding of the tragic nature of the conflict in that region, his empathy for the people on both sides, has helped turn him into the most popular politician among both American Muslims and Jews.

He has also shown that he knows to speak clearly about dictators in a way that the current American President has been unable to do. For example, he says of Russian President Vladimir Putin, "He is an autocratic thug who is attempting to destroy democracy and crush dissent in Russia."

He needs to show the same clarity when talking about Castro and Cuba as well. □

• Eric Lee is the convenor of "London for Bernie", writing here in a personal capacity. For all Eric's columns on Sanders, and other Sanders coverage, see [bit.ly/el-bs](http://bit.ly/el-bs).

# Behind the Rutnam case

By Luke Hardy

On a basic trade union level we should be against the bullying of even a very well paid civil servant like Philip Rutnam, head of the Home Office, who resigned on 29 February, complained that many of his staff had been bullied, and said he would sue the government for "constructive dismissal".

There clearly is a turf-war element here, as in the resignation of Chancellor Sajid Javid over prime minister Boris Johnson's insistence on replacing Javid's staff by staff under Johnson's control. Or the case of Javid's adviser Sonia Khan, who was marched off the job last September by armed police called in by Johnson's adviser Dominic Cummings, and whose union is now suing over unfair dismissal.

Beyond that, we see an effort by the new government to transform the state to suit its authoritarian

nationalist politics and centralise power in the hands of Boris Johnson's chief adviser Dominic Cummings.

Cummings sees the traditional levers of state power as dominated by wishy-washy "Oxbridge humanities graduates" (though he himself is one of those). He sees his role to clear out the liberal infection and centralise power so that the chosen leader can operate with the mandate of the silent majority.

Cummings wants like-minded "radicals" committed to the transformation of the British state, though even he had to let the openly racist Andrew Sabisky resign (18 February) after journalists dug out Sabisky's blog posts.

However right wing this government is, we cannot cheer on senior civil service officials who implemented the hostile environment, austerity, the war on the disabled and the poor. Those people are not allies.

We do not see the senior civil service as a neutral arbiter. It is a tool of class rule. Tony Benn wrote about that in relation to civil-service pressures on the Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s.

## INSTITUTION

However, the senior civil service is also an institution that can be subjected to laws, parliamentary oversight, rules and regulations more than an absolutist cabal led by Cummings can.

If Johnson and Cummings smashes the senior civil servants' union, the FDA, and reconstituting the civil service in its own image, then the way is clearly open to wider attacks on left-leaning officials in education, academia or the broader public sector.

You do not have to whitewash the politics of the privately educated wealthy mandarins who dominate Whitehall to oppose the

governments assault on the civil service. Or perpetuate comforting fictions about their role.

We want a radically democratic workers' state that cannot be won by simply laying our hands on the bourgeois state and its civil service. We seek government through elected and recallable delegates, with full transparency, and with all official jobs done at workers' wages.

Millions of people are unconvinced of the need for a socialist reconstitution of society on an international scale but are deeply concerned about the authoritarian rightward turn across the globe. They are looking for movements and social forces that can effectively fight and resist it.

If the workers' movement takes the lead, many of them may yet be won to our cause and the banner of international socialism. □



## Agenda

Over the next ten days or so, to 14 March, the main activities for Workers' Liberty people will be organising for our "Class Struggle Environmentalism" day school on the 14th, and activity to support the UCU strikers, whose fourth week of strikes runs from 9 to 13 March.

We're also continuing distribution of the Workers' Liberty *Postalworker* bulletin ([bit.ly/post-b](http://bit.ly/post-b)). The new CWU union ballot in Royal Mail runs to 17 March.

This issue of *Solidarity* includes (printed as a pull-out to reduce costs) a new issue of *Women's Fightback*, which has published in various forms and frequencies for 40 years now, on and off, since 1980. It is timed for use especially at International Women's Day events on 8 March, but is designed also for longer-term use over coming weeks and months.

Our Workers' Liberty London forum on 28 February, to discuss our new book *Solidarnosc: the workers' movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-1*, drew about 40 people, including a number of Polish people living in London and people who were active in the Polish Solidarity Campaign in the 1980s.

Workers' Liberty union activists in the National Education Union (NEU) and the civil service union PCS are busy with preparations for those unions' conferences: 6-9 April, in Bournemouth, for NEU; 18-21 May, in Brighton, for PCS.

If you want to liaise with us at either conference, email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) and we'll put you in touch.

Dates for your diary (details of all these at [workersliberty.org/events](http://workersliberty.org/events)):

5 March: Uyghur solidarity protest at the Chinese Embassy

8 March: International Women's Day.

14 March: dayschool on class struggle environmentalism

21 March: UN anti-racism day march. Together with others, we are supporting a free movement bloc on the march

27 March: Workers' Liberty London forum - debate with Socialist Alternative

18-21 June: Workers' Liberty summer school, Ideas for Freedom

22-26 July: Workers' Liberty residential week school on Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*

9-19 November: COP26, Glasgow

At [bit.ly/mo-pe](http://bit.ly/mo-pe), you will find suggested text for motions on:

- "Get Labour on the streets"
- Free movement
- West Bank annexation
- Iran and Iraq
- Free Our Unions
- And
- Downloadable pdf for petition on free movement
- Charter for democracy in the labour movement □



# Green New Deal, not airport expansion!



By Misha Zubrowski

Existing plans for Heathrow airport to be expanded with a new third runway have been ruled illegal by a court of appeal, in the latest move in a battle stretching back the best part of two decades.

On 27 February the court ruled that in June 2018 Chris Grayling, then the transport secretary, was acting unlawfully by not taking into account the government's commitment - under the Paris agreements - to tackle the climate crisis. The Government said it would not appeal, though Heathrow airport itself will.

Air travel is extremely emissions-intensive, releasing a much higher quantity of greenhouse gases per individual or unit of goods moved than other major public transport or freight methods.

In December 2003 a governmental white paper, "The Future of Air Transport", advocated a third runway at Heathrow and an expansion of Stansted.

Since then, environmental campaigners have been fighting these proposals, given the harmful

impact they would have on the planet; with local residents opposing community destruction and noise and air pollution.

The resurgent environmental movement in 2006-11 increased the opposition, with the 2007 Climate Camp targeting Heathrow. *Solidarity* supporters, through Workers' Climate Action, were involved in this climate movement and opposing a third runway, while also supporting strikes of BA cabin crew based at Heathrow.

Nonetheless, in January 2009 the Labour government announced aims for a third runway on economic grounds. The tireless campaigning continued, and the plan was later scrapped by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010. Or so it seemed.

While recognising and committing, "no ifs, no buts", to honour the opposition to the third runway, the coalition government established an Airports Commission to consider London's supposed airport capacity problems. In 2015 this commission recommended a third runway at Heathrow.

In October 2016, Theresa May's government approved the third runway plan, against opposition even from some of her own MPs. Further opposition by activists and

in the courts has followed.

In June 2018, despite an upsurge of anti-expansion activism, the government got Parliamentary support for its plans by 415 votes to 119. Shamefully, while Labour's Corbyn leadership stated opposition to expansion, Labour MPs were given a free vote and many voted supported the government.

Challenges to expansion were dismissed by the high court in May 2019. However, on 27 February this year, a court of appeal delivered the more favourable verdict.

Boris Johnson has himself previously opposed Heathrow's third runway. Despite being a fair-weather climate sceptic, his opportunist political stances have sometimes fallen in our favour.

The Conservatives' 2019 election manifesto stated that:

"Parliament has voted in principle to support a third runway at Heathrow, but it is a private sector project. It is for Heathrow to demonstrate that it can meet its air quality and noise obligations, that the project can be financed and built and that the business case is realistic. The scheme will receive no new public money."

The court's verdict is the first major ruling in the world based on the Paris climate agreement, and may inspire similar attempts in the

UK and beyond.

Ultimately, the decision has not and will not be settled primarily in the courts. The political obstacles so far are down to widespread campaigning, winning large numbers of people to opposition, and so placing government and parliament under pressure.

The government may now abandon the runway, or draw up a new policy document to attempt to approve expansion. On the latter course of action, they may attempt to square the circle, or it may be possible to reconcile expansion with the comparatively weak Paris agreements. It is down to environmentalists and the labour movement to pressure them to abandon it.

Unite and GMB, two of the three biggest UK unions, two unions which represent many Heathrow workers, and two unions which have a lot of sway within the Labour Party, have consistently backed a third runway.

Continuing their attempt to square the circle, Unite's press office said following the latest court verdict that Unite are "urging the government to take immediate action to ensure that the planned construction of a third runway at Heathrow goes ahead, while ensuring the environment is fully

protected."

GMB National Officer Nadine Houghton is likewise "disappointed" in the verdict on the basis of jobs. She attempts to reassure us that "[l]ike everyone else, GMB members are very worried about climate change, but we would have held Heathrow Airport Ltd's feet to the fire on their target for zero carbon by the mid-2030s."

Members of these unions, and activists across the labour movement, must fight for serious environmental policies. A socialist Green New Deal would create many more good new jobs than a third runway; in any case, our movement cannot continue to take the conservative option of accepting the bosses' immediate plans for job creation when doing so drives climate change and with it net harm to our class.

We must counterpose to this: no third runway, an end to airport expansion, and policies to reduce flights.

We must also boldly champion worker-led transition of the transport industry. Jobs guarantees and retraining where necessary: expanding low cost, high quality, integrated, democratically run public transport, especially trains. □

## WORKERS' LIBERTY INVITES YOU TO... CLASS STRUGGLE ENVIRONMENTALISM

10.30-17.30, SAT 14 MARCH 2020

PARK VIEW SCHOOL  
WEST GREEN ROAD, LONDON, N15 3QR.

A day of workshops on how capitalism is the driver of environmental crises and what we can do to fight it.

Workshops on Marxist ecology for beginners; building local, changing the global; how to fight the fossil fuel industry; climate struggles in Australia; socialist strategies; food, forests, fighting climate catastrophe.

Tickets: £20 high waged, £8 low waged, £3 unwaged. £1 for school students from Eventbrite [bit.ly/cse-tickets](https://bit.ly/cse-tickets)

+ vegan food, second hand books, networking



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On Thursday 27 February, activists responding to a call "For Two States and Equal Rights", [bit.ly/2s-er](https://bit.ly/2s-er), protested near the Israeli Embassy in London against the Trump Plan and the threats by Israeli political leaders to annex large areas of the 80%-Palestinian West Bank.

The planned annexations would reduce the residual autonomy of the Palestinian cities, towns, and villages to that of disjointed patches of land surrounded by and completely dominated by areas claimed permanently for Israel.

We thought it urgent to get onto the streets before Israel's elections on 2 March, because annexation is likely to follow very fast after the election results are in.

As we go to press, Israel's long-standing right-wing prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has made slight gains, but with his established allies is still short of a majority. However, his main opponent, Benny Gantz of Blue and White, has already endorsed annexation of the Jordan Valley.

The turnout by Arab voters was markedly up, and the mostly-Arab Joint List came in as the third largest party. Palestinians living in Israel, and democratically-minded Israeli Jews, will continue fighting for two states and equal rights.

The Jewish-Arab movement Standing Together commented: "There are no shortcuts. What is needed after the elections is the hard work of building a grassroots movement from the bottom up. A Jewish-Arab people's movement that will transform Israel and create change. Where there is struggle, there is hope".

They need our active support. □



# Morning Star welcomes end of free movement



**Antidoto**

By Jim Denham

It is scarcely a secret that the biggest problem the *Morning Star* has with the Johnson government is that, on so many issues, they fundamentally agree.

On Brexit (preferably “no-deal”), nationalism, hostility to “liberalism”, “human rights” legislation, the “metropolitan elite” and “finance capital”, the *Star* (and its ideological masters, the Communist Party of Britain) sing from much the same hymn-sheet as Johnson and Cummings.

Yes, of course, the *Star* ritualistically denounces Johnson’s cruder forays into out-right racism and warns that the Tories can’t be trusted with workers’ rights; but that cannot hide the underlying political correlation – and, indeed thinly disguised admiration for his “boldness” and “unerring” political acumen.

Nowhere is this demonstrated more plainly than in the *Star*’s response to the ending of EU free movement and the introduction (from next January) of a “points-based” immigration policy that will (supposedly) end “unskilled” migration into Britain.

The MS has spent years claiming (on the basis of very little evidence) that free movement of labour drives down wages, so it was hardly surprising to read in an editorial (3 Feb) that the *Star* positively welcomes the ending of free movement: “Brexit means that our nation state is no longer bound by the free and often forced movement of labour that accompanies the EU’s free movement of capital.”

That phrase “often forced movement of labour” is worth interrogating: what exactly does the *Star* mean by it? The only possible understanding is that workers often feel “forced” to travel in order to find employment – something that applies to British workers relocating within the UK and which (as far as I’m aware) the *Star* has no objection to.

The same editorial proclaims “No human being is illegal” but then goes on to call for “a

non-racist migration policy that both serves our economic needs and meets our humanitarian obligations, but does not denude poorer nations of their skilled personnel”: which is exactly what the Tories say they are introducing and which, would of course, make any human being who slipped in without sufficient points... illegal.

## CONFUSED

The *Star*’s real dilemma over all this was at least partially revealed in a further editorial (20 Feb):

“It [the points-based system] is presented as a bid to help British workers, and bosses’ ability to undercut pay and conditions by bringing in cheap labour has been a key factor in creating the ‘bargain-basement’ economy, dominated by insecure work and poverty pay, that we see around us.”

Now, just read that paragraph again, and try to work out what it’s really saying: is the *Star* in agreement with the Tories’ proposition that their new immigration policy will “help British workers” and stop bosses “bringing in cheap labour”? Given the confused wording, it’s impossible to say, for

sure: but what we do know is that the *Star* believes immigration is a major factor in driving down wages, and has published articles (by no less an authority than Len McCluskey, complete with an out-of-context quote from Marx), arguing just that.

The 20 Feb editorial warns us that: “Posing as champions of the EU’s free movement model is likely to alienate as many people as it appeals to, since the government has shrewdly pointed out that when the new system kicks in non-EU immigrants will no longer be at a disadvantage ...”

I think we can read that word “shrewdly” as meaning “quite rightly”.

What the Tories are doing, of course, is extending to EU citizens the racist and oppressive policies they’ve long operated towards non-EU migrants – and (as far as can be judged) the *Star* thinks that’s progress!

The one unquestionably internationalist slogan the *Morning Star* has come out with, in the course of their recent coverage of immigration, were the words “No human being is illegal” – however, unfortunately, they should have added “but some are more legal than others.” □

## Fewer boons of HS2



**Letters**

There is a lot to agree with in Mark Catterall’s letter in *Solidarity* 536 - [bit.ly/hs2-mc](http://bit.ly/hs2-mc) - but I am less optimistic about the capacity argument for HS2.

High speed direct rail services between

major cities could help to free up congestion, but at this rate the second stage of HS2 could be completed somewhere between 2035 and 2040, far too late to have significant impact on carbon emissions and reduce the amount of freight and commuters moved by road.

And where will capacity will be freed up? As I read it HS2’s congestion relief to the WCML is compromised by the failure to provide interconnection with the WCML. Given

it will only run on two tracks, it cannot possibly serve all the cities in its zone of influence.

I agree about electrification of all existing railways. Back in 2011 Network Rail was investigating the complete electrification of the York to Hull line, but that was officially abandoned in 2016 by the then Rail Minister Paul Maynard. □

Simon Nelson, London

## Brown shoes don’t make it



**Letters**

In making the case that Bernie Sanders will not be the equivalent of George McGovern, Eric Lee paints a rather skewed over-favourable picture of Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), who was US President following Kennedy’s assassination and till 1969. (*How Sanders Wins*, *Solidarity* 536, [bit.ly/hsw-el](http://bit.ly/hsw-el)).

Johnson was president at a time of vigorous social agitation from below, and responded to the pressure with reforms, as conservative politicians sometimes have done. That doesn’t show that he was better than,

say, Britain’s 1908-16 Liberal prime minister H H Asquith, who also presided over reforms.

Eric mentions Johnson’s enacting of new voting rights and civil rights legislation, as well as the initiation of basic Medicare and the “war on poverty”. Missing is the fact that Johnson escalated the war in Vietnam and tried to suppress proper reporting of it.

Even leaving aside Vietnam, Johnson unlike Sanders showed no evidence of a particular personal commitment to civil rights. Under the pressure of the March on Washington in 1963 he was pressured into the Civil Rights Act, while still trying to keep many of the avowedly racist Southern Democrats onside.

He personally intervened to

support the denial of seats to the 64 delegates from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party who challenged the all white and avowedly segregationist Mississippi Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

The war on poverty did provide some federal support for new initiatives, but later he would take from those pots to plough more into Vietnam. Some initiatives like the Job Corps training were abject failures, with more than 25% of those who took part in it still out of work, though the same money invested could have paid for college tuition.

Between 1964 and 1968 unionisation in the US public sector

expanded by two million. Successful strikes against federal wage restraint helped to boost those incomes far more than the government assistance.

Another concern about equating Sanders with Johnson is that Johnson and his Vice Presidential nominee in 1968, Hubert Humphrey, raised huge sums from big business, far outstripping what Goldwater raised. Johnson was the safe pair of hands in that election.

Sanders has rightly eschewed corporate financing of his campaign. We want him to continue a stance that would make it impossible. □

Will Sefton, London

## Selina Todd and the Twitter storm

A social media storm broke out after a feminist conference in Oxford on 29 February asked Oxford University historian Selina Todd to hand over her two-minute opening address to a colleague, following threats by some speakers to boycott the event.

Todd is associated with Women’s Place UK, which was set up to oppose progressive reform of laws on transgender rights.

In a strange twist, WPUK types demanded the AWL immediately denounce the “disinvite”. But none of us even knew about the event, let alone had involvement in it!

And our position on such things is clear: we support trans rights, but oppose “disinvites”, boycotts, etc. on this issue because we favour dialogue.

But the radical feminist Twitter mob defending Todd made dialogue impossible. It is not normal communication to demand instant and pointless clarifications. Or to falsely accuse one feminist group at the event (Feminist Fightback) of being responsible for the disinvite.

Or to denounce those who wanted to stand up for trans rights (whatever the problems of method in doing so) in vile misogynistic and transphobic terms. □

• “Support trans people’s rights!”, motion passed at Workers’ Liberty conference 2018: [bit.ly/stpr18](http://bit.ly/stpr18)

• Workers’ Liberty 3/61: “Gender: the right to choose”. [bit.ly/g-rtc](http://bit.ly/g-rtc)



# Build unions, not borders!

## 6699 Editorial

The Tories have threatened to abandon talks with the European Union in June and spend the second half of the year preparing for a No Deal Brexit.

No expert thought it would be easy to get a UK-EU trade agreement even by the end of the year, when the transition period is due to end and Brexit really kicks in. Getting an agreement largely sorted by June will be that much more difficult. It looks like the Tories are trying to bluff the EU into concessions by a game of brinkmanship which could easily end in No Deal anyway.

The Tories have abandoned their earlier promises to maintain a "level playing field" on workers' rights, environmental standards, state aid and other issues, and are justifying themselves by noisily demanding full "sovereignty", i.e. the right to diverge from EU-mandated standards as they see fit.

Overwhelmingly, of course, the divergences will be in the direction of an even more neoliberal, anti-working class regime than exists at present.

It's all part of the same package as the Tories' plans to stop all immigration of so-called "unskilled" labour.

Against the nationalist drive of the To-

ries and their counterparts in other countries, the left must insist that economic and cultural flourishing, meaningful political democracy and social progress depend on the lowering of borders between countries and increased international links and solidarity.

Free movement of people is an essential part of all that, and of left-wing, pro-working class politics. Hostility to migrants is an essential part of the nationalist project and its hostility to the left and workers' interests.

At Labour Party conference 2019, after years of campaigning on the issues, socialists won strong policy to defend and extend free movement and migrants' rights. In the Labour leadership election, Keir Starmer and Lisa Nandy have said they support maintaining existing free movement, and Rebecca Long-Bailey has made positive noises about it.

As the general election result showed, adopting a left-wing policy does not automatically win wide support for it in society. Pro-migrant and pro-free-movement policies need to be systematically argued and campaigned for, particularly after years and decades when the vast bulk of campaigning has been on the other side.

Free movement should not just be defended, but extended. The increasing closedness and hostility of Europe to migration from outside has been the culture me-



dium in which far-right nationalist politics have grown so spectacularly.

The Turkish government has threatened to open its borders with the EU and allow masses of migrants from Syria to cross. Those migrants face being held as prisoners in concentration camps on Greek islands or in limbo while Turkey tries to extract more money from the EU.

Migrants should be welcomed and integrated into society. The most important mechanism to welcome and integrate migrants, and to make society capable of welcoming and integrating, is a strong working-class movement. Build unions, not

borders!

On 21 March, Workers' Liberty is co-sponsoring the "No borders" / "Free movement" bloc on the UN Antiracism Day march in London, organised by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and others: Join us there to say "Build unions not borders!" □

- The Free Movement/ No Borders bloc, sponsored by Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Labour for a Socialist Europe, Mutiny, Red Flag, Socialist Resistance, and Workers' Liberty, assembles 12 noon at Riding House Street/ Langham Place, London W1B 2QS.

## Get Labour on the streets

**S**olidarity is campaigning in the labour movement for the Labour Party to launch a concerted on-the-streets drive of demonstrations and mobilisations to demand: rebuild the NHS, save our schools, end austerity. Text to adapt for a motion to your CLP or union branch: [bit.ly/1-o-s](https://bit.ly/1-o-s) □

# Covid-19: the case for public spending and public ownership

## 6699 Editorial

Covid-19 is spreading. Spreading even faster, in the last week of February, was financial panic.

The Dow Jones share-price index in the USA went down 12% in the week ending 27 February, its biggest drop since 2008.

The first economic effects from a pandemic are in some ways the opposite of the usual beginning of a capitalist slump.

That usually begins with "overproduction" - when capitalists, vying each to outstrip the other in a boom, find they've increased capacity way beyond available market demand, and suddenly cut back on new investment.

With a pandemic there is instead a "supply shock", a disruption of production caused by factories supplying production inputs being

shut down.

That would happen with a pandemic even with a socialist economy. With capitalism, though, the "supply shock" can also trigger an economic crisis of the more usual capitalist sort, through a snowballing slump of demand as laid-off workers lose income and capitalists pause investment and luxury spending.

The labour movement should demand a crash increase in NHS funding to enable currently-overstretched hospitals and other facilities deal with the risks of the virus. By enabling hospitals to hire more staff, that increase in funding will also counteract economic slump.

Lisa Nandy, though in general she has positioned herself as the Labour leader candidate least wanting to "pick sides" against big business, has rightly demanded "emergency legislation to guarantee people the rights they deserve such as statutory sick pay

from day one for all workers regardless of income... Bosses should not put their profit margins ahead of public health and people need to be able to follow medical advice".

As it stands, workers get statutory sick pay of £94.25 per week only from the fourth day off, after three days unpaid.

Sick pay clauses in union collective agreements give sick pay more comparable to regular wages, and often from day one, though sometimes there is a twist with "attendance bonuses" which effectively make each month's full pay depend on no day off sick that month.

The labour movement should demand full sick pay across the board, no loss of bonuses, and no loss of Universal Credit for claimants "self-isolating" over Covid-19.

We should also demand a crash restoration of funding to local authorities, which will need to deal with much of the social fallout if the virus spreads widely.

The first answer to a financial and credit crash triggered by a spread of the virus is public ownership and democratic control of high finance. □

## Democracy in the labour movement

**P**olicy-making in the labour movement should be the property of conference and duly-elected committees, not of a designated "Leader" and their "Leader's Office" handing down announcements.

To push back the Tories week-by-week, and to build a movement which can get the Tories voted out, we need to get a real democracy-from-below in the labour movement, and to clear away the very large Blair-era elements still in Labour Party and union structures. See [bit.ly/d-l-m](https://bit.ly/d-l-m) for our proposals. □



# UCU: how to continue after Easter

By a UCU activist

As I write, negotiations with the employers are ongoing, and we're told they're "constructive", but we have no further detail beyond that.

Greater transparency in these negotiations is essential; rank-and-file members of the union need the right to scrutinise and assess what the employer is putting on the table, and collectively decide how to respond.

Lively pickets are being organised in many places, but on the whole the pickets since 24 February seem smaller than the October-November 2019 strikes, and than the USS pension strikes in 2018. Some branches are strategically deciding not to picket every day, in some places because they're conscious that workers can't afford to live close to their institutions and travelling in to picket is a financial burden to people already losing money due to being on strike.

But ways need to be found around this, whether that's via agreed picket duties allowing people to rotate, or using hardship funds to pay for travel expenses. Allowing pickets to dwindle, or become token pres-

ences, will suggest to the employer that the strike is weakening, and relieve pressure on them to offer a new settlement.

Most fundamentally, solid picketing on every strike day means maximising the possibility of persuading fellow workers, and students, not to cross, therefore maximising the disruption of the strike.

In the 2018 strike, the union leadership wanted to call off action to ballot on an extremely shoddy offer. A big factor in what stopped them was that lively and well-attended picket lines acted as spaces for collective discussion, and a strong rank-and-file pushback to the leadership's strategy developed, which eventually forced them to change course and prevented the demobilisation of the strike at that point.

Without something similar now, it becomes much easier for the union leadership to construct an unsatisfactory exit strategy from the dispute. That's not to suggest they're consciously looking to engineer a sell out, but seeing the dispute through requires continual pressure from below, even on leaders whose hearts may be in the right place.

After the next set of strikes, things become

more difficult. The Easter break, when many staff will take leave or be away from campus, will necessarily slow things down. Unions should look to organise local actions, such as meetings and demonstrations, to keep as many people mobilised as possible, but some loss of momentum is almost inevitable.

The question is, how can we ramp things back up and escalate after Easter, when we move into exam seasons, with schedules varying across different institutions?

## DISRUPT EXAMS

The aim must be to disrupt exams. None of us will relish the impact this will have on our students, but the nature of the work we do means this is where we have most leverage. We must look to call action that will disrupt the exams themselves, and the period of marking afterwards.

The AUT, one of UCU's predecessor unions, called a marking boycott in 2006. It was fairly effective, and would've been even more so if the union leadership hadn't called it off prematurely. Since then, a precedent has been set whereby many institutions view boycotts as a form of strike, and will dock

full pay. We have to be prepared for that, but not intimidated by it.

A national programme of selective and rolling strikes, with dates determined by input from local branches depending on what would be more disruptive in their particular institutions, targeting exam days themselves, with an ongoing marking boycott in between strike days, could be a next step.

That might seem like a de-escalation following two rounds of all-out national strikes, but if it was planned and executed effectively it could be an escalation in terms of the impact of the action.

For strikes on exam days to be effective would require solid pickets, as well attended as possible, that made a real effort to prevent students and other workers from crossing. Exams are often administered by non-academic staff who aren't in UCU.

Appeals not to undermine the strike should be made to them, both directly via picket lines and via the local campus organisations of unions such as Unison, Unite, and GMB. □

## Regaining strike momentum

By a Cambridge UCU member

After the first two weeks of picketing in the UCU "Four Fights" dispute, the number of activists and people on the pickets has remained almost static.

Whilst we're evidently not losing momentum, we're not noticeably gaining it either. This is down by approximately a half compared with the 2018 USS pensions strike; somewhat disappointing for a union that grew during this period by over 16% nationally, and by

more than 80% in Cambridge.

Whilst we haven't seen a proportional increase in organisers, the strike has allowed members to lay better foundations for longer-term union building. A number of people have stepped up to help organise their departments and become active reps, and importantly in the case of some traditionally poorer unionised faculties, such as Neuroscience, Astronomy, and Physics.

Whilst building short-term strikes and long-term sustainable branches require different approaches, I'm optimistic that the strike has at the very least activated

the union in parts of the university most in need.

Cambridge University remains one of just 5 out of 150-plus UCU branches in the UK that aren't yet recognised by their employer. Having active departmental reps in every department and faculty will strengthen the case to change this, and should be a priority campaign locally irrespective of the outcome of this round of strikes.

There will soon be a long break between academic terms, and the strike ballot runs out in May. It isn't clear that a re-ballot now would break the 50% threshold in

as many institutions as it did in October, and a poor result would be a major gift to our opposition.

Time really is running out. Member morale is being tested, with many hoping for even a slight improvement in the current offer (rightly rejected by the negotiating team) that would halt our action.

This shouldn't be an excuse for members to accept weak half-measures, but a call for action. If we were serious about winning, we could do this tomorrow.

With over 1600 members and well over 100 committed activists in Cambridge alone, staff occupa-

tions and direct action would force the hand of local management to intervene nationally. It wouldn't take more than a handful of UCU branches to do this before the balance of forces shifted vastly in our favour.

This spells the need for both local organisers to call for heightened disruption, and for a national UCU rank and file network prepared to coordinate militant activists to take these steps in a joined-up manner. □

## Salford, Liverpool, and Tower Hamlets

By Martin Thomas

On 26 February, Paul Dennett, the Labour mayor of Salford, announced that "for the first year since 2010/11... Salford Council has managed to set a no cuts budget after nine debilitating years of Tory-Lib-Dem and Tory cuts, which have taken £211 million or 53% of central government funding out of Salford".

This is surely a good move, and some of the credit must go to campaigning over years by unions and community groups in Salford.

Steve North, Salford branch secretary of the local government workers' union Unison, writing in a personal capacity for *Socialist Alternative*, says: "The most significant step taken was in 2018, when the mayor and his council colleagues abandoned plans to close five threatened council-run day nurseries and instead campaigned with trade unions, parents, carers and the wider community to fight for the requisite resources to keep them open.

"Words were turned into deeds, which saw over 1,000 people march in support of the joint campaign, of which the council were part. Chants that would previously have been directed towards the council, were instead directed towards the government".

The other background to this move is the government's decision about central funding for local councils for the year 2020-1. Feeling, probably, that they had too many other problems to worry about, the Tories increased "core funding" in line with inflation.

That move did not reverse the cuts on the last decade. It did not - reopen the libraries, the children's centres, and the other facilities closed. Nor did it prompt the local government employers to offer more than 2% pay rise to council workers in 2020-1, despite their average 22% loss in real wages since 2009.

But it meant that there is no rigid pressure from central funding cuts onto local councils. Where councils have made cuts nevertheless, that will be because they want

to increase reserves, because they want to improve their financial position for 2021-2 and later years, because they are "rolling forward" cuts plans already made, or because they want to cut one area in order to boost another.

## HEROIC?

So the declaration on 30 January by Joe Anderson, the Labour mayor of Liverpool, was less heroic than it seems.

"I will refuse to make any further cuts to our budget because we are now at the stage where doing so will mean closing down vital services".

That's good, but it can almost certainly be done by adjustments within the financial framework set for the council by the government. Over February Anderson has given no sign of organising any great mobilisation or confrontation.

Some Labour councils, however, are continuing cuts-minded policies.

In Tower Hamlets, East London, the local National Education Union (NEU) and Uni-

son branches have returned huge majorities for strikes, on big turnouts, and the GMB branch is also balloting, with its ballot due to close on 4 March.

They are resisting a scheme called "Tower Rewards", which the Labour council threatens to impose on workers from April.

The scheme is essentially about pushing Tower Hamlets workers down to the minima set by the national "green book", and eliminating better conditions which have been won there over the years, especially on severance payments.

Like other councils, Tower Hamlets is under no strong pressure from central government to make redundancies in 2020-1, but seems nevertheless intent to push through its scheme in order to ease redundancies in later years.

Activists will argue for solidarity with the Tower Hamlets unions, and for the labour movement to set plans to win a good pay rise for council workers, end further cuts, and start to restore some of the services lost in the last decade. □





## The UCU's "four fights"

The UCU's "four fights" are:

- pay
- workload
- equality
- casualisation

The main demands on pay are for an increase of Retail Price Index plus 3%, £10 per hour minimum for in-house staff, and Foundation Living Wage (£9 per hour outside London, £10.55 in London) for outside contractors.

On workload, a 35 hour week.  
On equality, action to close the gender and ethnic pay gaps.  
On casualisation, demands include: end zero-hours contracts; transfer hourly-paid staff to fractional contracts; take outsourced staff back in house; give postgraduate teaching assistants guaranteed hours and proper employee contracts. □

• UCU strike bulletin, by Workers' Liberty activists in UCU: [bit.ly/ucu-b](http://bit.ly/ucu-b)

## Students back the strikes

By Maisie Sanders

Thirteen students at Stirling University who were suspended for taking part in last term's occupation in support of the strike by university staff union have won their first victory – they will not now be made homeless!

They had been told that their suspension would mean losing their accommodation. The win is a result of pressure being put on the University by supporters.

On 26 February Edinburgh students occupied in support of the strikes and adding a further demand to "end the hostile environment on campus affecting international staff and students". A campaign of misinformation, including by the *Tab* newspaper, sought to undermine the occupation, claiming students were being blocked from using the occupied building as study space.

In fact the occupation aimed only to disrupt classes, to strengthen the strike. The *Tab* is on the wrong side in this dispute.

Students across the country must help step up the pressure and demand the right to protest.

Another form of attack on student organising is cuts to student union budgets. Sussex Uni student union have been told their budget will be cut by 5-10% despite growing student numbers.

The UCU branch at Goldsmiths (University of London) is now officially in dispute with management over proposed 15% cuts, including possible redundancies, and re-

structuring which will take decision-making away from academic departments. This is being pushed through under the ridiculously named "Evolving Goldsmiths" plan.

The Student Union, which has been actively supporting the UCU strike, has said it will take action alongside campus unions.

Although everywhere across the country student solidarity groups are beginning to develop – holding open planning meetings, encouraging students to attend pickets, organising direct action, helping put on teach-outs – this will need to quickly grow and strengthen.

Immediately those groups have vital work to help convince students not to cross picket lines, to build rallies, and to help strengthen this stage of the UCU's dispute. In the longer run they will need to organise to oppose future cuts, attacks on democratic rights, redundancies, future casualisation and the restructuring of higher education.

Cambridge students are now occupying the Old Schools management building. Student Strike Solidarity is calling for students to escalate solidarity actions with occupations and blockades of management offices and to help make the picket lines huge as negotiations take place on the UCU's Four Fights.

Student Strike Solidarity is planning a national meet-up to discuss the ongoing battles. Send a direct message to SSS via Facebook [bit.ly/f-sss](http://bit.ly/f-sss) to find out more. □

## A case for a rank-and-file network

By Camila Bassi

My perspective and participation in the national dispute over pay deflation, casualisation, excessive workloads, and the gender and BAME pay gaps has very much been shaped by our local industrial dispute at Sheffield Hallam university over workload intensification and stress.

Without a doubt, what pushed our branch over the legal threshold in the national dispute was the 84.4% mandate in the local dispute – a dispute that has built up over a long time. Through the lens of the local struggle, our members have easily drawn the connections and seen the holistic picture: linking rising workloads and unpaid work, pay inequality and deflation, and runaway levels of precarious employment, to a university sector ravaged by market forces – and said, "we've been the shock absorbers for a broken system, no more!"

Our local dispute has been directed by our well-attended branch meetings, our democratic sovereign body. Our branch committee of elected officers and reps has run the day-to-day of the dispute and formed our strike committee for the first eight days of action. We made this strike committee open to all members in the run up to these 14 days of action.

The organic development and participation of a collective of student activists called Hallam Students Support the Strike has added a critical dimension and point of leverage to our struggle: organising impressive solidarity action on the picket lines and through social media, and gaining us important national media coverage.

At present, we are putting the latest offer from management to members. While it's not what we asked for, our negotiators suggest that it's as close to a maximum of what the employer will actually offer right now. What we have learnt is that every time the employer has said they cannot offer more, and we have run and won an indicative ballot for action, run and won a legal ballot for action, taken strike action, taken further strike action, each and every time, the employer has moved. Class organisation and struggle works.

Every time a local member has faced bullying management during this dispute, once they have told us, as a branch we have had their back. With no exceptions, management have backed down. What's more, we've grown our branch to record numbers.

At the rank and file level, we have never been as confident and organised as we are

now. This dispute has brought to the fore new faces, new energy, new confidence. We recognise now that part of the reason we have ended up in a crisis situation of workload intensification – apart from, most decisively, the forces of sector-wide marketisation – is that we as staff and union members have sleepwalked into it. Our silence has been effective complicity.

If the latest offer from management is accepted by our members, we recognise this moment as the beginning of a genuine, rank-and-file struggle. We are planning to expand the number and activity of Health and Safety Reps, using Health and Safety legislation as a point of education, agitation, organisation and leverage; carrying out regular stress surveys, for instance, publicising the findings, applying pressure on management, further growing the union.

Before this industrial dispute, we had members who have never been on strike before and members disillusioned by previous national strike action called for odd days and hours in months like June when we are no longer teaching. What this local dispute has taught all of us is, if we organise properly, from the rank-and-file, we move forward, we gain. We're taking that lesson forward now.

Our experience locally demonstrates the critical need for a national rank-and-file network. The 2018 USS pensions dispute developed forms of such a network, but specific to the pre-92 sector. What we need doesn't preclude what already works and exists.

The formal, bureaucratic structures of the union itself should open up and extend towards the grassroots to enable a rank-and-file network across the pre- and post-92 HE sector and FE sector. Not only to horizontally share lessons in class organisation, but also to understand how the local vertically connects with what is happening nationally.

For my branch, the disconnect is vast. We have no national negotiators in our branch, unlike our UCU comrades up the road, and have been relying on a daily basis on social media and hearsay to decipher what might be happening nationally. Demanding a rank-and-file network goes hand-in-hand with democratically opening the national union.

Practically, that would mean the live-streaming of national negotiations, which would promote accountability and democratic steer from local branches, and provide a clear sense on the ground of why we are or should be on the picket lines. □

• Camila Bassi is UCU branch chair at Sheffield Hallam university, writing here in a personal capacity.

## Left challenge in NUS

By Maisie Sanders

I will be standing for the full-time position of Vice President Higher Education, in National Union of Students (NUS) elections next month. In that election I will be the only distinctly socialist left candidate, with a clear commitment to support the UCU dispute and to take a clear political stand against marketisation as well as push for piecemeal student demands.

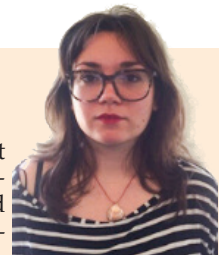
Most (but not all) of the candidates across three full-time officer positions are generally leftist, with good commitments, to, for example, restoring free education, closing

the BAME attainment gap, improving mental health services and tackling sexual violence.

However, the emphasis is on professional expertise rather than an activist orientation.

Larissa Kennedy, standing for President, is an leftist activist candidate, but she gives no commitment to reversing wide-ranging anti-democratic reforms in NUS which have left the organisation with just three full-time officer positions and a toothless National Scrutiny Council. □

• Manifesto: [bit.ly/ms-vphe](http://bit.ly/ms-vphe)





# The story of the Polish workers



## Book review

By Eduardo Tovar

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the founding of *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the Polish independent trade union, at what was then the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. *Solidarność* both emerged from and provided the organisational infrastructure for the mass strikes of August 1980.

This intense period of struggle thrust strike leaders like Lech Wałęsa and Anna Walentynowicz into the international limelight. With the signing of the Gdańsk Agreement on 31 August 1980, *Solidarność* became the first independent union to be recognised by a Warsaw Pact country.

At its height in September 1981, *Solidarność* boasted a membership of 10 million, representing a third of the entire working-age population of Poland. It proved on a larger scale than Hungary 1956 or East Germany 1953 the ability of the working class to organise against the fake-socialist regimes of the Eastern Bloc; shook the foundations of the bureaucratic empire in the USSR and Eastern Europe; and left the structure shaky enough to be brought down by the surges from below in 1989-91, after the USSR's debacle in Afghanistan and the failure of attempts to escape economic "stagnation".

In his new book *Solidarność: The Workers' Movement and the Rebirth of Poland in 1980-81*, Mark Osborn provides a short and accessible overview of the developments that culminated in *Solidarność*'s birth. He also lucidly explains the dramatic events of 1980-81 themselves, which ended with *Solidarność* being forced underground by Wojciech Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law in December 1981.

In Poland, more so than in other East European countries where Stalinist parties had at least some pre-1945 base of support, the "Communist" rulers "were aware they were a beleaguered minority imposed by a hated foreign power". That prevented them from ever achieving complete totalitarianism (p. 9). Even in the period of High Stalinism, the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, "PZPR") could neither subjugate the Church nor collectivise private agriculture.

All independent working-class organisation or free speech was banned, but Polish cultural and political life had a higher degree of autonomy than elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Those conditions facilitated the further laying of long-term foundations for *Solidarność*. Stepping-stones were the 1956 Poznań uprising, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski's 1964 "Open Letter to the Party", the 1968 student revolt, the 1970 and 1976 strikes over price increases, and the 1976 founding of the Workers' Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników,

"KOR").

Throughout his historical overview, Osborn provides a running critical commentary from a Third Camp socialist perspective, drawing out both positive and negative lessons for today's political left and organised labour movement. This critical commentary is bolstered by the appendices, which include pieces published by *Socialist Organiser* (a predecessor of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty*) in the 1980s and Stan Crooke's summary of political developments in Poland from the 1981 coup to the present day.

*Solidarność* has degenerated tragically. The political balance within it shifted to the right when it was underground between 1981 and 1988. Today the union has only 5% of the membership numbers it had in 1980. It is caught in "the political slipstream of right-wing populism" (p. 100).

The positive lessons Osborn draws out from the experience of *Solidarność* include the wide circulation of an oppositionist press amongst organised workers (including the KOR's periodical *Robotnik*), the creation of regional Inter-factory Committees confederated into a delegate-based National Commission, the rank-and-file's successful push to prevent Wałęsa from ending the Gdańsk strike on 16 August 1980, and the live broadcasting of the negotiations in the Lenin Shipyard via the PA system.

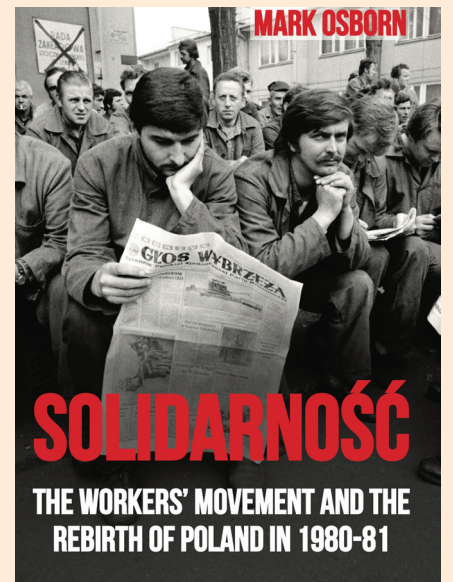
## LESSONS

The negative lessons include *Solidarność*'s unwillingness to make a direct challenge to the PZPR's right to rule and, by extension, its unwillingness to take power. One sees this from how, strong though many of the famous 21 Demands of August 1980 were (e.g. the right to strike, paid maternity leave), *Solidarność* made little in the way of specifically political demands, e.g. the freedom to form independent workers' parties, or democratic control over the administrative apparatus.

The omission is especially noticeable when one bears in mind that the left-wing intellectuals Kuroń and Modzelewski, who were crucial to *Solidarność*'s founding and direction, had previously placed such political demands front and centre in their "Open Letter to the Party".

To Osborn, much of *Solidarność*'s reluctance stemmed from how its hybrid nature as "[p]art union, part network of workers' councils, and part political movement" was not conducive to sharpening and resolving internal differences on an explicitly political basis (p. 65). Moreover, Kuroń and his co-thinkers had drifted towards a strategy of "self-limiting revolution" out of fear that, if *Solidarność* were to engage in party politics directly or seize power outright, the Soviet Union would respond with military force.

The fear was understandable in light of the Russian invasions that crushed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968. Nevertheless, as Osborn points out, at the height of *Solidarność*'s power in 1981, the Russian military was bogged down in



**A new history of *Solidarność* from its dawn until the 1981 military coup. £5 + post. [workersliberty.org/solidarnosc](http://workersliberty.org/solidarnosc)**

an extremely costly war in Afghanistan, and wary of the American reaction that an invasion of Poland might provoke (p. 67).

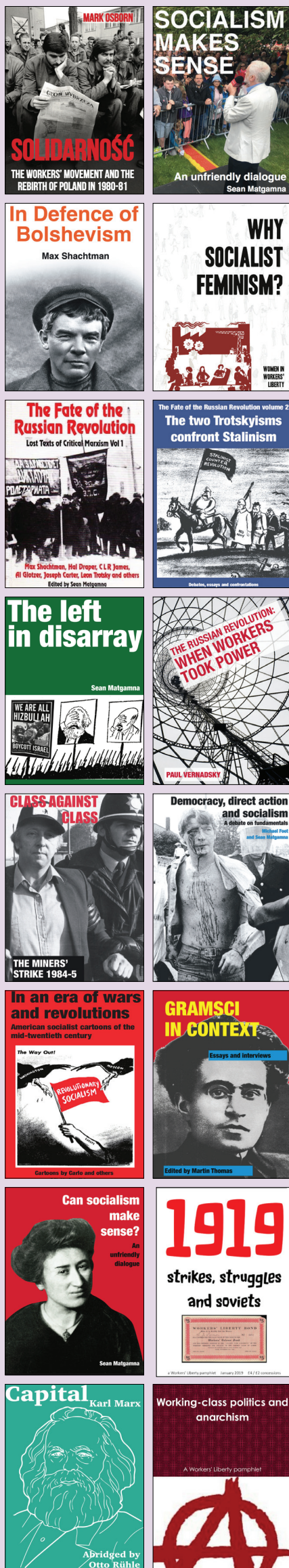
Even in 1956, Polish troops successfully blocked a Soviet armoured column advancing on Warsaw, prompting Khrushchev to back down rather than risk triggering an armed conflict.

Moreover, by seeing themselves as having to make some degree of compromise with the Stalinist party-state and viewing Jaruzelski (who would lead the 1981 military coup) as an officer who could be trusted, Wałęsa and the other national leaders of *Solidarność* severely underestimated the party-state's systematic inability to accept opposition to its rule and left the workers' movement vulnerable to that 1981 coup.

At the time, the influence of Stalinism and the resulting "Second Campist" support for the Soviet Union led some sections of the British left to dismiss *Solidarność* as little more than a front for the CIA or the Catholic Church. A broader section of the labour movement was pro-*Solidarność* in a tepid, passive "yes-but-on-the-other-hand" way.

When Jaruzelski shipped coal to Thatcher to help her counter the British miners' strike in 1984-5, that shifted perceptions, but too late. Still today there are some on the left who look fondly on the police states of the Eastern Bloc as a historically progressive alternative to capitalism.

By writing such a readable introduction that acknowledges *Solidarność*'s pitfalls without losing sight of its major significance as a story of working-class courage and organisation in the face of repression, Osborn has done us a tremendous service. □



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# Open the borders for Syrian refugees!

By Pete Boggs

For a long time, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been "threatening" to open Turkey's western borders, and allow the millions of refugees to travel to Europe.

Now he is upping the threats and raising the stakes. His aim is not to get better conditions for the refugees. It is to force Europe into greater support of Turkey.

Yet, with the renewed attacks on migrants, it is the responsibility of socialists all across Europe to challenge the racist anti-immigration laws being put forward by our governments.

In Britain the losses have far outnumbered the victories as Home Secretary Priti Patel tightens up restrictions under the direction of the hard-right Tory government. Even before Brexit the UK was one of the most restrictive countries in Europe for Syrian refugees. The UK had admitted only 10,600 refugees by late 2018, while Germany had admitted 770,000 and Sweden over 120,000. Now Patel wants to add extra fences and barriers.

Even the global total of the refugees from Syria, maybe six million, makes an entirely manageable number for Europe's relatively wealthy countries, with a total population over 500 million, to integrate. These refugees deserve a welcome and a chance to rebuild their lives, not barbed wire and persecution.

Turkey holds maybe four million refugees from Syria, and many more people are seeking to flee from formerly rebel-held areas of Syria now under attack from the Assad regime.

In March 2016 a deal came into effect between the EU and Turkey to hold the refugees in Turkey, in return for a payout from the EU to Turkey which was supposed to help provide maintenance for the refugees. Turkey helped to police the borders, and anyone found to have entered the EU through Turkey without having already undergone a formal asylum application process would be returned to Turkey.

Now thousands of people have attempted to gain access to Greece: at least 500 people have arrived at Greek islands including Lesbos. According to the UN at least 13,000 people were preparing to make border crossings on the weekend 29 February / 1 March.

Greece's response to this has been unwelcoming and violent. All international phone numbers in the vicinity of the border received a text from the government: "From the Hellenic Republic: Greece is increasing



border security to level maximum, do not attempt to illegally to cross the border."

They have cancelled all asylum applications at least for the next month, and fully armoured riot police have fired tear gas. Already one child has died when a dinghy capsized.

Erdoğan's response to the migrant crisis, allowing millions of refugees from Syria into Turkey at a time when Europe has been beating up asylum-seekers and turning back boats in the Mediterranean, looks humane by comparison. However, refugees in Turkey have been banned from working, and restricted to specific areas which are often lacking in basic infrastructure. Ultimately they have been used as a political pawn.

In the Turkish state's existential war against the Kurds (existential for the Kurdish people, that is) Syrian refugees have been forcibly and often violently resettled in north-eastern Syria as part of an attempt to change the predominantly-Kurdish nature of the region.

This latest episode of talk of opening the borders with the EU has also shown how the AKP will carry out its political plays at the expense of refugees' safety and lives.

Erdoğan has revelled in taunting Europe with the threat of sending more refugees up against barbed-wire fences and truncheons of Fortress Europe. Süleyman Soylu, the AKP Interior Minister, tweeted the unsubstantiated claim that 76,385 have left Turkey through Edirne, which borders Greece and Bulgaria.

EU member states are not very squeamish about carrying out the brutalisation of migrants themselves, but for the most part their preferred method has been to outsource that work to authoritarian leaders, such as Sudan's Omar Bashir and Turkey's Erdoğan.

The deal with Turkey has been nowhere

near as bloody as the Khartoum Process in Sudan and the broader Horn of Africa, where Libyan and Sudanese authorities have captured and tortured refugees. However, it still demonstrates the unwillingness of Europe to accommodate refugees, and their willingness of EU states to deport those who manage to slip through the cracks.

The background to all this is the beginning of full-scale conflict between Turkey and Syria, and a developing new surge of refugees seeking to flee across the Syria-Turkey border.

## ESCALATION

What had previously been limited to sporadic violence largely carried out through proxies has seriously escalated.

As I write on 2 March, about 100 pro-Assad soldiers (whether government troops or from other forces such as Hezbollah) have been killed in the last few days, following the death of 33 Turkish soldiers in the Idlib Governorate.

The big question for both powers is Russia, and what Putin will decide. Ostensibly, Russia is the central concern diplomatically for Syria and Turkey.

Since the coup which brought Hafez al-Assad to power in 1971, Russia has effectively acted as an overlord for Syria. That status has given Russia the warm-water port of Tartus, one of its few ports other than Sevastopol which are ice-free throughout the entire year, and its only access to the Mediterranean Sea. In return Putin has dutifully defended Bashar al-Assad, vetoing UN sanctions on Syria during the civil war, and Russian air support has been an important part of the war effort.

The situation is more complicated for Turkey. Putin and Erdoğan have been on opposing sides in conflicts in Syria and Libya,

yet have consistently presented themselves as working together to bring peace to these areas. The TurkStream pipeline has been built as a joint project, bringing Russian national gas to Turkey and beyond to southern Europe.

Since the renewed fighting in and around Idlib, both Turkey and Russia have been more and more antagonistic towards one another, at least in words. Russia has said it cannot guarantee the safety of Turkish planes if they are flying over Idlib. It says that, when asked, Turkey refused to say where Turkish troops were so that Russia could exempt from attacks or push Assad to exempt them.

Turkey, on the other hand, says that they did give Russia this information, and holds Russia responsible for the deaths of Turkish soldiers in Idlib. As of yet, it is unclear whether any of the Turkish casualties have been directly caused by Russian forces.

The situation might become clearer after Thursday 5 March, when Erdoğan will visit Moscow.

The situation at home for Erdoğan is not disastrous, but it is not good either. The Republican People's Party (CHP), the secular nationalist opposition to Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), has made noises against the war and criticised the government over the deaths of "martyred" soldiers. However, only the left-wing and Kurdish-linked People's Democracy Party (HDP) has been able to bring itself to vote against the government's most recent parliamentary motion authorising the war.

The government has further tightened restrictions on social media since the end of February, and temporarily detained the editor-in-chief of Sputnik (a Russian-government funded news outlet) in Turkey. □

# Trump visit triggers anti-Muslim violence

By Matt Cooper

Late February saw an outbreak of anti-Muslim violence in New Delhi, the urban area around the Indian capital.

Although reports vary, they suggest forty-three dead and many hundreds hospitalised. Muslim homes, businesses and mosques were attacked, burned, and destroyed. Most of the dead and injured were Muslim.

The trigger for the attack was President Trump's visit to the city. On Sunday 26 February, a local leader of India's governing party, the Hindu-chauvinist BJP, Kapil Mishra, speaking at a rally, demanded that police clear protests in the city against the BJP's Citizenship (Amendment) Act before

Trump's visit ended. The CAA is part of a drive to deny Muslims Indian citizenship if they can't produce adequate paperwork, as many poorer people in India can't.

Mishra particularly focused on the women's Shaheen Bagh protests, occupying an arterial road in New Delhi. He stated that if the police would not move the demonstrators, then his mob would.

That came after the BJP's campaign in the election for the local Delhi legislative assembly early in February. Although the BJP hold the national seats in Delhi, local power is held by the anti-corruption Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The AAP is non-sectarian and has broadly social-democratic welfare policies, although it is socially conservative.

The BJP's campaign in the election attempted to ramp up scapegoating against

the minority Muslim population, calling them traitors and anti-Indian. The BJP failed to make major inroads into the AAP's local support - the BJP increased its vote from 32% to 39%, but the AAP won more than half the vote and most of the seats in the local assembly - but the campaign did stoke up anti-Muslim feeling.

The mob that the BJP whipped up went on the rampage on Sunday 23 February, and included members of the right-wing Hindu Sena (the "Hindu Army"). Armed with iron bars, chains, knives and some fire arms, they attacked not only the anti-CAA demonstration but Muslim neighbourhoods.

The police (controlled by the central state, not locally) stood by, and there are some reports that they joined in the attacks. Shops were ransacked, people dragged from their

homes and beaten, pregnant women were kicked to the ground.

As well as the dead, one hospital has seen more than 500 injured including knife and gunshot wounds, acid burns and mutilated genitalia. There was no official action against the attacks for days.

Only on 26 February did the BJP prime minister, Narendra Modi, call for calm and send in paramilitary police to restore the semblance of order.

The BJP has benefited from the collapse since 2014 of the sclerotic and corrupt Congress Party, which had been India's major ruling party since independence. It is imperative that socialists and working class activists build a secular alternative to Modi and the BJP. □



# To bring revolution "d

By Eduardo Tovar

The socialist activist and scholar Robert Fine, who passed away on 9 June 2018 at the age of 72, was a long-time sympathiser and sometime activist with Workers' Liberty.

Our series of book reviews to commemorate Fine continues with *Political Investigations: Hegel, Marx, Arendt* (Routledge 2001).

Karl Marx (1818-83) was the first writer to integrate socialist politics with comprehensive and well-documented theories of economics and history. Most working-class socialists since his time have regarded themselves as Marxists to one degree or another, and by now most of us vehemently reject the idea that the so-called "Marxism" of the Stalinist states had anything to do with Marx's real legacy.

G W F Hegel (1770-1831) was the most influential philosopher of the tradition which developed, starting with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), on the basis of the Enlightenment and the rise of science and of liberal politics. Marx in the early 1840s was part of a group known as the "young Hegelians".

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) was a political philosopher who spent her youth in Germany but wrote most of her best-known books after fleeing from the Nazis to the USA. She was broadly associated with the left and with Zionism, but a dissident and maverick in both contexts.

Fine argues that reading Hegel, Marx, and Arendt together offers insights into "the common concerns they confront - the spectres of both freedom and barbarism by which the modern world is haunted" (p. 2). To Fine, this approach "allows us to see the relation between the subjective forms of right and the objective forms of the commodity as two

sides of a single social order" (p. 4).

Although Fine pays considerable respect to both Hegel and Marx, he gives additional praise to Arendt because, in Fine's view, "no one has more subtly elaborated both the potentiality for barbarism and the possibilities of freedom that arise out of modern political life", thereby "[picking] up the mantle of Hegel and Marx far more than is currently recognised". (p. 4)

## THEMES

In my view, *Political Investigations* represents a further exploration of several themes on Marxism, Stalinism, and anti-Stalinism he discussed in his Workers' Liberty article *The Poverty of Anti-Stalinism* ([bit.ly/p-astal](http://bit.ly/p-astal)).

In that 1990 article, Fine raised several related concerns. Firstly, he was concerned about his fellow anti-Stalinist Marxists making shallow criticisms of Stalinism simply for being insufficiently anti-capitalist (such as in its "right" turns towards class-collaborationist Popular Fronts) rather than recognising how Stalinism could be militantly anti-capitalist in its own right while still being deeply reactionary. Secondly, he was concerned about simply counterposing Stalinism to either the abstract idea of socialism or its ideal realisation rather than positively reformulating our understanding of socialism in light of our critique of Stalinism. In Fine's words:

"Marxism cannot be defined negatively; it is neither simply the negation of bourgeois forms of social life nor is it simply the negation of Stalinism. The slogan of 'anti-capitalism, anti-Stalinism' may be a useful starting point for socialists, but is no substitute for the positive reformulation of Marxism." (Fine 1990: 155)

Fine's point here about Marxism being more than simply the negation of bourgeois forms of social life also suggests a deeper thematic continuity between *Political Investigations*, *The Poverty of Anti-Stalinism*, and his previous writings on *Democracy and the Rule of Law: Marx's Critique of the Legal Form* (Blackburn Press 2002 [1984]). In the latter book, Fine sought to combat two "equally mistaken" characterisations of what Marx thought about law: one in which Marxism appears as little more than an extension of liberalism and another in which Marxism appears as little more than a negation of liberalism.

Fine did this by trying to understand Marx in relation to previous political and legal thinkers, including Hegel. This also reflects Fine's broader interest in bringing questions of normativity back into the academic discipline of sociology, which often views itself as exclusively concerned with narrowly defined empirical research.

Trying to gain a more complete perspective on Marx by going back to Hegel is not itself anything new. Perhaps the most famous Marxist writer on the methodological significance of Hegelian dialectics is G.V. Plekhanov, who in 1891 observed that "Hegel's importance in the social sciences is determined first and foremost by the fact that he considered all their phenomena from the standpoint of the process...of coming into being... i.e., from the standpoint of their appearance and their disappearance".

Similarly, much is often made of Lenin's 1915 aphorism that "[i]t is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having

thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic." György Lukács, the Frankfurt School, Raya Dunayevskaya, C L R James, and other "Hegelian Marxists" have made varied attempts reconceptualise Marxism by drawing on Hegel's writings. There have also been attempts to bring Hegel back into the foreground of social theory in general, perhaps most notably Gillian Rose's seminal book *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1983).

In his own re-evaluation of Hegel, Fine focuses on Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821: the title could also be translated as "philosophy of law"). Fine begins by outlining the different orthodoxies in interpreting Hegel. There was an old orthodoxy which started with Rudolf Haym in the mid-19th century, became popular with English-language writers during the World Wars, and was further pushed by Karl Popper after 1945. That saw Hegel as a forerunner of totalitarian ideology, someone who "elevates the state into an object of divine worship and debases the individual into a superfluous and expendable 'moment' of the state" (p. 5).

A newer orthodoxy (Fine cites Allen Wood and Shlomo Avineri: more recently, for example, Terry Pinkard) stresses how embedded in the liberal tradition many elements of Hegel's "rational state" are. These elements include "individual rights, the rule of law, trial by jury, a written constitution, a relatively autonomous civil society, the separation of church and state, etc." (p. 8).

Nevertheless, the new orthodoxy slides into its own problems of reading *Philosophy of Right* one-sidedly. It often downplays Hegel's more disconcerting propositions about the state's "divinity" and indifference to individuals, as well as the archaic nature of several of the institutions Hegel includes in his "rational state", such as the monarchy.

More fundamentally, both orthodoxies "treat liberalism itself as the standard against which the text must be judged"; "[f]rom the misplaced outrage of the old orthodoxy to the increasingly uncritical pronouncements of the new, liberalism itself remains strangely unquestioned" (p. 15).

In contrast, critical theorists, such as those of the Frankfurt School, "accepted that in his youth Hegel was revolutionary in both political and philosophical terms, and that he was profoundly inspired by the French Revolution". (of 1789-94: p. 19) Nonetheless, they lapsed into "stereotypical views of a movement from the radicalism of youth to the conservatism of old age" at the cost of seeing the deeper connections between Hegel's earlier and later writings (p. 20).

## MISUNDERSTANDING

To Fine, a recurring problem across these different prominent readings of *Philosophy of Right* is a misunderstanding of Hegel's project. It is "not to prescribe 'what ought to be' but rather to understand 'what is'" (p. 24). In doing so, Hegel sets out to study "the idea of right as it is conceived and actualised in the modern age"; "[i]t is an investigation into the dynamics of subjectivity - not in abstract but as it is made concrete and real in our own social and political lives" (p. 24).

Rather than isolating and privileging one particular form of right [law] over another, as tends to occur when thinking about "right" in the abstract, Hegel comes to understand the idea of right in a diverse range of deter-

minations in human life, situating it:

"...historically as the achievement of the modern age, socially as a determinate form of subjectivity, dynamically as a movement from one form and shape to another without a given end, holistically as a system of intrinsic connections and critically as a system rent by its own contradictions." (p. 28)

By embedding the idea of right in the empirical world, Hegel broke with the natural law tradition that had dominated political philosophy. ("Natural law" meant law deduced by pure reason from eternal facts of human nature or of God). He allowed political thought to escape "the presumption that philosophy can deduce 'what ought to be' from a priori conceptions of right or from transcendental principles of history, morality and language, and then impose this *sollen* [moral duty] on the rest of us" (p. 27).

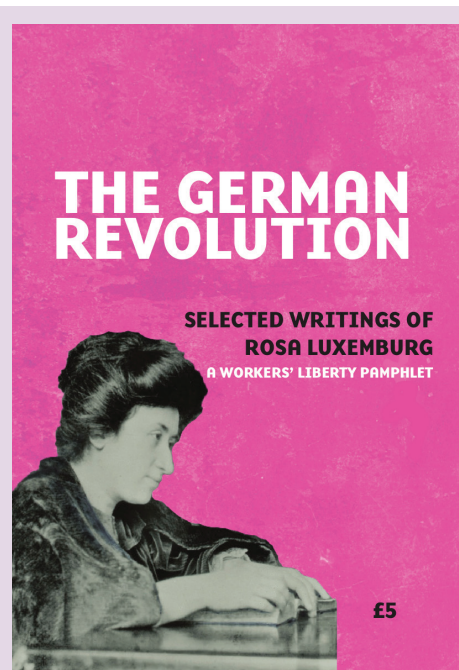
Hegel "does not abandon the struggle to bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be, but he addresses this gap in a way that is designed to forestall the use of violence, terror and annihilation to bring the 'is' in line with the 'ought'" (p. 27). In doing so, he "preserves the space which separates our understanding of political life from the practicalities of political action and leaves us free to make our own political choices" (p. 27).

In this explication of Hegel's approach, the main contrast Fine draws is with Kant, the chief figure in German philosophical discussion before Hegel. In Fine's words, "if Kant turns individuals as they appear in our own society into an a priori condition of political cohesion, Hegel begins with individuals as they are found within our society in order to denature their form of existence and unpack what is distinctive about the modern subject" (p. 48). This is because Kant, unlike Hegel, is not able to distinguish between morality and ethical life.

This not to say simply that "Kant concentrates only on inner-directed feelings of morality at the expense of any orientation toward the social and political institutions of the community" (p. 53-54). Rather, the difference is that Kant viewed institutions of ethical life such as civil society, the state, and the family "as actual or potential emanations of our will", whereas Hegel viewed them as objective and necessary relations that impose binding duties on subjects (p. 54).

Hegel's distinction between morality and ethical life allowed him to distinguish between state and civil society in the modern sense as "the stage of difference between the family and the state" (p. 58). This sets up Hegel's understanding of political representation. As Hegel presents it, "[t]he real function of political representation...is to admit the private interests of civil society into the organism of the state as one of its several elements...and to serve as a middle term between civil society and the state" (p. 65).

This intermediary function of political representation entails many exclusions. Its dual role is "to embody the 'subjective moment in universal freedom' in order to prevent the isolation of government which might otherwise be an arbitrary tyranny, and to prevent the isolation of civil society which might otherwise crystallise into a bloc in opposition to the state" (p. 65). In other words, Hegel departed from liberal philosophers' view of the state as the actual "united will of all".



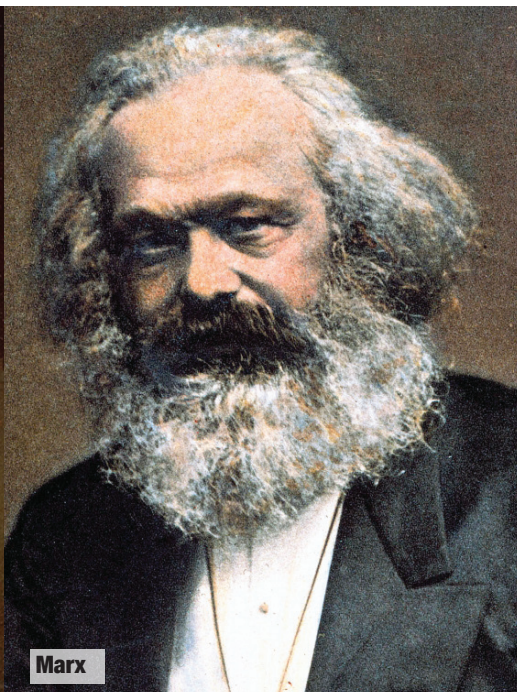
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# own to earth"



Hegel



Marx



Arendt



Fine

This brings us to the aspect of Hegel's writings that Fine wishes to bring out more in relation to subsequent thinkers: "the critique of the critique of representation". In other words, whilst Hegel critiques political representation, he is wary of turning this critique into a demand to abolish representation as such or to make representation wholly active and unrestricted.

This is because, "[a]lthough Hegel recognised that the demand that everyone should participate in the business of state arises naturally in opposition to the many formal and substantial exclusions established by representative government", he was troubled by how "it issues the instruction that everyone 'must participate in this business'" (p. 67).

Similarly, Hegel was deeply concerned that "a 'pure' form of representation, one in which citizens appear only as an atomised mass of individuals and the state is treated as the only legitimate association, would turn the state into a slave to public opinion", thereby undermining the independence needed for critical thought. (p. 67)

Whilst Hegel accepted the value of the people's empirical consciousness, he nevertheless thought that public opinion deserves to be "respected as well as despised", since by its nature public opinion is a repository of not only "true needs" and "substantial principles of justice", but also of "false information", "errors of judgement", and other such "contingencies of opinion" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §317).

This is why, although Hegel never abandoned his enthusiastic support for the French Revolution of 1789-94, he believed that much of the Terror of 1793-4 occurred because the Revolution "replaced the indeterminate 'I' of the bourgeois property owner with the equally indeterminate 'we' of the people as if the world were a void waiting only to be filled with its soul, but when it discovered that the world was not a void, it could express its frustrated sense that 'everything was possible' only in a fury of destruction" (p. 73).

In short, Hegel warned of how overcoming power using only abstractions of freedom (for example, the idea of "true democracy") could prevent the establishment of concrete freedom and, in irrational and destructive

ways, mimic the very forms of domination and mystification one seeks to overcome in the first place (p. 75).

All this sets up Fine's reassessment of the connection between Hegel and Marx. To Fine, it is a mistake to take at face value Marx's own view of his relationship to Hegel, especially Marx's remark in the 1873 postface to the second German edition of his most famous book, *Capital*, about having "inverted" Hegel's dialectic "in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell".

Instead, reading *Philosophy of Right* together with *Capital* helps us notice the structural similarities between their analyses. As a matter of method, both works analyse modern society by starting with its most abstract and simple elements, and then work their way "upwards" to these elements' more concrete and complex manifestations.

The main difference is that Marx addresses modernity's material or economic forms, whereas Hegel addresses its ideal or political forms, which makes their analyses complement each other. Moreover, the works supplement each other because *Philosophy of Right* and *Capital* identify modernity itself with the ideal forms of political life and the material forms of economic life respectively.

Read together, Hegel and Marx "offer a more complete image of modernity, one which includes both the social forms of the subject and the social forms of the object, than each offers in isolation from each other"; "we are forced to concede that the modern age cannot be reduced either to its ideal or its material aspects" (p. 97).

In doing so, we can keep the modern age's real dichotomies in mind and "start from the substance of the social order rather than... proceed atomistically and end up only in the juxtaposition of these separate spheres" (p. 98). The political and economic spheres each give rise to their own illusions and abstract forms of domination. In the political sphere, there are the illusions of free will and the domination of law and the state; in the economic sphere, there are the illusions of determination and the domination of money and capital (p. 98).

This reassessment of the Hegel-Marx relationship sets the stage for Arendt. Here the work Fine stresses most is *The Origins of To-*

*talitarianism* (1951). Recounting "the failure of liberalism to live up to its own ideals and its inability to resist the rise of totalitarian movements", Arendt argues that "when liberalism presents totalitarianism as the Other of itself, it understands neither totalitarianism nor itself, for although totalitarianism reaches fruition only at limited times and in particular times and in particular places, it has deep roots in the modern system of right" (p. 107-08).

## DESTRUCTIVE

To Arendt, "the 'spiritless radicalism' whose hostility to the whole rational architectonic of right, law, nation, and state proved so violent and destructive, was itself the product of the system of right broken down under the weight of its own contradictions and partial reconfigurations" (p. 119).

Arendt means this in multiple senses. Most obviously, totalitarian movements such as Nazism and Stalinism found their mass appeal in people's justified disgust at representative institutions' real deficiencies and "channelled this contempt for representative institutions into a doctrine of 'movements' which obscured the very distinction between the inner-party elites and the people with whom they claimed identity" (p. 115). One practical consequence of this was that "all forms of representation were suppressed except that of the totalitarian movement itself: representation was not overcome, it was monopolised" (p. 115).

Additionally, "equivocations and perplexities inherent in the idea of right" themselves manifested in totalitarianism (p. 118). For instance, since "the modern idea of right was from the eighteenth century attached to the nation state as its author, provider, and enforcer", "[w]hen certain groups were denied the right to have rights by virtue of their statelessness, it was a small step to attribute to such people certain natural characteristics (such as their 'Jewishness') to account for and justify the expropriation of their rights" (p. 118).

To Fine, this sensitivity to the fundamental contradictions within modernity itself – to both its light side and dark side – places Arendt in deeper continuity with both Hegel and Marx than she herself realised. One sees

this in her explication of the inherent tension in the revolutionary constitution of freedom, which is thought to establish an absolute beginning through the act of foundation.

The inherent tension in question is between, on the one hand, freedom as a ground for authority on which lasting institutions can be built following the revolution and, on the other hand, freedom as a repeatable event that extends beyond simply augmenting the constitution established by the revolution. This is why, in Arendt's view, "we have to stop thinking that the concept of revolution can be actualised in some ideal form" (p. 130).

This informs Arendt's turn to a "critical cosmopolitanism" in the spirit of Hegel's ethical philosophy. That is, Arendt looks for a politics based on the idea that all human beings can or should be citizens in one community, but does so in a way that "refuses to make any leap of faith – be it faith in the state or faith in the cosmopolis; it refuses to stop time by predetermining the structure of what has not yet come into being" (p. 148).

All this follows the intellectual agenda of both Hegel and Marx. This is "an agenda that confronts the central perplexity of modern political life: that the critique of representation cannot rest content until it links hands with the critique of the critique of representation" (p. 162). This agenda faces up to perplexity but seeks neither to "resolve it with premature judgements and conclusions", nor to "use it as an excuse for inaction in the face of injustice" (p. 162).

I shall leave the question of how solidly Fine's interpretation of Hegel is based on Hegel's actual writings to readers more familiar with them. For now, I shall say that, whilst I think Fine overstates the matter when he speaks of a "unity" of Hegel and Marx, I find his joint reading of the two theorists highly thought-provoking.

This is especially true in respect of how Fine's reading grounds the often-perplexing Hegelian notion of simultaneously preserving and changing contradictory elements that interact.

*Continued page 12*



# To bring revolution "down to earth"

From page 11

One sees this in how attempts to overcome the forms of domination, mystification, and alienation that arise from the contradictions of modernity, such as marginalisation from political representation, can end up replicating these forms in terrifying manners.

As for Arendt, I admit that, unlike Fine, I do not place *Origins of Totalitarianism* especially high among her writings. I am much more partial to *The Human Condition* (1958). I also admit that my intellectual connection to Arendt has always been something of a love-hate relationship.

## ILLUMINATING

On the one hand, I often find Arendt's observations illuminating and intellectually stimulating, such as her observations about the shift of meaning in the term "revolution" from an act of restoration to an act of fundamental rupture with the past and her critical treatment of sociology's reliance on historically familiar categories when analysing qualitatively new phenomena, which in her view inhibits proper understanding of their novelty and significance.

On the other hand, to the extent that her writings can be read as attempts to offer causal explanations for social movements,

Arendt often comes across as unduly dismissive of material factors like poverty or even viscerally emotional factors like fear, focussing instead on a kind of existential psychology or mass pathology of people atomised and dislocated by modern society.

Similarly, as Gertrude Ezorsky's critical review of Arendt's famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) in *New Politics* (vol. 2, no. 4, 1963) illustrates, Arendt was often guilty of ignoring available evidence that contradicted her controversial claims that Adolf Eichmann was an entirely "normal" man who did not hate Jews fanatically and that Jewish leaders and organisations cooperated with the Nazis to a "truly extraordinary degree".

Arendt also seemed excessively pessimistic about ordinary people's ability to change their conditions through collective organising, as seen from her *Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution* (1958). Although she identified the councils that emerged in these struggles as spaces of freedom and as foundations for a new form of government laid from below, she still remarked that the stature of the 1956 revolution "will not depend upon victory or defeat; its greatness is secure in the tragedy it enacted".

She further remarked that it would be "rather unwise to expect from the Russian people, after forty years of tyranny and thirty years of totalitarianism, the same spirit and the same political productivity which the Hungarian people showed in their most glorious hour", despite the fact that she herself had never expected the Hungarian Revolution and other anti-Stalinist uprisings in the Eastern Bloc to happen in the first place.

So there are broader problems with Arendt, and Fine does relatively little to deal with them in his interpretation of her writings. Is there still value in reading Arendt alongside Hegel and Marx? I would say there is.

Although the phrase "the banality of evil"

is often misidentified with becoming a mindless instrument of evil, such as a pen-pushing bureaucrat, the phrase actually denotes how otherwise perfectly ordinary human beings can very consciously commit horrific deeds for the most petty and selfish of reasons. What Arendt found chilling in her view of Eichmann was how he appeared entirely willing to oversee genocide for the sake of his own career advancement. Whilst Arendt might have misidentified Eichmann himself as a representative figure of this "banality of evil", we are certainly no strangers to the phenomenon of people putting aside their moral and political judgement for careerist reasons and the dark paths down which such careerism can lead.

As such, Fine is justified in paying such attention to Arendt's thoughts on "the banality of evil" in his closing chapter and locating its significance within her development of a critical, cosmopolitan perspective. Whilst I shall have to save the topic for another time, I also agree with Fine that there is a case for reading Arendt and Trotsky together. This is because both Arendt and Trotsky were unafraid to liken the barbarism of Stalin's USSR to that of Hitler's Germany and both attempted to understand the significance of the two regimes' similarities whilst acknowledging their differences.

Additionally, Fine's analysis provides relevant perspectives to bring to recent debates in the pages of *Solidarity* on the question of morality and revolution. This is because Fine asks us to confront and comprehend the terror that can come in the wake of a revolution, even when the revolution itself was justified.

One should understand Fine's engagement with Hegel, Marx, and Arendt in the context of his long-running effort to combat the way that many of us on the left treat our idea of true democracy, by which we usually mean a system of directly democratic communal councils, as something that will itself

resolve the contradictions that the critique of political representation highlights without any risk of reproducing those contradictions.

By this point, it is hopefully clearer how the themes of *Political Investigations* connect to Fine's earlier criticisms of forms of left-wing anti-Stalinism which fail to comprehend that Stalinism is deeply hostile to capitalism and working-class liberation alike, that we cannot simply counterpose Stalinism to an abstract idea of what we think socialism or how we think it has been realised ideally, and that we cannot treat Marxism as only the negation of liberalism and bourgeois society.

Despite its more guarded perspective on revolution and what it can unleash, one should avoid the temptation to read *Political Investigations* as a renunciation of revolutionary politics. In Fine's own words:

"This is not to abandon or to reject the idea of revolution, which is our only resource against the continuation of injustice, but rather to bring it down to earth, to recognise its mystique and acknowledge that it is not above the equivocations of political life." (p. 130)

"The proclivity of revolution to reproduce, sometimes in more irrational form, the power it overturns is not a reason for us to throw up our hands in despair, but rather to face up to the burden of events, whatever message it delivers, to explore the dynamics of our own disillusionment, and see the notion of 'absolute beginning' for what it is: merely the conceptual aspect of political life divorced from its actuality." (p. 4)

In the end, Fine calls on us to reject finding something within human nature that guarantees opposition to totalitarianism. Instead, he centres our own agency in the world and the freedom and responsibility that agency entails: "Everything depends on us – on what we do, how we act, whether we find an adequate political response. None of this can be predetermined." (p. 162) □

## The world's housing crisis



### Film review

By Steve Allen

A new film, *Push*, documents the work of a UN Special Rapporteur as she travels the globe to understand the housing crisis.

On the face of it, it could be an inspiring call to arms. Unfortunately, it provides few solutions beyond governments working together to tackle global finance.

The film title is a nod to the process of gentrification, whereby residents are "pushed" out of their homes to make way for typically more expensive developments. Housing has become a financial asset to be traded at the whims of private equity firms. Meanwhile tenants face ever increasing rents and stagnating wages. Our "protagonist" asserts that the right to affordable housing is protected by international law. While she acknowledges the housing market has failed, she puts this down to "disaster capitalism" rather than capitalism in general. This is a common liberal viewpoint, but one also espoused by some on the left in the form of "de-financialisation".

The film features many poignant testimonies, especially from former residents of Grenfell Tower. There are also small examples of community organising, such as a rent strike in Toronto. However, more time is given to talking heads: economists, academics and politicians.

All in all, the film gives an underwhelming answer to such a large-scale problem. □

• [imdb.com/title/tt8976772/](http://imdb.com/title/tt8976772/)

## A landslide for Starmer will be bad

By Sacha Ismail

Keir Starmer looks on course to be elected Labour leader by a big margin. Balloting opened on 24 February and will close on 2 April.

According to a Survation poll for LabourList, Starmer will win 45% to 34% for Rebecca Long-Bailey and 21% for Lisa Nandy, and beat Long-Bailey 64-to-36% in the second round. According to a YouGov poll, he will win in the first round 53-31-16.

The YouGov breakdown is interesting. Among members who have joined since the general election, Starmer has 67%, to 22% for Nandy and only 11% for Long-Bailey. Among those who joined before 2015 it is Starmer 56%, Nandy 22%, Long-Bailey 21%. Only among those who joined between 2015 and 2019, which is over half the total sample, does Long-Bailey lead, 46-43-11.

Among affiliate members, i.e. mainly trade unionists – who voted strongly for Jeremy Corbyn both times – Starmer has 66% to 22% for Long-Bailey and 18% for Nandy, and 75% to 25% in the second round.

Starmer is ahead among every age group – particularly older members, but even among 18-24 year olds he has 48% to 28% for Nandy and only 22% for Long-Bailey. In the second round, he would defeat Long-Bailey 75-25. (Admittedly, the 18-24 age group is a very small sample.) Long-Bailey does best among



Labour First organiser and Starmer deputy Chief of Staff Matt Pound has led workshops on how to prevent the AWL from gaining influence in local Labour parties

25-29 year olds, losing to Starmer 35-48, with 17% for Nandy.

Angela Rayner, on paper supporting Rebecca Long-Bailey but in practice sharing a lot of supporters as well as politics with Starmer, is also well ahead of the pack. She has 47% in the first round to her closest rival Richard Burgon's 19%.

We have been sceptical about Rebecca Long-Bailey's left-wing record and credentials. However, Starmer winning by a mile is more likely to embolden Labour's right

than him winning narrowly, or of course Long-Bailey winning. That strengthens the argument to vote for Long-Bailey.

Some on the left have tried to paint Starmer as more right-wing than he is. Others, however, have tried to paint him up as a relatively strong left-winger. That is absurd. There is a reason why the likes of Labour First organiser Matt Pound are central to his campaign.

Even respondents to the LabourList poll expect Starmer to move Labour "closer to the centre" (79%, as against 1% who expect him to move "further left").

Socialists in Labour must begin to organise a serious left opposition to a Starmer leadership, and campaign above all for a democratic running of the party, with decision-making in the hands of members and affiliates, not of an anointed leader. □

• Charter for a democratic labour movement [bit.ly/d-l-m](http://bit.ly/d-l-m)

## MORE ONLINE

*Scrapping the anti-union laws: where do the leadership candidates stand?*

Sacha Ismail reviews the stance of Labour's leadership and deputy leadership candidates on repealing Britain's anti-strike laws, and finds them all wanting. See The Clarion [bit.ly/leadersunionlaws](http://bit.ly/leadersunionlaws)



# Reasons to vote Rebecca Long-Bailey for leader

By John Bloxam

As Mark Osborn wrote in *Solidarity* 533: "Now, having seen the practical results of leaving politics to professional politicians and media pundits, we should judge candidates for the Labour leadership by their willingness to launch mass, sustained action in defence of the NHS and for free and state-run education for all.

"All the candidates have put on their 'left face', but none has talked about the need to mobilise and protest in our thousands and millions, across the country. That needs to be done. Labour and unions, onto the streets!"

That's our yardstick in the Labour Party leadership elections, and from that point of view we call for a clear vote for RLB.

As leader, has she said she will immediately call for Labour and the unions to get on the streets against the Tory Johnson government? No. Is there plenty that can be criticised in her policy pronouncements and campaign to date? Yes, and we have itemised it in recent issues of *Solidarity*.

But over the last two weeks she has unequivocally and publicly said she supports workers taking action both now and in the future as a matter of course and necessity. That has clearly marked her out from the other leadership candidates, and must be the starting point for the test of judging candidates against the mobilisation and protest action that is needed now.

She has said she is on the side of working class action.

"As leader of the Labour Party, I have committed to back workers in every dispute and strike against unfair, exploitative and unjust employers. This will range from actions on opposing cuts, tackling the climate crisis, and standing up to the resurgent far-right. Standing on the side of workers and trade unions, no questions asked, is going to be crucial in standing up to this reactionary Conservative government.

"As Labour leader, I will be as comfortable on the picket line as at the dispatch box, and under my leadership Labour will never return to condemning striking teachers or firefighters, or to treating trade unions as if

they're embarrassing relatives of the party. I will be there every step of the way with workers and stand with them on the picket line and will have no hesitation in which side I pick." (bit.ly/lu-lship).

There is a short distance between "Standing on the side of workers and trade unions, no questions asked... in standing up to this reactionary Conservative government", and taking an active, leadership role in promoting such action. We should argue for RLB to go that extra distance now. That can only have any real weight if we do that as part of an effort to get her elected Labour leader in the present elections. That should be an important element now in developing the drive we have called for to "Get Labour on the streets".

Calling clearly and prominently for a vote for RLB does not mean being silent on areas of criticism and disagreement, any more than it does in other labour movement elections. But the justifiable criticisms should neither dominate nor obscure what we are saying.

Electing RLB as Labour leader, given her clear and unequivocal statements in support



of workers' action, would be the best result for the necessary campaign to "Get Labour on the streets!" and taking on the Tories now. Vote RLB. □

## Indicted for opposing cuts

By Ann Field

Disciplinary proceedings have been initiated by the leadership of Glasgow City Council Labour Group against Matt Kerr, who is a candidate in the Scottish Labour Party deputy leader ballot running from 21 February to 2 April.

At a City Council meeting a fortnight ago the minority SNP administration proposed a cuts budget. The Labour Group also proposed a cuts budget, with the usual homilies about it being "less painful", "the fault of Holyrood underfunding", "our cuts not as bad as yours", etc., etc.

Matt, a Glasgow Labour councillor, decided that he could not vote for either of the cuts budgets and walked out of the meeting. As he subsequently explained:

"Yesterday (at the Council meeting) I announced that I could not vote for any cuts budget being proposed for the city that I represent. I have had enough, this city has had enough, and we owe it to the people we represent to put up a fight."

### GLASGOW

"Declining to support a Labour Group decision is not something I did lightly, but each of us has to make a stand against the SNP cuts at some point. I could not have in all conscience voted for any of the budgets proposed in the Chamber yesterday."

The response to Matt's refusal to support further cuts sums up the sorry state of Scottish Labour after years of right-wing control. And nowhere is its state more lamentable than in the ranks of the dysfunctional Glasgow City Council Labour Group.

According to the Labour Group finance spokesperson: "You (Matt Kerr) broke the group whip, you engaged in personal grandstanding and gifted the SNP an attack line before walking out and leaving your Labour colleagues to deal with the consequences."

Labour Group chair Marie Garrity went one (or several) better, claiming that Matt's conduct had led her to back arch-right-winger Jackie Baillie in Scottish Labour Party (SLP) deputy leadership contest:

"Leadership is not walking out on your

colleagues or trying to throw them under a bus. That's not unity. Through this (Deputy Leader) contest it has become clear that Jackie Baillie is the real change candidate. I will be voting for her."

For the right wing, the key and sole issue is that Matt broke the Group whip (although the Group standing orders only say that councillors are "expected" to abide by Group decisions).

But what the issue really highlights is the utter spinelessness of the Glasgow Labour Group. When Matt proposed at a Group meeting that Labour should propose a no-cuts budget, just one other member of the Group backed him.

Garrity – a close ally of Group Leader Frank McAveety – equates refusing to support cuts with throwing members of the Labour Group under a bus. But throwing the poorer sections of the population under a cuts steamroller doesn't seem to even register on her political radar.

The debacle also highlights the uselessness of the Glasgow Labour Local Campaign Forum, which is meant to exercise some degree of control over the city's Labour councillors.

The Forum hardly met last year, was badly attended when it did meet, exercises no control over the Labour Group, does no campaigning, and functions only as the passive recipient of tedious lectures by the Labour Group leadership about municipal realpolitik.

Jackie Baillie, Matt's opponent in the Scottish deputy leadership contest, has denounced Matt's conduct in a particularly surrealistic manner: "I'm not in favour of councillors walking out and abdicating responsibility. Matt walked out and left the rest of the Labour Group behind. They stayed to argue and protect the interests of their constituents, and I think that's critically important."

But in what way is a cuts budget a mechanism to protect the interests of constituents?

Baillie's enthusiasm for bonding Labour to council cuts finds its highest expression in her support for the "Aberdeen Nine" – nine councillors suspended from the SLP because they joined a Council coalition administra-



tion with the Tories.

Baillie has not condemned the councillors for allying with the Tories and implementing cuts.

Her complaint, and key plank of her election platform, is that they have been suspended by the SLP. She wants them to implement cuts in alliance with the Tories as full-blooded re-instated members of the SLP.

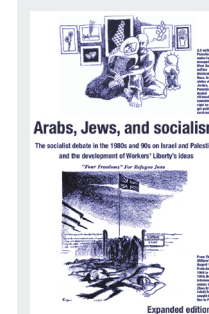
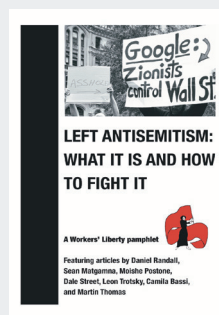
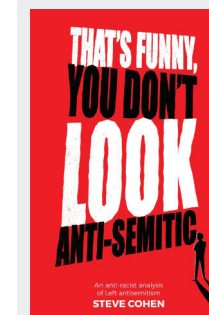
Baillie was on the Board of Directors of "Better Together", the Labour-Tory "No" alliance in the 2014 independence referendum. Class collaboration with the Tories is second nature for her.

With a shameless contempt for reality, the pro-Trident, pro-fracking, pro-class-collaboration, pro-cuts Jackie Baillie – who wraps herself in a Union Jack at every opportunity, and was thrown off Scottish Labour's front bench in Holyrood for briefing against Richard Leonard – now proclaims:

"I am the real change candidate. Next year's (Holyrood election) campaign can't be driven by a small group advocating more of the same. We need to open our doors, rebuild and unite the Labour Party."

Scottish Labour members, especially in Glasgow, should: oppose any disciplinary action against Matt; build an effective Local Campaign Forum; build the anti-cuts alliance which the Labour Group is inherently incapable of building; and campaign for Matt for Deputy Leader. □

## Antisemitism book offer



**Workers' Liberty has got a cut-price deal on a bulk order of the new edition of Steve Cohen's That's Funny You Don't Look Anti-semitic. The 1984 book has become a well-known source for understanding and combating left antisemitism.**

**We are selling these books for £5 each. They can be bought alongside one of the pamphlets for £7, two of the pamphlets for £9 or all 3 for £10. All orders are subject to £1.50 for postage).**

**Please make payment at [www.workersliberty.org/payment](http://www.workersliberty.org/payment) and email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) to confirm which of the books and pamphlets you want.**



## Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in 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 and to militantly assert working-class interests.

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

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

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

# Combatting antisemitism within the revolution, too



## Book review

By Dale Street

"Bolshevism has made Russia safe for the Jew. If the Russian idea should take hold of the white masses of the western world, then the black toilers would automatically be free," wrote the Jamaican-American author Claude McKay in September 1919.

By contrast, journalist and playwright Isaac Babel's description of antisemitism in the Red Army in the years immediately following the October Revolution led him to ask the question: "Which is the Revolution and which the counter-revolution?"

Echoing Babel's question, the writer Ilia Ehrenburg described his experience of waiting to vote in the Constituent Assembly election in November 1917:

"People were saying: 'Whoever's against the Yids, vote number 5 [Bolshevik]! Whoever's for world-wide revolution, vote number 5! The patriarch rode by, sprinkling holy water. Everyone removed their hats. A group of passing soldiers began to belt out the Internationale in his direction. Where am I? Or is this truly hell?'"

Who was right? McKay? Or Babel and Ehrenburg?

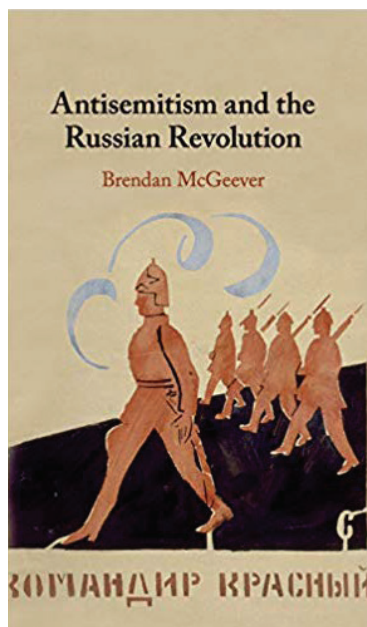
Brendan McGeever's answer, in his recently published *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution*, could be summed up as: McKay was closer to the truth (after making due allowance for rhetorical flourish), but Babel and Ehrenburg were certainly not wrong either.

The antisemitic pogroms which took place in the former Pale of Settlement in the years following the October Revolution were the most violent assault on Jewish life in pre-Holocaust modern history.

Around 100,000 Jews were murdered. Over half a million Jews fled their homes to escape the carnage. The bulk of those pogroms were carried out by military forces fighting to overthrow Soviet power.

The Russian autocracy had used antisemitism and tolerated, if not encouraged, Jewish pogroms. To the Bolsheviks, therefore, it seemed only "natural" that the forces of counter-revolution should again resort to antisemitism and pogroms.

But antisemitic pogroms were also carried out by forces fighting, at least ostensibly, in defence of Soviet power. Antisemitism, including its most virulent forms, was to be found amongst Bolshevik Party members, officials of local Soviet governments, and units of the Red Army.



McGeever's book focuses on two particular instances of Red Army pogroms of Jews: in the Chernihiv region (northern Ukraine) in the spring of 1918; and in southern and central Ukraine in the spring and summer of 1919.

In the former, Red Army units attacked Jewish self-defence groups, plundered Jewish homes, destroyed a synagogue, and demanded that Jews hand over their wealth. Jews were also summarily shot in large numbers. In the town of Hlukhiv alone, over a hundred were killed.

The latter pogroms were carried out by forces under the command of Nikifor Grigor'ev. The worst of them occurred after Grigor'ev had "switched sides", abandoning the Bolsheviks and staging an anti-Soviet insurrection.

## RIFE

But local Soviet officials and Bolsheviks, and even Red Army units sent to fight him, joined in the pogroms. And even while Grigor'ev's troops had been constituted as a Red Army Division, antisemitism had been manifestly rife in its ranks.

The central Bolshevik leadership and Soviet government did not remain passive in the face of these pogroms. They decided on a number of measures, including summary execution, to stem the tide of antisemitism.

But such decisions were often not followed through on the ground. Or, if implemented, then only half-heartedly and late-in-the-day. The contemporary Soviet press and later official histories also omitted mention of manifestations of Red antisemitism.

In fact, as McGeever convincingly argues in his book, the driving force in responding to the pogroms and Red Army antisemitism was not the "official" Bolshevik and So-

viet structures but Jewish non-Bolshevik socialists, although many of them subsequently joined the Bolsheviks.

McGeever's immediate focus on the two waves of antisemitic pogroms leads him into a broader discussion revolving around the different responses and strategies formulated by Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik socialists to combat antisemitism.

Did the Bolshevik view of antisemitism — essentially a "tool" of the ruling classes — disarm it politically in combatting the problem in the ranks of revolutionary forces? McGeever even goes so far as to imply that the Bolsheviks were guilty of "a race-blind class reductionism."

And how should the struggle against antisemitism have been conceptualised and politically defined? This was a contested issue at the time.

Was antisemitism to be combatted specifically as a threat to Jews (as argued by the Jewish non-Bolshevik socialist activists), or was it to be combatted as an element of the overall threat to Soviet power (as argued by some of the "mainstream" Bolshevik leaders)?

And was antisemitism to be challenged as a specific form of national hatred, or was it to be subsumed into a generalised opposition to all forms of national hatred? Again, the same divisions emerged.

Themes used in Bolshevik propaganda and agitation, argues McGeever, were open, albeit unintentionally, to antisemitic interpretation. In particular, the campaign against economic "speculation" chimed in with the antisemitic identification of speculation with Jewishness.

What was at stake here, writes McGeever, "was the capacity for racialised conceptions of Jewishness to be reinscribed through Bolshevik economic policy."

Even in formulating a response designed to challenge and eradicate antisemitism, McGeever continues, the Bolsheviks accommodated to antisemitic stereotyping of Jews — not enough Jews in the front line of the Red Army, but too many Jews in positions of power.

According to McGeever: "Every step taken by the Bolsheviks in the campaign against antisemitism risked perpetuating the racialising logic they sought to criticise."

By contrast, it was in the ranks of the non-Bolshevik Jewish socialists that "a critically important degree of anti-racist agency" was to be found.

These non-Bolshevik Jewish socialists originated in the ranks of the Bund and Poalei Zion. Under the impact of the Russian Revolution they went through a process

of splits and fusions as they moved towards membership of the Bolshevik Party.

Their "more urgent form of anti-racist praxis" was facilitated by their commitment to a Jewish socialist-national project:

"The closer one stood to a Jewish socialist-national project in the Russian Revolutionary context, the more likely one was to elevate and take seriously the question of antisemitism in one's own political practice."

But even the analysis and proposals of these Jewish socialists, which flowed out of their project of Jewish self-reconstruction, could be "vulnerable to an antisemitic interpretation":

"Those Bolsheviks [i.e. the ex-Bundists and ex-members of Poalei Zion] most prone to perpetuating racialised conceptions of Jewishness were, in fact, the architects of the Bolshevik confrontation with antisemitism."

## DISCUSSION

Such arguments might not merit uncritical endorsement, but they certainly merit further discussion.

Drawing on Moishe Postone's writings on the "ability" of antisemitism to "appear to be anti-hegemonic, ... the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible global form of domination," McGeever also addresses a more fundamental issue:

"Popular anti-bourgeois sentiment, an important reservoir of revolutionary socialism, could, at the same time, be a reservoir of antisemitic mobilisation. ... Antisemitism provided a nexus that enabled people to move between the seemingly antithetical categories of revolution and counter-revolution."

Thus, the pogroms of 1918 and 1919 on which McGeever focuses "illustrate the explosive capacity for revolutionary discourse and populist anti-bourgeois sentiment to be expressed through antisemitism."

As examples of the slogans raised in that period McGeever cites:

"We are the Bolsheviks. Beat up the Yids!", "Smash the Yids! Long Live Soviet Power!", "Death to the Yids and Communists! Long live Soviet power!" and "Down with the political speculators [from the land where they crucified Christ]! Long live the power of the soviets of the people of Ukraine!"

It was no wonder that Babel found it difficult to distinguish revolution from counter-revolution, nor that Ehrenburg wondered if he had arrived in hell. □



# CWU ballots until 17 March

By Ollie Moore

As *Solidarity* went to press on 13 March, Royal Mail workers were beginning a new ballot for industrial action, after a successful ballot last year was injunctioned by the High Court.

The ballot will close on 17 March. It is about action to prevent a re-structure that could see the postal

and parcel delivery aspects of Royal Mail's business separated into distinct companies, a move which the Communication Workers Union (CWU) says could threaten up to 20,000 jobs.

The CWU is also demanding that Royal Mail honour an agreement reached in 2018 which included a commitment to a reduced working week.

The CWU has held 800 "gate meetings" at Royal Mail workplaces across the country to build the ballot campaign, which the union says is a record number. A Royal Mail worker told *Solidarity*: "Gate meeting mainly used as a mechanism for reps and full-time officials to convey information to the members. That's useful and worthwhile, but it's missing an op-

portunity not to make those meetings forums for more participatory, democratic discussion about where to go with the campaign." The industrial action ballot closes on 17 March.

In pay negotiations separate to the dispute, Royal Mail's latest offer, for a 6% pay increase across three years, has been rejected by the CWU. □

# Tube workers ballot from 6 March

By Ollie Moore

Tube union RMT will ballot its entire membership across London Underground, around 10,000 workers, for strikes over pay and conditions. The ballot runs from 6 to 31 March.

LU workers are already almost a year in to what should be their

new pay arrangements, with the previous deal having expired in April 2019. RMT's claim was for a "substantial, above-inflation pay increase", with a flat-rate minimum for the lowest paid, and for a 32-hour, four-day week. LU's latest offer is for an RPI+0.2% pay rise for four years. The ballot marks the first time RMT, the only union to

organise across all functions and grades of LU staff, has balloted its entire LU membership in nearly five years. That last ballot took place before the turnout thresholds required by the 2016 Trade Union Act were imposed, but had they been law at the time, the RMT's ballot would have cleared them.

Driver-only union Aslef, a mi-

nority union across LU as a whole but a slight majority amongst Tube drivers, is also balloting over pay, in a vote running from 28 February to 12 March. If the ballots return majorities, Tube workers could strike in the run-up to the mayoral and GLA elections, due to take place on 7 May. □

## TfL workers strike on pay

By Ollie Moore

Unite members employed across Transport for London (TfL), including on the Woolwich Ferry, recently taken back into direct operation by TfL, struck again on 28 February, in a series of disputes over pay.

Workers in TfL departments including Dial-a-Ride, bus revenue, and streets and taxis enforcement are striking against a deal proposing a 1% pay increase and a cut in annual leave. A further strike is planned for 27 March.

RMT members working for London Underground revenue, who recently returned a majority in a ballot for industrial action against attempts to impose a two-tier workforce in their department, are discussing when to take action, and could coordinate with TfL revenue workers in Unite. □

## Getting the contract in-house



**Interview**

By a UCL worker

An outsourced UCL worker and IWGB union rep spoke to Daniel Randall from *Solidarity* about their campaign for improved conditions and direct employment.

Outsourced workers at University College London (UCL) are fighting for company sick pay, and for our union, the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB) to be recognised, so we can bargain collectively. We want equal terms and conditions with directly-employed staff, and ultimately for our jobs to be taken in house and for UCL to employ us directly.

The security contract is held by a company called Axis. The caterers, porters, and cleaners are employed by Sodexo. We last struck in November 2019, alongside university workers in the University and College Union (UCU). There are currently discussions taking place about pay grades for outsourced staff, but those discussions involved Unison, not IWGB. Unison has a recognition agreement with UCL, and with Axis, despite only a small minority of outsourced workers being members of Unison. IWGB is the majority union amongst outsourced staff.

It's frustrating that our union is excluded from these discussions. Unison also excludes their own members from meaningful discussion and consultation; we're currently running a petition campaign to demand that outsourced workers are properly consulted in the current talks over pay, and we've even had some Unison members sign that.

Unison has actively undermined



our struggle. In the run-up to our strike in November, Axis gave the Unison reps on the contract time off to go around discouraging people from striking, telling them they'd get in trouble or even be sacked. Although our strike was successful there's no doubt this had an impact, and intimidated some people out of striking. On the security contract, there are different types of workers – building attendants, operation and patrol officers, and control room workers. But the Unison reps are all building attendants, and many people feel they are only interested in one section of the workforce.

Axis manage the contract in a very unfair and nepotistic way. There's a lot of bullying and harassment from managers, and it seems like friends and relatives of certain managers are being given better jobs. Axis uses its relationship with the "client", UCL, to intimidate and micromanage us. A manager will approach a security officer at a gate, who might be standing near a wall, and say, "the client has told us they don't want you standing there, you must stand here, in the middle," even if it's pouring with rain. Axis's contract expires in late 2021. We want to have a big push to get the contract taken in-house. UCL is also due to get a new prov-

ost soon, who doesn't have a good record, so we don't expect this fight to be easy.

We have a very good relationship with the local UCU branch. We've been to their meetings and they've been very supportive of us and our dispute. I think we've even been a source of inspiration for them; our picket lines and protests have a lively, party atmosphere, which I think other unions can learn from. There have been some discussions about the idea of one union for all campus workers, but not many. Some UCU members are also members of IWGB, in part as a way of showing support for us. But forming a single union is a long way off, I think. One of the reasons people wanted to join IWGB is that it is completely independent. It has no ties to the institution. However, we still want to work as closely as possible with UCU, and other unions that support us.

IWGB is still growing in the workplace. Hopefully that will continue. Some outsourced workers are still under-confident about standing up for their rights, or unsure as to what their rights even are. Continuing to build the union will help with that.

We will keep fighting and, when necessary, strike again. □

## Bullying is not just Rutnam



**John Moloney**

In the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), part of the Department for Transport, one of our leading reps, Paul Williams, is being targeted for compulsory redundancy.

We believe this is an attack on the union in the workplace. Paul's local branch is discussing a possible dispute and strike to resist that attack. The union will ensure there is a national focus on this campaign.

In wider politics, a light is being shone on the relationship between the government as an employer and the civil service. Clearly there are tensions at the top, in terms of how the people around Mr Cummings want to restructure the civil service, and possible resistance to that from some senior managers.

It's perfectly conceivable that senior bosses, like Philip Rutnam, have been the victims of bullying by hard-right Tories. Unfortunately, the bullying, intense workloads, and overbearing management faced by much less high-profile, far lower-paid, frontline civil service workers, including outsourced workers, every day has not received equivalent media attention.

We're yet to see any concrete details of Mr Cummings' plans, but whatever he is planning, our union will resist any attempts to worsen our members' working conditions.

Outsourced workers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office concluded a month-long strike on 28 February. Reps are meeting with Interserve, the outsourced contractor, along with the conciliation service Acas, next week to discuss union recognition. If the dispute is not resolved, the workers have already made clear they are prepared to escalate their action.

Our members on the ISS cleaning contract at three HMRC offices, in Liverpool, Bootle, and Birmingham, have returned a resounding majority in a vote for strikes to win living wages, sick pay, and union recognition. They voted 97% in favour of action, on an 89% turnout.

For the Merseyside cleaners, who've been in dispute for some time and have struck multiple times, this was a re-ballot, as the mandate of their original ballot had expired. We were able to spread the dispute this time by involving cleaners in Birmingham.

A programme of rolling strikes is due to begin across all three offices from 16 March. □

• John Moloney is Assistant General Secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

## Free Our Unions

Poetry on the Picket Line, a collective of radical poets who perform in solidarity with strikes and other workers' struggles, held a benefit gig for the Free Our Unions campaign on Tuesday 3 March.

The event also launched the new book of verse by Workers' Liberty supporter and Poetry on the Picket Line member Janine Booth.

On 22 February, RMT London Transport Region organised a training session for activists on understanding and confronting anti-union laws, which used Free Our Unions materials. If you want help developing a similar training course for your own union, email the campaign at [freeourunions@gmail.com](mailto:freeourunions@gmail.com) □





# Solidarity

For a workers' government

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Students supporting the recent UCU strikes at Bristol University

## Student solidarity for UCU strikes

By Rachael Baylis, Brighton University

The second wave of (UCU) University and College Union strikes, taking place from 20 February, has been bigger and more active than the ones that took place before Christmas. Student activity has turned up a notch, with students from arts courses and the humanities in particular organising demonstrations of support.

At my university (Brighton), before the strike began, there was an open meeting in which staff gave presentations on strikes and the history of collective action. Fascinatingly, the overwhelming majority of those present were women. Following the presentations, students discussed with one another potential actions we could take. A group of art students had begun a

petition called "Boycott Brighton" and sent people to question the Board of Governors outside their meeting. Others were looking into class action for tuition fee refunds.

Because of the nature of the campus layout in Brighton, it isn't often you get to interact with people on other courses. Being able to communicate between different groups was extremely beneficial. In the meeting, we exchanged details in order to organise. We've also applied to the student union to establish a Brighton University Trade Union Solidarity Society.

In the previous wave of strikes, there was a battle with the student union (SU), who issued an anti-strike statement and moreover without canvassing student opinion. Following a campaign regarding the poor behaviour of the president, who repeatedly lied to students about it, the SU was

forced to actually survey its members. Just over half of respondents explicitly supported the action being taken by the UCU, and so for the first time Brighton SU supported the strikes.

On the first Friday of the strike, about ten of us got together and sat in the main foyer of one of the campuses, and had management down within five minutes. They stood on our banner, brought about seven security guards around us, and told us that the strikes were about national issues and didn't affect Brighton!

Obviously, that's rubbish. I have spoken to numerous staff who are devastated at the manner in which they've been treated by the University of Brighton, casualised, forced to take on unsustainable workloads, with the sacking and pushing out of BAME members of staff.

We sat in the foyer for four

hours, reading, distributing leaflets, painting signs and eating the food provided to us by the SU cafe! By the end of the demo, the Facebook group we used to organise had grown from 30 to 70 members. All in all it was a success.

In the second week, there was another sit in and a blockade of a mezzanine at a different campus. The students, dressed in black and wearing price tags of their tuition fees, stood like mannequins in the window to demonstrate how we are not commodities. Ironically enough, the same day we saw a tweet about university Vice Chancellors attending a meeting put on by Amazon about increasing productivity. Brighton VC Debra Humpris was clearly identifiable in the picture, leading to a placard being taped to the Amazon deposit boxes that reads "People not Products".

As we begin week three, the Trade Union Solidarity Society has been set up and will act as the vehicle for organising and educating the student body on unions, strikes and working-class politics. Planning for a fundraiser to go towards the strike fund is well underway.

Featuring testimonials from staff at Brighton, art work from students and performances from our more musically talented comrades it is looking to be a successful and fun evening that will be educational, moving and importantly – full of booze and solidarity!

Onwards to victory for UCU! □

• Brighton UCU strike fundraiser, 7.30pm, Monday 9 March, Ye Olde King & Queen, Marlborough Place, BN1 1UB. £2 entry/donation on door, bring cash for donations.

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