

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

After the grades fiasco



FOR SCHOOLS WITHOUT EXAM TYRANNY!

Workers' control and "back to school"

Workplace committees
can limit the virus risk
from reopening schools.

Page 5

An internationalist left in Labour

"Momentum
Internationalists"
relaunches itself.

Page 7

Saklatvala, the revolutionary MP

Shapurji Saklatvala was
also the first "BAME"
Labour MP.

Page 8-9

Big unions to elect new leaders

Unison and Unite will
both vote for new General
Secretaries.

Pages 12-13

Stop evictions, pause rent bills!

By Dan Rawnsley

In April the government implemented a ban on landlords evicting tenants. Though eviction orders continued to be lodged, none have been acted upon by the courts. This scheme was due to end on Sunday 23 August, and now has been extended only to 20 September. The Scottish government has extended the ban to March 2021.

The housing charity [Shelter estimates](#) that 227,000 people have fallen into rent arrears from the pandemic, which amounts to 3% of adult private tenants. Ben Beadle, the chief executive of the National Residential Landlords' Association is quoted in the *Financial Times* saying that: "The overwhelming majority of tenants are paying rent as normal." (That's residential tenants. Shops and offices have been paying maybe only half their rent due, and some of their owners have been demanding a nine-months rent holiday for the pandemic).

A lot of workers have been in a position to carry on paying their rent only thanks to furlough. The *British Medical Journal* reported on 20 August on an "89% increase in food parcels distributed by Trussell Trust food banks" and "35% of children skipping at least one meal a day, with 10% skipping more than one meal per day".

The Food Standards Agency has reported that 10% of people were accessing foodbanks in June and 9% in July. Many of those keeping up with the rent are already being forced to cut back on essential household spending.

This situation is likely to get worse in the coming months as the government carries out its plan to end furlough at the end of October. The scheme has provided for 9.6 million workers, and [probably over three million](#) are still dependent on it. The official [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) has warned that the unemployment rate is likely to hit 12% by the end of the year. With furlough and jobs being taken away at the same time, the number of tenants in arrears and facing eviction is sure to rise.

The history of the labour movement provides us with

lessons on how to fight back. After the Second World War, the Communist Party (trying to regain ground after its abject support for Churchill during the war) organised occupations of disused army bases, holiday camps, and, in one case, luxury flats in Kensington. They demanded the tenancies be recognised by councils.

During the First World War, when slum landlords moved to raise rents in Clydeside by as much as a third, working-class women led the fight in the form of a rent strike. During the miners' strikes of the 70s and 80s, which involved miners going without pay for months, bailiffs found themselves unable to enter many mining communities to carry out evictions because of local anti-eviction organisation.

Our tools are rent strikes, anti-eviction pickets and occupations. Tenants' unions like Acorn, Living Rent, and the London Renters' Union are likely to be important to the coming struggle. Beyond immediate resistance the Labour Party and wider labour movement must bring pressure to bear on the government to extend the evictions ban. Thangam Debbonaire, Shadow Minister for Housing, has written to the Secretary of State for Housing, but a letter does not make a campaign. Our movement should also demand an extension of furlough; the Spanish government is discussing extending furlough until at least the end of the year.

The Tory government will not readily concede to workers' demands on housing. They are much more likely to look out for landlords. We need to rally the labour movement to fight and raise the demand for a workers' government that can break apart the housing market and make safe, good-quality housing a right enjoyed by all. □

• Background article: bit.ly/dk-housing

Tabloid 9 September

From the next-but-one issue, no. 562, 9 September, we will return to our usual tabloid format from this reduced format which we've had to use in lockdown because lack of street activity and meetings made it difficult to circulate the paper. We will use the return to run an experiment of producing a couple of regular issues in the "endorse-folded" format (which we've previously used for "specials" on fighting fascism and on automation) and seeing whether that format sells better than the plain-vanilla version of tabloid. Because of the probability of a second virus surge, we won't run our weekend event Ideas for Freedom (postponed from June) in November as tentatively scheduled. The next [Ideas for Freedom](#) will be 10-11 July 2021. The next Workers' Liberty conference will be 17-18 April 2021. □

More online

The Black Jacobins

Dan Davison on the Haitian revolution against slavery
bit.ly/blackjac

The Border Force state

Luke Hardy indicts the spread of militarised border-policing
bit.ly/boforce

Who's lying about the Uyghurs?

Mohan Sen indicts Socialist Action as covering for repression in China
bit.ly/who-uyg

Cooperate where we agree, debate where we disagree

Martin Thomas responds to Neil Faulkner's take on the 12 July online meeting between Workers' Liberty, Mutiny, and Red Flag
bit.ly/coop-deb

GCSE and BTEC chaos: now redesign the system



Editorial

The fiasco of A Level results on 13 August was followed by a week of government crisis leading up to 20 August when GCSE grades were announced. BTEC results, due to be released at the same time as GCSEs, were delayed at the last minute.

Following a series of protests and government stumbles A Level grades were eventually, overall, boosted by allowing “teacher assessed grades” to count (in fact Centre Assessed Grades, CAGs, which are signed off by Head Teachers and are far from being simple teacher assessments).

GCSE results (in England) were notable by a sharp increase in the pass rate (Level 4 and above), by 9%, to 76%. Awards of top grades (Level 7 and above) went up by 5% from last year to 25.9%. BTEC results are now due on 28 August.

School exams had been cancelled due to Covid and an algorithm had initially been used by the exam regulator, Ofqual, to calculate A Level and GCSE results.

The algorithm had been designed to keep exam grade awards at similar levels to recent years. In this respect it did its job well, cutting down CAGs. 280,000 CAGs, or 40% of the A Level total, were downgraded.

Wanting to avoid grade inflation, and maintain the integrity of the exams, is not, in itself, unreasonable. But the way this was done at A Level proved to be to the benefit of students from well-off families, at independent schools, and to the serious detriment of working-class kids at many inner-city schools and Sixth Form colleges.

There was much condemnation of “algorithms”. That was unfair on algorithms. If algorithms do not produce reasonable results, it is because humans have messed up. In this case the main culprit, the Education Minister, Gavin Williamson, a twerp, squirmed about, attempting to blame Ofqual for the entire mess. He claimed not to know there was a problem with the method used to calculate the grades.

Williamson is a liar. Classroom teachers knew all about the exact nature of the problem three months ago, so he must have known too.

This staggering, unnecessary, exam mess gives us an opportunity to rethink our education system and to restate some basic values.

For the past several years AWL members in the National Education Union (NEU) have campaigned against the testing regime in primary schools and to get the union to organise a boycott. We eventually won the union to the boycott policy, arguing that the exams are unnecessary and damaging to children’s education and mental health.

Now we need a campaign to do similar in secondary schools. First, GCSEs – brought in when the school leaving age was 16 as an end-of-education exam – must be abolished. GCSEs have damaged the curriculum, for example squeezing out Art and Music to make space to cram Maths and English, and reduced much of Year 11 to exam-cramming rather than learning.

How should children progress without GCSEs? They should be allowed into colleges and sixth forms to study what they want.

And post-16 study, at A Level for example, should be broadened out. Instead of the current A Level system where most students take three subjects, a far narrower diet than in almost any other country, students should take several more courses. Young people should have a broad education. All students should receive a living grant, post-16, to allow everyone to study if they wish to do so. Post-18 students should be guaranteed a place at a local university. UCAS should be abolished.

That should remove the pressure, panic, and stress now associated with Year 13. At the same time, good well-paid jobs for teenagers who want to go straight into work should be expanded, and opportunities to go to uni later in life (heavily cut back since uni fees were raised) should be expanded.

And directly connected to this exam mess, we should recognise that “teacher assessments” will never be reliable until the pressures to manipulate results that are placed on teachers and school managements are removed.

The heavily politicised and brutal Ofsted-led regime that stands over schools should also be abolished and replaced with supportive and collaborative school-monitoring bodies run through Local Education Authorities. Performance-related pay for teachers and school league tables should go too. □

Government should bail out unis

With the A-levels fiasco, high-tariff universities have had their limits on student numbers lifted, and been pushed to accept more students than they’ve planned for. Some are offering money to students who will defer their places for a year. They will probably try to shift more of their increased teaching load onto casualised, insecure, low-paid staff. They will siphon off students from low-tariff universities, which may offer better teaching but rank lower in Britain’s university-snobbery system. Some of those low-tariff universities will be at real risk of bankruptcy. The labour movement should demand that the government “bails out” those universities, rather than letting these long-term assets be wrecked by this fiasco. □

Unions: use the lull to organise!

By Martin Thomas

Drax power station workers are balloting, 14-25 August, for industrial action against 230 threatened redundancies there.

The GMB union has won a 95% majority, on a 67.5% turnout, for strikes at British Gas if the bosses do not back down on a threat to fire their whole workforce and rehire on new terms.

The Unite union held a mass meeting of 1000 British Airways ramp, baggage, and cargo workers near Heathrow on 20 August, and they voted for the union to move for "industrial and legal action" over job cuts, pay cuts, and BA cheating on redundancy pay for workers who have already signed for voluntary redundancy.

Workers at the Tate galleries in London have struck against over 300 threatened job cuts.

And the TUC and several unions are, at least on paper (or, rather, [on the web](#)), backing the call made by [Safe and Equal](#) for full isolation pay for all workers who have to quarantine because of the virus.

The labour movement is beginning to use the easing of the lockdown to do meetings, ballots, strikes, picket lines, and demonstrations.

We'll need a lot more of that, and quickly.

The official Office for Budget Responsibility [estimates 12%](#) unemployment by the end of 2020.

The manufacturing bosses' group [Make UK reported](#) in late July that 53% of its firms were definitely planning redundancies in the coming months. 42% didn't expect to be back to normal within the next 12 months. 59% of firms still had more than 25% of their workers furloughed.

About three million workers are still on the furlough scheme now being phased out and due to close at the end of October. Many will be in pubs, cafés, and shops, likely to close outright as the pandemic continues.

Croydon council has announced 450 job cuts, and Luton 350. Other councils, having lost much income and spent much extra during the lockdown, will follow unless the government returns more of the billions taken from councils in cuts since 2010.

Local and government action

As well as plans for action workplace by workplace, employer by employer, we need across-the-board plans and demands for government action. Both the Labour Party and the TUC say that they are campaigning "for jobs", but their demands are very vague.

A while back it looked like a high-pandemic, high-lockdown period, in which many jobs were saved by furlough and our attention was focused on anti-virus measures, would be followed by an eased-pandemic, eased-lockdown period of job-cuts fallout.

Now it looks like we will have a combination. Across the world new virus spikes are bringing new local or partial lockdowns. There will probably be more of that as we get into the Northern Hemisphere winter. The Tories have added to their record of floundering by abolishing Public

Health England and putting its remains under the management of Tory crony Dido Harding, who has no medical or scientific expertise.

At the same time furlough schemes are being wound down. Bosses who have been on "wait and see" since the start of lockdown are moving to axe jobs, and axe all the more because no approximation to "business as usual" is near. The [TUC reports](#) that zero-hours contracts increased 41%, to April-June 2020 from a year before, in wholesale and retail, and 35% in health and social care. That indicates that many of the few new jobs created this year have been insecure ones, more easily cut, and making it often difficult for workers in those jobs to self-isolate when they should.

Job cuts and virus-control

The labour movement must work simultaneously on two fronts, job cuts and virus-control.

- Shorten the working week with no loss of pay, to create more jobs with a standard working week of four days or 32 hours

- Expand directly-employed public sector jobs in health, social care and other public services. Expand council house-building

- Take the manufacturing and aviation giants declaring job cuts into public ownership, and convert them to green and socially useful production; take the banking and financial sector into public ownership and democratic control

- Drop the reintroduction of "conditionality" on Universal Credit, introduce a fallback emergency basic or minimum income as a safety-net.

And also:

- Full isolation pay for all
- A public-health, publicly-accountable virus-control strategy, not the current semi-privatised mess in test-and-trace and in NHS supplies and logistics

- Taking over of the private hospitals and integrating them into the NHS

- Taking social care into public ownership, and staffing it on regular public-sector pay and conditions

- Extension of furlough payments, and rent holidays, to prepare for closing areas like pubs, cafés, and inessential travel when and where infections mount.

World-wide, data show the virus slightly subsiding. New infections rose exponentially from mid-May to early August, but since then have declined slightly. New deaths have plateaued or decreased in August, too.

We don't know whether those figures are artefacts of the balance of infection shifting more to countries with poorer detection of cases and deaths, like India, or real trends.

Since the tourist season in Europe led to rising infections, we have to expect that tourist returns-home will also do that. Almost certainly the winter will be difficult. The labour movement must use the "gap" we have now, when organising is easier, to prepare. □

Back to school: workers' control to make it safe

By a London school teacher

The government has a campaign to persuade parents that it will be safe to send children back to schools in England in September, following the return in Scotland on 11 August.

Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Advisor to the UK government, says, reasonably, that it is important that all children are in school and that "the chances of children dying from Covid-19 are incredibly small."

Whitty added that there are no risk-free options but that children would suffer much more from long-term health and mental health problems by remaining out of school than from dangers associated from Covid-19. That is also true.

Whitty also says: "There is [probably] much less transmission from children to adults than adults to adults." Again this is probably true, although older teenagers seem more likely to transmit than smaller children.

Nevertheless, there is some risk. On 24 August NHS Tayside reported that at a school in Dundee for students with additional support needs, 21 workers had tested positive, plus two students. All households connected to the school are in self-isolation for two weeks.

I am a teacher in my late 50s. All the students I teach are 16-18, and by November I will be teaching 30 kids, some of whom will be coughing and sneezing, in closed classrooms, five hours a day. I will have to get to school on over-full public transport, and there are 150 adult staff at the Academy whom I will mix with as I work.

If I were just a narrow trade unionist I might say: the main issue is the safety of union members and myself, so let's close the schools (or open them only on a limited basis). But I'm a socialist first and foremost and I recognise there are other concerns beyond my own immediate interests.

School staff fulfil a key role in society. We are an essential service. We need to work just as NHS staff and supermarket workers do, because the kids need us to do our jobs.

If I was a socialist with a Stalinist-tinged propensity to shout the opposite to anything the state says I would be demanding schools shut, because Whitty and the Tories say they should open. *Socialist Worker* is a good example – with the caveat that their loud-mouthed rhetoric is faked and conceals a right-wing practice inside the school workers' union, the NEU, where they suck up to the central leadership.

So we need to reopen the schools, while making them as safe as possible for everyone, and only accept closures as a last resort to deal with spiralling, out-of-control, Covid spikes. School unions must demand that vulnerable staff and children should not be expected to be in school. "Vulnerable" should be defined generously, and vulnerable staff should be paid their normal wage; vulnerable kids should be educated on-line or in separate areas.

All contracted-out school services should be brought in-house. Partly this is to ensure adequate cleaning in schools (many cleaning services are privatised and the

private cleaning companies are notorious for cutting corners). We also need to ensure all staff can be confident that if they need to self-isolate they are able to do so because they will receive occupational sick pay, not statutory sick pay. We must insist on regular temperature checks for all staff and children, regular testing, covid-distancing. Staggered starts might well make sense, too.

The Covid crisis is a problem where staff, kids, school bosses and the state apparently have some common interests. No doubt no-one wants Covid outbreaks in schools. But we also know that bosses cut corners and union leaderships are conservative. In the NEU we need to demand the union makes loud propaganda for the use of Health and Safety legislation (Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Protection Act, etc.) which will allow school groups to take action to stamp out poor Health and Safety practice by sloppy managements.

We cannot trust Head Teachers to take adequate safety precautions. One of the saddest moments in my life as a trade unionist has been to witness the panic amongst reps and activists across my London Borough as Johnson announced school reopenings in June. The national union's political-lobbying strategy fell apart at this point and reps filled our NEU WhatsApp chat with demands for the Mayor to step in and save us or for school heads to "do the right thing" and refuse to open schools.

There was no panic at my school, where the union is strong. The lesson is: the only people we can trust is ourselves. Organise to ensure safety at your school and take action if you need to.

School union organisations should set up health and safety committees to monitor and instruct managements. Where possible they should draw in student reps, too.

Finally, it might well make sense for the union to organise a national ballot on health and safety issues in schools. We do not know what the winter will bring, and the state's Test and Trace scheme is a part-privatised scandal. So we might well need the ability to take national action, and a ballot signals intent. □

New videos!

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to [our youtube channel!](#) Many have subtitles. **New these last three weeks:**

- [40th anniversary of the Gdańsk shipyard strike](#) – a short video with Mark Osborn – author of *Solidarność*
- [From e-campaigns to street campaigns](#) – *Solidarity* editorial with Stephen Wood
- [Minnie Lansbury: A different sort of Labour councillor](#) – intro speeches by Janine Booth and Selina Gellert
- [Expand jobs, boost pay! Nationalise social care!](#) *Solidarity* editorials □

Please watch and subscribe; like, comment and share!
All at: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Over 230 million people under water



Environment

By Zack Muddle

The Greenland ice sheet had an average net loss of over one million tons of ice *each minute* in 2019, so [research published on 20 August](#) showed. One million tons is one cubic kilometre of water; across the year a record loss of over 500 billion tons.

That loss from 2019 could contribute well over 1mm of sea level rise globally, as well as diluting the Gulf Stream with fresh water. Antarctic ice loss [is also progressing](#) at an alarming rate. The cumulative impact is compounded by thermal expansion of the ocean's water as the planet heats, and potentially accelerated by positive feedback mechanisms. As more surface snow is melted, darker ice is revealed, which absorbs more solar heat, and meltwater weakens ice sheets.

Modelling of sea level rise is complex and contested. The [IPCC in 2018](#) stated (emphasis in original) that "It is *very likely* that the rate of global mean sea level rise during the 21st century will exceed the rate observed during 1971-2010 [even on the lowest carbon] scenarios due to increases in ocean warming and loss of mass from glaciers and ice sheets."

"It is *virtually certain* that global mean sea level rise will continue beyond 2100, with sea level rise due to thermal

expansion to continue for many centuries."

Their "process-based models" predict roughly 1m rise for higher-carbon scenarios by 2100. However, "the collapse of marine-based sectors of the Antarctic ice sheet, if initiated, could cause global mean sea level to rise substantially above" that.

Additionally, "Some semi-empirical models... project a median and 95th percentile that are about twice as large as the process-based models."

"Semi-empirical" modelling, using statistical modelling based on past sea-level changes, is more contested than directly modelling currently-understood processes as in "process-based models". But semi-empirical models have had "successful calibration and evaluation" against the record: more so than process-based.

The USA's [Fourth National Climate Assessment](#) sees 2m by 2100 as the "[h]igh end of [the] *very likely* range under [a high carbon scenario] when accounting for possible ice cliff instabilities".

Some sea-level rise is now unavoidable, but, under all models, the bigger our reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the lower the sea level rise.

An [estimated 230 million people](#) currently live below 1m above current high-tide lines, and so would be regularly under sea level with 1m rise. The (increased) number who would be hit by annual floods is much greater still, and then there's the impact of flooding on agriculture and infrastructure,

With 2m, worse still. □

"NRPF" hits women harder in pandemic



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Women's charities have raised the alarm that victims of domestic violence are being refused places at refuges because they do not speak sufficient English.

Those turned away include a mother with a 14-month-old baby who was fleeing violence after being held as a slave by her ex-husband.

Karma Nirvana, which supports those at risk from forced marriage and "honour"-based violence, said squeezed services in the lockdown period made it even harder for migrant women to access refuge places. Of 20 women Karma Nirvana could not find a refuge for during lockdown, it said five were turned down by six separate refuges for not speaking English.

Migrants falling under the "No Recourse To Public Funds" rule due to being dependent on a partner's wages or status already face further barriers in escaping domestic violence. NRPF bars many migrants from accessing a

vast proportion of the social security net we all rely on in times of crisis.

They are barred from Universal Credit, disability allowances, local authority homelessness support and access to mainstream refuges for victims of domestic violence. With recent job losses due to lockdown, more migrants are running up against walls of NRPF.

For some migrants without right to remain in the country, reporting domestic violence to the police or specialist services risks data sharing with immigration enforcement, and ultimately deportation (for them and their children).

It is no surprise that with domestic violence increasing and services already stretched, pre-pandemic, it is even harder for migrant women to access domestic violence services.

We must fight for funding for domestic violence services to have proper funding, with increased refuge places and specialist services including translators and interpreters available across the sector. We must fight for safe-reporting mechanisms and the end of data-sharing policies when victims approach the police.

We must also fight for a social security system that offers housing and benefits to enable anyone to leave an abusive partner without risking impoverishment. □

Young Labour: rebuild with internationalist politics

By Steve Michaels

The left-wing tide in the Labour Party which carried Corbyn into the Leader's Office in 2015 was driven by a surge in engagement in left-wing politics by young people.

The elements of genuine socialism in Corbyn's platform were a source of hope for many young people. That opened the possibility of building a real youth movement, and overcoming the Blairite stranglehold on Labour's student wing and the sluggishness of a Young Labour that was prevented by bureaucracy and dwindling membership from developing real local roots.

Unfortunately, five years on, that promise hasn't been realised. While some local student Labour Clubs have adopted left wing leaderships and become more active, overall, the picture is one of lost time.

The leadership of the Corbyn project began its term in office with a fight against its own left wing. Momentum was consumed by a raging fight by its office to stop its membership from putting any leftward pressure on the leader, which meant shutting down not only its own democratic structures, but also its youth wing, Momentum Youth and Students (MYS). A narrow clique of Stalinist-influenced careerists were deployed by the Leader's Office to carry through the shut-down of MYS and keep Young Labour under control.

That clique, with a nasty culture of online bullying and cultish group-control behaviours (including a creepy one-finger salute...), took control of Young Labour on behalf of the leadership and ran it into the ground.

The politics the "official left" leadership of Young Labour were poor: they supported Brexit and were hostile to attempts to commit the party to backing freedom of movement. In organisational style they borrowed too much from old Blairite patterns: beyond mobilisations at internal and external elections, the young membership were expected to remain passive.

Young people came out in repeated, impressive mobilisations for Corbyn. But the youth wing's paranoid leadership, obsessed with factional control and uninterested in any serious effort to organise working-class young people into an autonomous youth wing, failed to develop a movement with life and roots of its own.

In the forthcoming Young Labour elections, young members shouldn't have to choose between standing still (with a cultish, paranoid, top-down and politically nationalist "left") and sliding backwards (to a right-wing liberal Blair/ Brown/ Miliband-style regime).

Momentum Internationalists and others are working to put forward candidates defending internationalist politics, and a democratic, bottom-up vision for reviving and re-organising Labour's youth movement. Watch this space. □

Momentum Internationalists is relaunching

By an MI supporter

Momentum Internationalists is planning a renewed drive to raise the politics of class struggle and internationalism in the labour movement.

The campaign group was founded by supporters of Labour for a Socialist Europe in the run-up to the elections for the National Co-ordinating Group of the big left-Labour group [Momentum](#).

In that election, it argued:

- that Momentum should uphold basic norms of labour-movement democracy (for example having an annual conference to set policy, so as to be able to campaign for the sovereignty of Labour Party Conference without looking ridiculous)
- that the Labour left should stand for the transformation and democratisation of the trade unions, rather than pursuing horse-trading with the union bureaucracies or regarding them as champions of socialism
- that Momentum's outlook should be internationalist: for freedom of movement, against the hard right's Brexit agenda, and taking freedom struggles around the world

seriously, from Hong Kong to Eastern Europe.

We made a splash with campaigns to push back against Keir Starmer's pro-Modi lurch on Kashmir, and the Labour leadership's inadequate response to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Now that the NCG elections are over, Momentum Internationalists will carry on its campaigning work and widen out its scope from Momentum internal affairs to build an internationalist left more broadly in the Labour Party and raise the flag for internationalist ideas more widely in society.

Momentum Internationalists has taken part in the first of a series of demonstrations and actions against the government's inhuman treatment of migrants in the English Channel. Our supporters have organised protests against Poland's state-led provocations and repression against LGBT people. We mean to promote the voice of the recent rank-and-file revolt by NHS workers over pay and make the Labour leadership back their fight.

And our young supporters will be putting forward a platform in the forthcoming Young Labour elections. □

Shapurji Saklatvala: Lab

By Sacha Ismail

In 1922, sixty-five years before Diane Abbott and three other Labour MPs of colour entered Parliament, the Indian-born Shapurji Saklatvala was elected MP for Battersea North in South West London.

Like many Labour candidates more recently, Saklatvala was a bourgeois figure standing in a working-class constituency which was not his home. There the similarity ends.

The first “BAME” Labour MP was a revolutionary socialist who attacked Ramsay MacDonald for failing to oppose British colonialism and Gandhi for failing to champion working-class and peasant struggles (and both felt they had to reply). He was the first person arrested during the General Strike, and imprisoned for his speech. He was banned from India because the British government feared his popularity there.

From 1921 Saklatvala was a member of the newly-formed Communist Party of Great Britain. Then there were three general elections in 23 months. “Sak” lost his seat won in 1922 to the Liberals by a whisker in 1923 and, standing as a Communist with Labour support, regained it by a whisker in 1924. With the growing Labour-Communist breach after 1925, and the CP’s turn to “Third Period” policies, he finally lost it to Labour in 1929.

Saklatvala was not parachuted into Battersea, but chosen as the standard bearer of a strong local labour movement which respected his record as an educator and activist in the class struggle, and the internationalism he represented.

Saklatvala used his platform in Parliament to aggressively champion the interests and struggles not just of his working-class constituents, but of the wider working class – in Britain and globally. He was so active in anti-colonial struggles that he was attacked as “the Member for India”.

This was not just a matter of speeches in Parliament, though he made a lot of those. He saw his role as a radical version of Bernie Sanders called “organiser in chief”. He used his position to help organise the working class and left and to educate for socialism, in Britain, in India and wherever he could reach.

Background

Saklatvala was born in 1874 in Bombay (today’s Mumbai) in a bourgeois Parsi family. The Parsis, a religious-ethnic group descended from Zoroastrians who fled the Islamic takeover of Iran in the 7th century, were disproportionately wealthy and influential. In 1900 they were perhaps 80,000 out of 300 million Indians. Yet the first three Indian MPs in Britain (one radical-Liberal, one Tory and Saklatvala) were all Parsis.

Saklatvala’s father was a merchant; his mother was the sister of Jamsetji Tata, the owner of India’s largest commercial and industrial empire.

There are indications that his Parsi heritage helped



shape his combination of a deep-rootedness in his background with universalism and internationalism. Conflicts with richer, more powerful and arrogant family members, including when he worked for Tata, may have contributed to growing beyond the strong Parsi tradition of upper-class philanthropy as an answer to the poverty and suffering he saw around him.

His daughter Sehri speculated that the seeds of revolutionary politics were planted in Saklatvala’s mind when he was a student volunteer for Ukrainian Jewish bacteriologist Waldemar Haffkine, a former populist-socialist and political refugee working to combat the plague which killed hundreds of Bombay’s people every week for much of the 1890s.

Accounts depict Saklatvala as a kind and humanitarian, independent-minded and very bright young man, but not yet a socialist. He would make that leap after moving to Britain.

In Britain

Frustrated with his relatives running the burgeoning Tata empire and plagued by serious ill-health – for quite a while he walked on crutches – Saklatvala came to Britain for treatment and recuperation in 1905. He fell in love with a young working-class woman, Sally Marsh, who worked at the rest facility he stayed at in Derbyshire. They would get married and have five children.

Despite growing family commitments, and holding down (relatively junior) jobs with the family firm (and briefly with electrical engineering company British Westinghouse), Saklatvala became increasingly engaged with left-wing politics. This was not long after the great upsurge of British workers in the 1880s and 90s, the rise of socialism as an organised force, and the emergence of what became the Labour Party. The year after Saklatvala arrived, 20 years of Tory rule ended with the election of a leftish Liberal government, carrying out reforms under heavy pressure from the labour movement.

In 1906, he still sympathised with the Liberals, but al-

our's first "BAME" MP

ready was frustrated by their limits in terms of their attitude to the working class. He attended left and labour movement meetings in Derbyshire and quickly moved to clearer socialist ideas. By 1907, after moving to London, he was involved in his local branch of the Marxist Socialist Democratic Federation.

He retained membership in the SDF and its successor British Socialist Party until they merged into the CPGB in 1920. It was relatively common to be a member of more than one socialist organisation, and from 1909 Saklatvala was active mainly in the larger but woollier Independent Labour Party, which he joined while living in Manchester.

A great lover of political debate ever since school, he also attended various non-socialist forums and meetings at which he could hone his skills and arguments. A commitment to free debate is something he would champion as a communist politician.

He met many prominent figures, from Ramsay MacDonald to Keir Hardie to Sylvia Pankhurst. His first political demonstration was one Pankhurst organised for women's suffrage, in 1908.

In 1911 he was involved in an unsuccessful project to interest British unions in the formation of a General Workers Union in India. He planned to return to India permanently, but after a visit with his family in 1912-13 abandoned the idea.

Before the First World War Saklatvala joined a number of organisations and took part in a wide range of meetings and activities. As early as 1911 he was actively noticed by Scotland Yard. However, it was the war and the Russian revolution which turned him from a committed citizen of the movement to a zealous and virtually full-time agitator to overthrow capitalism.

War and revolution

During the war, despite restrictions, the ILP's membership tripled to 16,000 – driven by the growing minority in society hostile to the war. Saklatvala was increasingly active in this growing milieu, making a major name for himself as a speaker. From the start he was strongly against the war.

The central themes of his propaganda were the need to replace capitalism with a radically different socialist system; and for socialism to be international as well as universalist in its values in order to succeed. His international and internationalist conception of socialism was strongly connected to anti-racism and anti-colonialism.

Saklatvala was active in the ILP's City of London branch, alongside a number of other well-known internationalist socialists, including John Walton Newbold, who would be elected a Communist MP in 1922. The City branch became known for outspokenness and activity in international solidarity, including support for anti-colonial movements. It organised not just around the well-established left cause of India, but also South Africa, despite many in the labour movement seeing African peoples as less deserving or

capable of freedom. In 1919 it held a major meeting on labour conditions in India, which was attended by delegates from the Indian National Congress.

From 1917 Saklatvala toured extensively, speaking at ILP meetings in many parts of the country. His tirelessness is demonstrated by the fact that during the 1918 election he travelled to Leicester *every day after work* to campaign for Ramsay MacDonald, who at that time he admired.

He was a delegate to national ILP conferences, explaining to the 1918 conference the motivation for his punishing schedule: he "wanted to do one thing, and that was to spread socialism from one end of the world to the other".

His commitment was strengthened further by the Russian Revolution. The revolution's impact on Europe's labour movements was profound, and Saklatvala was one of thousands of socialists in Britain who felt transformed, particularly as he saw so many parallels between Russia and India. In 1918, he was involved, along with Sylvia Pankhurst, in founding the People's Russian Information Bureau to support the Bolsheviks.

He was part of the minority of the ILP who favoured joining the Communist International, founded in 1919. When, after two years of struggle, this battle was decisively lost, he and others resigned from the ILP to join the Communist Party.

Typically of the time and even more of the man, there was little animosity or personal hostility involved, but his political diagnosis was sharp and harsh. His resignation letter criticised "a spirit not at all creditable to socialism or communism... the new life on which ILP members are launching out, namely of seeking municipal and parliamentary advantages at the sacrifice of the spirit of true socialism".

When Saklatvala joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, founded in 1920 by merger of the British Socialist Party and other smaller revolutionary groups, he maintained many of the connections, national and rank-and-file, he made in the ILP. This is how, just as he joined the CPGB, he was adopted as the Labour parliamentary candidate in an area where the labour movement was strong but the Communists weren't – Battersea. □

• Further articles will tell more of Saklatvala's story.

Battersea vs the British Empire: radical walking tour

Meet 2pm, Saturday 19 September, outside Clapham Junction station (St John's Hill), South West London. Come and learn about the history of one of the labour movement's first London bastions, through the remarkable story of three anti-racist, anti-imperialist, socialist figures: John Archer, Charlotte Despard and Shapurji Saklatvala. □

Deliveroo workers strike for decent wages and sick pay

By Michael Elms

On Wednesday 19 August couriers working for Deliveroo struck in Sheffield, demanding a pay increase, sick pay, and an end to sackings from the platform without hearings or appeals. Their action almost completely shut down all delivery business for local restaurants selling food via the Deliveroo app.

The strike drew support from Labour MP Olivia Blake, who sent a message to the rally:

"I fully support Deliveroo workers, and all precarious workers, organising for better conditions and the right to a guaranteed living wage. For too long Deliveroo, Uber, and other employers of the platform economy have exploited their workers. Now is the time for guaranteed, decent wages; fair conditions, an end to unfair sackings; and real sick pay for all."

Since summer 2019, couriers working for platforms like Deliveroo and UberEats have been organising with the assistance of activists from the local Workers' Liberty branch. Workers' Liberty members and our friends in the local Labour Party and left have been out on the streets talking to delivery workers and helping them build their organisation. A group of worker-leaders and a culture of organisation has developed from among conversations between drivers parked in Sheffield town centre between jobs. Over the last year, couriers have taken on the council over unfair parking tickets, confronted delinquent restaurant managements who treat workers with disrespect, and built their union's strength to fight the big platforms over pay and workers' rights. Today their IWGB union branch has dozens of paid-up members and the drivers are strong enough to effectively close down Deliveroo's business at peak time on a week night.

Four weeks of action

On Monday 24 August, a well-attended Zoom meeting voted on a four-week programme of actions to keep up the pressure on employers big and small in the food delivery gig economy.

Dee Uddin, the Chair of the Sheffield branch of the couriers' IWGB union, said "We did not protest or take strike action in the pandemic because we knew we were supporting the country and it was a time to step up and help people, not count the pennies. We are all supporting

families – and my son suffers from severe asthma – but we knew we were doing an important job for society. But now we can't stay silent because the pay is so low.

"People are obliged to work for multiple platforms just to survive: but the companies penalise us for that. We get no holiday pay and no sick pay, and sometimes you make under minimum wage: the other day I waited 25 minutes for an order at Mr Miyagi for which I was paid £3.20. But we drivers are the ones the companies penalise for long waits. And we have to cover insurance, petrol and upkeep on our vehicles.

"We need clarity on how the fee systems work. You might make good money one day and then the next find the fees have been cut. When I started, the lowest you'd get for a delivery was £4.25. Today I get paid as little as £3.10.

"There should be a hiring freeze. A lot of people laid off elsewhere have signed on to work for the app but the result is that no-one is getting enough work to support their families.

"We need sick pay. At the start of the pandemic I was very ill for a week. I received £100 for that week. We need proper sick pay. Many drivers feel that they have no choice but to work when they're sick. Even if they fear they've got Covid they still feel pressure to come into work, because they're worried, asking themselves, "how will I feed myself? How will I survive?" □



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom. **Until 21 September:**

Sunday 30 August, 6.30-8pm: [A global history of pandemics](#)

Sunday 6 September, 6.30-8pm: [Remembering the Bosnian war](#), with Sarah Correia

Monday 7 September, 7:30-9pm: [After Slavery and Mass Migrations](#)

Sunday 13 September, 12-2pm: Socialist Feminist Reading Group: [Hood Feminism by Mikki Kendall](#)

Sunday 13 September, 6.30-8pm: [What is left antisemitism, how can it be confronted?](#)

Sunday 20 September, 6.30-8pm: [Covid-19: what do we know so far?](#) With George Davey Smith, (Professor of Clinical Epidemiology at Bristol University)

Monday 21 September, 7:30-9pm: [Racism Today and How to Fight it](#)

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see [workersliberty.org/meetings](#) □

Protect lives, not borders!

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement is seeking signatures for a statement against the Tory government's moves to clamp down on asylum-seeker boats crossing the Channel. bit.ly/lcfm-pp □

Lebanon in revolt

By Joey Ayoub

Joey Ayoub is a Lebanese writer and activist. He spoke to Daniel Randall from Solidarity about the protest movement in Lebanon in the aftermath of the Beirut explosion on 4 August.

The implications [of the resignation of the government] are not particularly big. There wasn't a celebratory moment on the streets such as we saw when [Saad] Hariri had resigned [on 29 October 2019], largely because we already know what the government's next steps are.

They will either pick Hariri again or get someone more respected, maybe the diplomat Nawaf Salam. The problem is that even if someone like Salam is picked, there would still be the other two members of this troika in their positions of power.

If Aoun and Berri resign, which is unlikely, and someone like Salam picked, this may be an acceptable concession as we've never had a situation where all three members of the troika are independents. That would install a "let's wait and see" moment, whether rightly or wrongly, that we have yet to see.

[There are now] the same demands as the 17 October [2019] revolution, but with more anger. The calls for the full resignation of this regime – currently symbolised by the president Michel Aoun, the speaker of parliament Nabih Berri and the leader of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah – and the complete rejection of any co-optation by rival sectarian parties – especially the Future Movement's Saad Hariri and the Lebanese Forces' Samir Geagea.

A popular demand is for early elections to be held while a transitional government is established without the presence of any of these key sectarian figures. This last demand has been rather vague which allowed the government [after October 2019] enough "negotiating space" to elect an outsider like Hassan Diab as prime minister while maintaining their power.

In addition to the above, we now have calls for an international investigation into the explosion.

There are a few independent parties that have been created in recent years and that have participated in the protests. Two worth noting are LiHaqqi ("For My Rights") and Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla ("Citizens in a State"). The latter is led by Charbel Nahas, a former Aoun ally who resigned in protest, set up his own party and is generally viewed as a progressive leftist in Lebanon. Li-Haqqi is another progressive platform that came out in recent years as well. They both have a growing base and it is assumed or hoped that were early elections to happen, they would get the independent votes as well as dissatisfied traditional voters. It is still very uncertain.

Besides the more party/election-oriented groups, there are hundreds of initiatives and collectives focusing on mutual aid and more broader solidarity networks. In my view, a lot of energy will be spent whenever elections happen,

assuming they do happen, as removing the main sectarian figures from power is viewed as an absolute priority.

The unions were largely repressed or co-opted in the 1990s and early 2000s (there is a good episode of the Lebanese Politics Podcast with labour researcher Lea Bou Khater that goes into the relevant details on that). There are independent unions that started being formed in the aftermath of the October revolution but this has slowed down due to Covid-19, the economic crisis and now the explosion. I suspect that they will pick up steam again in the near future.

What we do have are independent student groups often working with independent labour movements. With Covid-19 for example, we've seen increased focus on the dangerous working conditions of medical workers in a country largely captured by private interests. The student-labour coalitions are nodes of resistance that are likely to continue to grow.

As a first step [socialists internationally] need to get rid of the Tankies that continue to lurk around anything remotely "radical", especially online. This is creating a lot of resentment towards western leftists especially, not too dissimilarly to how other groups of people like Hongkongers, Taiwanese, Uighurs, various Latin Americans, Belarusians, Ukrainians and so on have been treated in recent months and years.

There has to be direct support based on a people-centred anti-authoritarian form of politics. Without that it will remain a primarily online shouting match that doesn't lead anywhere productive, with those repressing us continuing to benefit from it.

In the more immediate future we will require a lot of medical aid.

In the more long-term future, I am expecting increased government repression coupled by intensified disinformation campaigns online designed to demonise and dehumanise us just as Belarusians and Hongkongers are currently being demonised and dehumanised. □

• Abridged: full text at bit.ly/ja-leb

What we demand in the crisis

1. Requisition key sectors
2. Fight for workers' control
3. Make the labour movement an essential service, fighting on the issues listed here
4. Defend workers' rights. Work or full pay! Cancel rent, mortgage, and utility payments.
5. Take care of the worst-off
6. Defend civil liberties
7. International solidarity □

• See full text at bit.ly/what-d

• Animated video of full demands: bit.ly/demand-video

The issues in Unison

By a Unison member

The context for the election now underway for a new General Secretary for the big public-services union Unison is the destruction that governments over the last 20 years have brought on services, pay, conditions and rights at work in the public sector.

Nominations are now open, and will run to 25 September. The vote-out, between candidates who get at least 25 branch nominations, will run from 28 October to 27 November, and the result will be announced on 11 January 2021.

It's right to point the finger for the destruction at the Tory and coalition administrations since 2010. But Labour, too, oversaw the introduction of austerity as a response to the economic crisis.

The main losers have been the working class, through cuts in public services (NHS, schools, local services etc), cuts in benefits, and cuts in jobs and rights at work. Real wages have declined by 22% over the last 10 years in local government according to official union statistics, between 10 and 20% over the last 7 years in health, and 16.5% over the last 10 years in higher education.

The pandemic has exposed the fact that Unison and other public sector unions have allowed a key group of workers in care homes and home or domiciliary care (low paid, mainly women, often migrant) to remain badly unionised, with virtually no recognition agreements and few rights at work.

We don't expect private-sector profit-led employers to give us sick pay and PPE and union representation and negotiating rights out of their own benevolence. In fact, we expect they won't do that, because it eats into the profits.

But, except in the North West region of Unison, there appears to be no plan or organising strategy for that sector. And this in a union that prides itself on being a majority female union with seats on its committees reserved for low paid and manual workers.

Labour and big unions like Unison and the GMB have also failed to fight against outsourcing and to remove Thatcher's anti-union laws.

As trade unionists, we get used to hearing from our union leaders that we cannot act without our members, that to win against unscrupulous employers or governments with strong majorities our members must be convinced to take serious action.

But in the last 20 years, under Dave Prentis as General Secretary of Unison, the leadership's practice has been to demoralise, demotivate or undermine organising for action. That approach has filtered through to many of the union's elected bodies, regionally and locally.

To safeguard the control of the union machine, Unison branches have been shut down or taken into regional control, and rules have been brought in to prevent branches coordinating "horizontally", even in the run-up to conference to support motions. The claim that a local branch cannot support anything counter to Unison national policy is used by regions to keep branch activists down.

Two assistant general secretaries are standing to replace Prentis. Both will pull out a left-wing speech when needed, and both will get coverage for free in the unions' media.

Christina McAnea is the right-wing continuity-Prentis candidate. Roger McKenzie is a left-wing bureaucrat supported by Jeremy Corbyn and seen by the official Labour left as the best bet to change the union.

There are two lay candidates, Paul Holmes (a Labour left activist in the Yorkshire region, with the support of "[Unison Action](#)") and Hugo Pierre (Socialist Party). Both are long-serving members of the union's National Executive.

Both lay-candidate platforms display the weakness of rank and file organisation in the union. The platforms have real content in the arena of the candidates' immediate experience, but are weaker on other sectors and issues. They are not candidates of a vibrant rank and file movement, or even a properly functioning union broad left; they are respect-worthy individual activists with limited forces behind them.

For example, Paul Holmes and Hugo Pierre are local government activists, and their platforms are very local-government-focused. Neither mentions the emerging grassroots NHS pay campaign, though both Holmes and Pierre surely support it. Neither says anything (beyond personal "worker's wage" commitments) about democratic reform of the union.

The union's left is split between McKenzie, Holmes and Pierre. Over the nomination period Workers' Liberty activists in Unison will be writing to each of these with questions about the anti-union laws, industrial strategy across our sectors, Labour, union democracy, building rank-and-file organisation, and taking a worker's wage. □

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(((•))) Upcoming livestreams

Workers' Liberty have a schedule of videos going "live". Please tune in and share! The videos (often subtitled) will "go live" at the times below on our [facebook](#), and (if not before) [instagram](#), [youtube](#), and often [twitter](#). From Wednesday 5 to Tuesday 11 August:

Thursday 27 August, 1.30pm: *Solidarity* editorial with Stephen Wood (see page 3)

Monday 31 August, 1.30pm: Colonialism and imperialism, and the historical roots of racism

NHS protests set for 12 September

By Mohan Sen

The rank-and-file NHS workers' campaign for a 15% pay rise – "NHS Workers Say No to Pay Inequality" – is heating up, with actions and events across the country from 26 August.

26 August will see workers' rallies at hospitals and workplaces in places including Ipswich, Cambridge, Aintree, Birkenhead, Manchester, North Tees, Southend, Chelmsford, Basildon and Coventry, as well as across London. The first half of September will see public demonstrations in places including Plymouth, Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Brighton, Bournemouth, Southend, Norwich and London, mostly on Saturday 12 September, some on 5 September. Details: bit.ly/NHSpayevents.

An NHS nurse key to the campaign told us: "The campaign is developing and expanding across hospitals in

London and around the country. More and more workers are realising they have to take action and organise themselves, and they are doing this energetically, and with enthusiasm. The spread of protests has shown the depth of anger of so many NHS staff as they come out of the pandemic and realise the governments' praise was so many empty words."

Every labour movement activist and everyone who wants to see the NHS workers – and all workers – win against the government should get involved and help make it happen. Buy badges to wear and distribute here: bit.ly/NHSbadges. To contact the campaign email nurses-sayno6@gmail.com.

For background on how the campaign has developed and the political issues involved, see our interview with Guy's and St Thomas' Unite branch secretary Mark Boothroyd bit.ly/markbinterview15. □

Beckett careerism splits United Left

By Ann Field

Howard Beckett, head of Unite the Union's Legal Department, announced on 20 August that he will stand for election as the union's General Secretary.

In online hustings held in mid-July the millionaire solicitor had sought to win the backing of the United Left, the "Broad Left" in Unite. He lost to Assistant General Secretary Steve Turner.

Beckett whinged that the vote had been marred by procedural deficiencies and irregularities, using the increasingly whacky Skawkbox website as his main media outlet. The United Left provided a detailed rebuttal of Beckett's complaints.

One condition of seeking endorsement from the United Left to be a General Secretary candidate is agreement to abide by the outcome, win or lose. Beckett's flagrant breach of that agreement has underlined yet again his lack of integrity, principle and moral scruples.

Beckett's unbridled careerism, largely built upon fake-left macho posturing, is now splitting the United Left.

237 of Beckett's 367 votes were provided by the "Progressive United Left Scotland" (PULS), set up by Unite Scottish full-timers in 2016 and run under their patronage ever since. PULS has now publicly backed Beckett's decision to stand.

Some of PULS's staunchest and longest-standing supporters in the United Left at all-Britain level, such as Kev Terry and Jayne Taylor, are now posting material on social media suggesting that PULS are a bunch of lying charlatans.

Under United Left rules, Beckett now faces expulsion. In a fit of full-timer-stage-managed fake indignation, Beckett's supporters will quit the United Left in solidarity with their millionaire martyr.

There is something more serious buried beneath this mutual backstabbing: the need for a rank-and-file candidate to stand for Unite General Secretary – or at least to attempt to win the 150 branch nominations needed to do so – so that the eventual General Secretary election is not a choice between different factions of the Unite bureaucracy. □

Let Tower Hamlets rebalot!

By Mohan Sen

After nine strike days since the start of July, and a lot of vibrant campaigning, Tower Hamlets council workers are regrouping in their fight to stop the "Tower Rewards" attack on their terms and conditions.

Under the anti-union laws, they need to rebalot to strike again. There are rumours that the national Unison leadership, despite its public support for the dispute, is dragging its feet and insisting on drawn-out procedures that will make further action impossible for a while yet.

Unison activists will push the union leaders to move faster. We can help by continuing to build support for the workers.

As Tower Hamlets Unison social care convener Amina

Patel told us last month:

"We've been overwhelmed by the support we've had since the action began. The strikes have really [built] momentum. The virtual rallies have been great and so have the picket lines... It's been really powerful..."

"Where is the campaign to get more funding? They use this excuse but they are not fighting the government for more money. They obviously feel that confronting the government is too hard, but confronting the workers is easy, because we're weak. We're showing them we're not weak."

Let's help them win! Updates bit.ly/THUupdates. For donations and solidarity messages see bit.ly/THsolidarity. Sign to support at bit.ly/THstrikestatement. □

“If you want to sign that, no job here”



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

For maintenance staff, the Outage [when the power plant is shut down for maintenance and repairs which can't be done while it is working] is a short, intense period of work completely unlike the rest of the year. Although our days are dominated with twelve-hour shifts for fourteen days straight, we get to sleep in our own beds and travel a normal commute home.

I've managed to scavenge a Saturday off and end a few shifts early. One of the apprentices explains how he'd wanted to “opt-in” to the EU Working Time directive when he signed his contract, but our line manager had told him “If you want to sign that, there's no job for you here.”

For the visiting contractors this is a different ball game. One of the workers grinding debris from the inside of the furnace tells me he's been moving from outage to outage across the UK, working 10-12 hour shifts, and hasn't had a day off in fifty days. Because every plant wants to do repairs in the summer, when power demand is low, the handful of companies specialised in servicing the machines race around the country during “outage season”.

Leeds energy recovery facility, for example, is an exact replica of Sheffield, but their outages overlap. This means that the hydraulics engineers I'm working with have to race up to Leeds at the weekend to begin work they “should have finished” during the week at Sheffield. One of them complains that “My missus is livid about me ditching the caravan holiday.”

Of course, outages often go over schedule. I'm walking out the door one evening when two mechanics run back in and begin rummaging through boxes.

“Gas leak”

“Oh shit.”

Our team tries clamping the pipe, then welding it, then clamping again, and at 7.30pm the boss tells the fitters to go home. The electricians stay till midnight working on the gas burner signalling problems.

A day later the gas burners are working and the furnace is lit, but the turbine valves are failing. Two systems engineers and two turbine engineers are kept in the switch room overnight trouble-shooting. When I catch up with the system's engineer the following day he's slightly delirious and tripping over his own feet. The turbine guys are remarkably cool and collected in their greasy red overalls – they take a two-hour nap in their cabins, eat some pot-noodle, and get right back to it. “Welcome to engineering.”

Eventually it turns out that the control system is working fine, but the valves themselves are faulty. A part is swapped and the valve begins working well; we “stroke” it to force the air out of the hydraulic oil system, but this causes a pipe burst and hot oil soaks the contractors. Once this is corrected, the turbine fails again.

“It's over-heating,” says the operator. “It's 30 degrees outside and the cooling system is failing.”

Our team returns to the cooling system and a brave or stupid electrician takes apart pipes which pump water at 75 degrees into the turbine housing. We watch, alongside my manager, anxiously as he isolates the leg and removes the filter cap, expecting a build-up of pressure to burst out and burn him. Luckily, no-one is hurt. Back in the control room, a manager asks:

“Did you do something in there, because it's working?”

No-one says anything. Finally, finally, the turbine comes online and the responsible engineers are allowed to go home. □

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a Combined Heat and Power plant in Sheffield.

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Anti-racist resources

We have compiled various anti-racist resources to learn about anti-racist movements, and arm yourself with ideas to beat back racism: readings and pamphlets, video and audio. **New content this week!**

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources □

Our new calendars

We're close to 70% of our fundraising target of £10,000 by 21-22 November: now at £6,977, with an additional £372 received in the last fortnight, mostly through small individual donations. Please keep them coming at workersliberty.org/donate.

Workers' Liberty members have been active on the streets more in the last two weeks – on protests against the anti-LGBT laws being enacted by the Polish government, over democracy in Belarus, at Tate Modern strikers, and with Deliveroo couriers protesting in Sheffield. On all these demonstrations we have sold *Solidarity* and our books and pamphlets. Now we have created new event calendars. Visit workersliberty.org/meetings (bit.ly/wl-cal) to subscribe to them from Google Calendar, Apple Calendar, Outlook or Thunderbird on your phone or computer to keep informed of Workers' Liberty and other left activities. Get in touch with us if you are going: see you there! □

“Conditionality” and DWP hours



John Moloney

“Conditionality” for benefit claimants has been restored, which means claimants can be “sanctioned” – i.e., have their benefits revoked – for things like being late for appointments. This is a spectacularly cruel decision on the government’s part, which PCS completely opposes.

At the moment, bosses are still proceeding with a light touch and often not insisting that frontline DWP staff impose conditionality. But that’s likely to change, especially as claims continue to rise. We oppose conditionality both in terms of its impact on claimants, and its use as a productivity measure to discipline our members. PCS wants a welfare and benefits system where our members’ role is to help people access support, not to deny it to them.

In the Department for Work and Pensions, our consultative ballot of members in 291 Job Centres and Universal Credit Service Centre nationwide closes on 7 September. The dispute there is over a management plan to extend opening hours, meaning workers would have more public-facing work. That’s a risk from an infection control perspective, as it means more face-to-face contact and greater numbers of people potentially gathering together in confined spaces. That puts both workers and claimants at risk.

DWP bosses’ ability to extend opening hours is a legacy of a deal agreed four years ago, which allows them to do this in exchange for salary increments. Our immediate challenge is to the safety implications of the extended opening, but many workers also, and entirely legitimately, simply don’t want to be forced to work longer hours. We’ll assess the result of the consultative ballot, but if it is “Yes” then I assume in the face of no change from DWP that a formal ballot will take place.

Our members’ strikes at Tate galleries, where workers are facing over 300 job cuts, have been tremendous. We held particularly lively pickets at the Tate Modern and Tate Britain galleries in London, with Jeremy Corbyn speaking.

The Tate cuts are typical of what workers are now facing across the culture sector. At London’s Southbank Centre, we’re considering industrial action, as our members there are also facing job cuts. There are also struggles around workplace safety, as museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions reopen to the public. At the British Museum, our members are challenging management’s inadequate risk assessments which we believe put both

staff and public safety at risk.

In HMRC, our cleaner members in offices on Merseyside conclude a month-long strike on 28 August. They’re employed by ISS, and are demanding living wages and full sickness and isolation pay.

There are also ongoing struggles across the civil service over the return to physical workplaces. Each department is drawing up plans for what senior management calls an “accelerated return”. We’re fighting for the maximum scrutiny of union reps over these plans; so far, in most departments, they don’t involve a push for masses of people to return to workplaces but of course under political pressure that may change. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

In-house cleaning on the Tube!

From *Tubeworker*

London Mayor Sadiq Khan was questioned on LBC radio today (13 August) about conditions for Tube cleaners, particularly their lack of staff travel benefits.

His non-committal remarks were misleadingly reported by LBC journalist Theo Usherwood as a commitment to “free travel to and from work”.

But they represent Khan conceding that outsourced cleaners deserve at least some staff travel benefits.

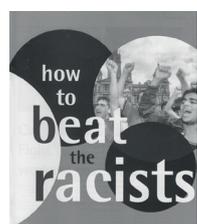
There are all sorts of different workers amongst directly-employed TfL/LU staff, but it’s understood that making the system run is a collective effort, so they all get the same staff travel pass. Why should the contribution of outsourced workers – who, let’s remember, didn’t ask for their work to be outsourced – be deemed less worthy?

And, anyway, Tube cleaners are not “contractors” who only work on LU on an incidental, job-by-job basis. Whilst they may have second or third jobs for other employers, cleaners are part of the permanent LU workforce, with the same cleaners cleaning the same stations, offices, and depots every day. They should have the same conditions as their directly-employed workmates.

In the same interview, Khan said he would “consider” bringing the contract for cleaning on TfL in house when it comes up for expiry in 2022, but ruled out cancelling the contract before that. This is the first time he has committed publicly to doing even so much as “considering” in-housing cleaning.

It’s some small but real progress, and Khan’s references to RMT’s “lobbying” and “campaigning” makes clear that it’s progress that has been achieved via the pressure of RMT cleaners and their supporters.

We should use Khan’s comments as impetus to intensify our pressure on him, and step up our campaigning for equal staff travel benefits for all cleaners, and for in-housing. 2022 at the latest, not the soonest! □



This pamphlet – **now an audio too** – aims to convince labour movement activists of the importance of fighting racism, anti-racists of the importance of the labour movement – and fighting to transform it.

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Solidarity



For a workers' government

Belarus: support the left and the workers!

By Omar Raii

Belarus has been gripped by protests and strikes following the fraudulent "re-election" of dictator Alexander Lukashenko on 9 August. On 22 August Another Europe Is Possible held a meeting with voices from the frontline of Belarus.

Lizaveta Merliak, International Secretary of the Belarusian independent trade union of miners and chemical workers, told us strike committees are now being formed all across Belarus. This is in spite of the fact that Belarus' repressive strike laws prevent trade unions from putting forward political demands or striking for political reasons.

Valentyna Katorzhevska, besides looking after her young child, is part of the Homel organization of the Free Trade Union of Metalworkers. Factory workers at various metal plants have been some of the key workers who have gone on strike and who have faced arrests and detention by the regime in response. Some members have even had to flee the country.

Pavel Katarzheusky of "Just World", the Belarusian section of the European Left Party, spoke about how he saw the future developing for the struggle in Belarus. He suggested that the struggle will continue but may not be as acute and in-the-open. Those in power may continue their repression over a longer period of time but not in the public eye.

He said that the Belarusian left must also politically oppose the liberals who are not interested in fixing social problems and for whom just getting rid of Lukashenko is enough. The protests are genuinely a small window of opportunity for the real Belarusian left, as opposed to the Stalinist groups in the country who (even those who, unlike the official "Communist Party", don't positively support Lukashenko) have condemned the protests.

These Stalinists who claim to oppose Western neo-liberalism conveniently ignore Lukashenko's neoliberal reforms like increases in pension age and the end of grants for some students, casualisation of labour contracts, and the dictator's parliamentary reform which

destroyed left opposition in parliament.

A speaker from the Ukrainian Social Movement, who are seeking to build an independent left party from below, pointed out some of the similarities and differences between the experience of other ex- and post-USSR-model countries. One similarity is that Stalinists still say that Soros and the CIA direct everything in relation to uprisings in Eastern European countries.

He emphasised also how different the situations have been in many of these countries. For example, Belarus does not now have a strong far right seeking to participate in these elections, whereas the far-right did carve out space in Ukraine.

He rightfully pointed out that if Lukashenko does stick it out, there will be more brutality and less space for independent left working-class activity in Belarus. He emphasised the need, as Workers' Liberty do, for an there to be an independent working class force as a pole in the struggle in Belarus and elsewhere.

Independent left-wing and working class forces evidently exist in Belarus. Our job is to give them our full solidarity. □

• More on Belarus:

"Eight out of ten of the largest enterprises in Belarus are on strike", by Dovydas Kuliešas: bit.ly/8-of-10

"Belarus: the working class joins the battle", by Dan Katz: bit.ly/wc-bela

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