

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

George Newman @gewman



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Virus: indict the Tories!



In Britain as in other countries in Europe, detected SARS-Cov-2 infections have been rising slowly since early July, and now faster since points in August.

In France, the rise has been much faster. In Spain, it has already fed into a rise in Covid-19 deaths, though so far only to a rate about 5% of the April peak.

From mid-April through to early July, infection levels fell fairly steadily across Europe. The fall was not reversed, halted, or even visibly slowed by limited lockdown-easing measures across those months, notably the reopening of schools in many countries.

The obvious explanation for the new rise in July and August, after schools shut for summer, is the reopening of pubs, bars, cafés, and tourist activities.

A further rise looks likely in the coming weeks, as more holidayers return home and as millions of students move across countries to set up new and often crowded “households” in halls of residence and to visit new pubs (even if they won’t be able to join the in-person classes they moved for).

Then a further rise when colder weather starts, in October-November, and people spend more time indoors. Yet another in November-December, when the flu season starts; tracking SARS-Cov-2 becomes harder amidst an inevitable rise in not-very-different-looking flu infections; and hospitals would become overstretched on regular seasonal patterns even without

the new virus. The Tories’ “rule of six” is unlikely to help much. It may even be counterproductive by turning people to blame each other as over-fussy or as reckless. We need measures which rebuild social solidarity and social provision.

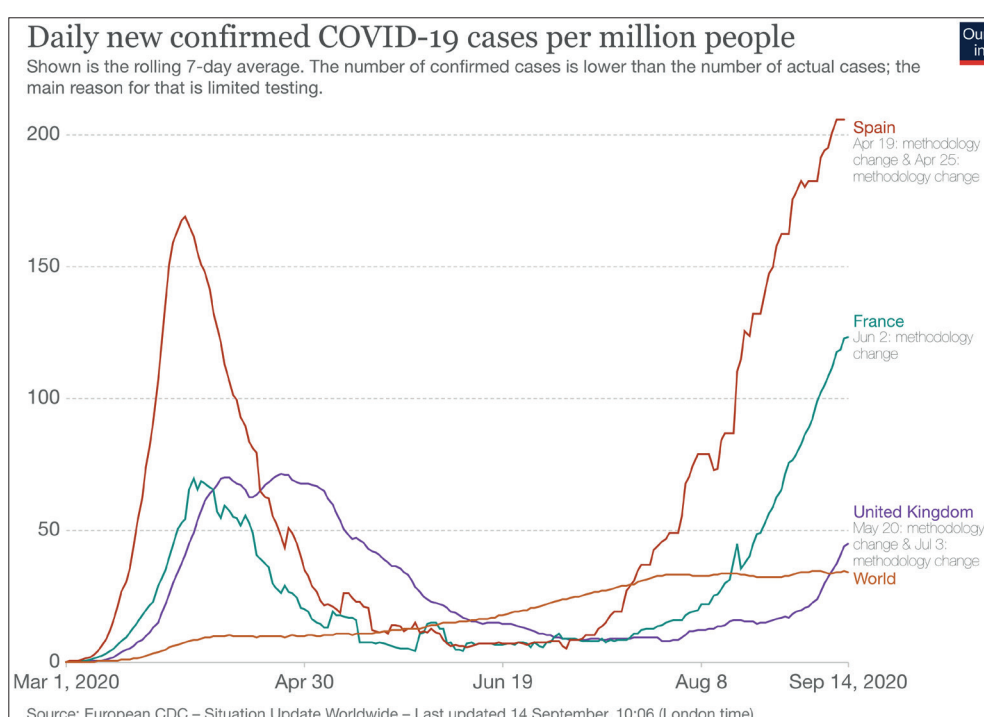
In Israel, which on most scientific estimates ended its early-2020 lockdown too early, in May, and has seen infections rising again since early June, the government has now decreed a new full lockdown for three weeks from 18 September.

Nowhere else, as far as we know, are scientists proposing full general lockdowns, as distinct from local restrictions, better tracking-and-testing, etc. To think that full general lockdowns are the only answer would in fact be to distract attention from the underpinning social issues. And those social issues, untackled, will take their toll again after any new full general lockdown, whether three weeks or three months.

Social issues make a difference. In Germany, cases have risen again since mid-July, but only slowly, and death rates in proportion to cases have always been lower than elsewhere, although Germany has and almost-always has had looser “lockdown” measures than Britain.

In Japan, which has never had a general lockdown, cases increased in June and July, but have decreased again since early August. A decrease in death rates has followed the new decrease in cases.

The new surge of the virus is not an unavoidable fate sweeping the world. In fact worldwide cases have plateaued



since late July, and worldwide deaths have decreased a bit since then.

The UK now has the highest rate of testing in ratio to population of any large country in the world. But, as the Independent SAGE scientists say: “The ‘NHS T[est-and] T[race]’ system is flawed, with an illogical focus on numbers tested, inadequate contact tracing, and increasing evidence that only a low proportion of those asked to isolate for 14 days are able to do so”. We need a *socially* different testing system.

The labour movement should not be intimidated by the “rule of six” into retreating to “stay-at-home” mode. We need the unions and Labour to mobilise to indict the Tories and demand:

- Isolation pay, and alternative accommodation for people in crowded

housing who need to self-isolate

- A public-health, publicly-accountable strategy, not the current mess of Serco and similar profiteering in test-and-trace, not the webs of private-profit contractors, sub-contractors, and sub-sub-contractors in NHS supplies and logistics

- Take over the private hospitals and integrate them into the NHS

- Take social care into public ownership, and staff it on regular public-sector pay and conditions

- Workers’ control over safety at work, and over all back-to-the-office plans

- Extension of furlough payments, and rent holidays, to prepare for closing areas like pubs, cafés, and inessential travel if indicated. □

Labour avoids politics

By Rebecca Lawrence

To dispel any illusion that Labour Party members are seen as more than foot soldiers and a source of funding by the people that run it, see the agenda for 2020 Connected, the online event on 19-22 September replacing the postponed National Conference and Women’s Conference.

The agenda gives the appearance of a political party at pains to avoid politics. The “National” days have 24 training sessions and only 9 policy panels. The policy panels are

only one hour long, and will likely consist of “the great and good” talking to us, not with us.

The “Women’s” Connected day has tried for more interactivity, but with lengthy lists of speakers. It’s doubtful members will get a word in.

Training is fine, but these sessions should run all year anyway.

This is a wasted opportunity. It could have been an exciting, revitalizing event, one which threw open the doors to the exchange of ideas, to debate and discussion, and to political education. Instead, I predict an

impeccably stage-managed and controlled event.

Many leadership offices have

probably fantasised about replacing conference with an event like this, one in which

they don’t have to answer to anyone and don’t have to listen to us. □



New videos!

Watch Workers’ Liberty’s videos and playlists, and subscribe to [our youtube channel](#)! Many have subtitles. **New this last fortnight:**

- [Remembering the Bosnian War](#), with Sarah Correia and Martin Thomas
- [The 1945 Labour government: Causes and lessons](#), with Mark Catterall
- [Global capital and pandemics](#), with Camila Bassi
- [The Black Jacobins: Haitian revolution against slavery](#), by CLR James – with Dan Davison
- [Rebuild the NHS for winter! & Next steps on NHS pay](#) editorials plus [Back the health workers! 15% pay rise!](#) editorial □

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

Schools: build health and safety committees

By a London teacher

At the end of our first week back from school summer holidays a colleague of mine rang the parents of a Year 8 boy in her tutor group. The boy had done very well in school, and was clearly delighted to be back with his friends. So my colleague talked to the boy's dad and told him how well the boy had been doing in class.

The boy's dad burst into tears. Presumably a mix of relief, intense long-term worry, and happiness, all coming to the surface at once.

The kids really need to be back in class. That the Tories are saying it does not make it any less true. And the parents need to see their children in school again. Schools are an essential service, and children and their families need us. That's all of us: catering staff, MIS and office workers, TAs and teachers, too.

The problem now is to try to stay open, and stay open in conditions that are as safe as possible for all staff and children. As Covid cases rise across the country, my Academy is clearly expect-

ing to lose some bubbles soon, perhaps in the next few weeks. (In our case a Year group of over 200 students constitutes a bubble).

It is not clear how many positive cases we have had, nor exactly what conditions will provoke a bubble's quarantine at home. The management are not being forthcoming with this information. What is clear is that we started with fewer than ten Covid test kits and now have almost none left. At least seven staff are self-isolating at home.

At the end of August a Public Health England report was published about Covid outbreaks in schools in June. The PHE concluded that - especially amongst younger children - there were remarkably few cases in schools; spread into schools was coming from the outside in, especially in areas with low infection rates. "Amongst one million pre-school and Primary school children 70 children and 128 staff were affected."

This is not a surprise, but also needs putting in context. I was teaching in June, but to classes no bigger than

eight students, with the windows wide open and the school almost empty. Now the school is rammed. Consistently maintaining social distancing in the corridors and most classrooms is absolutely impossible. These students are older teenagers and the numbers of Covid cases is rising. By November the windows will all be shut and the kids will be coughing and sneezing. It is a different situation now.

Isolated

Isolated cases of temporary partial and complete closure of individual schools are now being reported in response to outbreaks. Presumably infection rates will continue to rise as university students cross the country to go to campuses.

That calls for concerted union and political action in defence of school safety.

My school has a health and safety committee and we are strong enough to push for what we want. Each school is different, requiring detailed attention to local conditions. In my place, for ex-

ample, we have a big concern about a heating and ventilation system in a new building which we think might be circulating air across classrooms.

But many schools are less well organised and require a lead from the National Education Union (NEU) and help from the Labour Party. Unfortunately, the NEU's material reads like the leadership is writing a passive blog or a disinterested newspaper-comment column, rather than running a campaigning union, and organising a fight for workers' and students' rights. The NEU must vigorously advocate members use Health and Safety legislation, such as Section 44 from the Employment Rights Act 1996, which allows workers to take action to enforce safety standards.

The Labour Party, not wanting to cause controversy, has echoed the government's back to school campaign without any reference to the health and safety of school workers or of people in students' households who might have the virus transmitted to them by students. □

Universities return: fight for control!

By Vicki Morris, University of Nottingham Unison branch chair (pc)

The 2020-21 academic year is getting underway. Higher Education (HE) institutions that closed down and sent most of their students away in March, scrambling to move all teaching online, are preparing to welcome over two million people, mostly young, once more.

Universities and colleges like many workplaces are allowed - expected - to reopen so long as they are "Covid-secure". All insist that they are now that - for students, staff, and the surrounding community. They cannot afford to do otherwise!

HE institutions are now basically businesses who must compete and make money to survive. They already lost money when they closed. They fretted throughout the summer that undergraduates (undergraduates = tuition fees) would not want to join or rejoin in 2020-21, but would defer to 2021-22. Fortunately for the universities, that seems not to have happened - who, after all, wants to spend even more time cooped up at home?

Universities make money from student accommodation, so they have been very keen

that students sign up to move in, whatever their prospects of on-campus teaching.

If students decide that on balance they would prefer to move out of halls (or not move in) we should insist that they have the right to do that, and are refunded any hall fees they have already paid. This may become a hot topic or lead to rent strikes quickly if further lockdown measures are introduced.

In the period ahead we must demand that HE is freed from market forces and is publicly funded to deliver high quality education to everyone that can benefit from it - but as safely as possible. That is not possible in a market system where institutions are torn by twin imperatives.

In early September, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) told the Government:

"There is a significant risk that Higher Education (HE) could amplify local and national transmission, and this requires national oversight. It is highly likely that there will be significant outbreaks associated with HE, and asymptomatic transmission may make these harder to detect.

"It is essential to develop

clear strategies for testing and tracing, with effective support to enable isolation."

Independent SAGE said: "All University courses should be offered remotely and online, unless they are practice or laboratory based, with termly review points."

They urged heeding the lessons of the US where a third of colleges reopened in August with face-to-face teaching and quickly experienced Covid outbreaks; many shut down again.

The UCU union that represents HE teaching staff recently set out five tests for safe opening of campuses, but the first is not currently being met nationally, let alone in Covid hotspots: "Sustained reduction in numbers of Covid-19 cases and infection rates".

UCU branches are negotiating locally with management and in most places the vast majority of teaching will continue to be done online. Frankly, nothing else is possible. A Covid-secure workplace means rooms can only be used at around 25% of normal capacity, and since some of the rooms used for student contact were small to start with many of them are useless in the Covid world.

There are many issues for campus trade unions and student campaigners to work on together in the coming term. We should be guided by a few key principles:

Solidarity: between students and staff, between different staff groups and unions, and between the university community and the wider community.

Using our power: we must



insist on being consulted over all issues thrown up by Covid and act fast when we need to. Lives depend on it. □



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom. **Until the end of October:**

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

Sunday 4 October, 6.30-8pm: Fighting council cuts

Sunday 18 October, 6.30-8pm: Analysing the new far right; a discussion jointly hosted by Mutiny and Workers' Liberty

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/meetings

Plus

Every Monday, from 21 September, 6-7pm: [Workers' Liberty Students](#) online political discussions

Thursdays, 8-9pm: ["Revolution Betrayed" study group](#)

Online calendars

Visit workersliberty.org/meetings for our calendars of events: public AWL events, wider labour and social movement events, and more. Subscribe to them on your phone or computer to keep your schedule up to date! □

Forward to Comrade Johnson's Five Year Plan!



By Jim Denham

Let's be clear: when it comes to Brexit, the *Morning Star* and its masters, the Communist Party of Britain, essentially support Boris Johnson and wish him well. They even (as we shall see) harbour hopes that he may introduce some sort of planned economy (no, seriously! See below).

This has been obvious for a long while: over a year ago (29 Aug 2019), the paper blamed anti-Brexit MPs for Johnson's illegal prorogation of parliament: "It comes in circumstances that have been created by anti-Brexit MPs and the House of Commons. They have had three years to agree a way to honour the people's vote to leave the EU [...] Now Johnson has decided to take them on with a trick or two of his own."

"Had more MPs been honest about their full intention, their own protestations about prorogation being a 'constitutional outrage' might at least have the ring of sincerity. As it is, they are the squawkings of a bunch of unscrupulous plotters who are now being played at their own disreputable game".

That tone of admiration was repeated when the paper described the coup as "a muscular move" that "adds to the conviction held by mounting millions of electors that the gap between Parliament and the people is becoming the defining feature of our politics".

The *Morning Star* went on to back Johnson's withdrawal bill, stating (21

Oct 2019): "This government... has, against the expectations and manifest hopes of all those parliamentary renegades who have repeatedly found ways to subvert the popular will, reached agreement with the European Commission. This is the actually existing Brexit. There is no going back... This is a withdrawal agreement that offers an escape from the obligations that the EU treaty regime imposes."

So what does the paper think about Johnson's latest "muscular move" - to announce his willingness to break the very treaty that the *Morning Star* was so enthusiastic about when it was announced less than a year ago?

Well, once again the *Morning Star* and CPB have expressed sympathy for "Mr Johnson" (as they respectfully refer to him these days) in the face of "EU intransigence": in fact, the main danger, they warn is that he'll back down: "With the support of the Labour Party leadership, the EU is determined to control state-aid industry policy in Britain and Northern Ireland while maintaining a large share of the fishing catch in UK waters. The danger is that Mr Johnson will sell out on both issues in order to appease Ulster Unionists and City of London bond dealers" (8 Sep 2020).

The role of the Ulster Unionists and London bond dealers in Johnson's possible "sell out" to the EU is not explained.

As for state aid: the *Morning Star* doesn't mention the fact that UK could more than double state aid spending and still not come close to the EU average. But they don't let that dampen their enthusiasm: Johnson's defiance



of the EU opens up the prospect of "Massive state aid to support industrial development... What's not to like?" (editorial, 9 Sep 2020)

By now totally carried away, the editorial even makes a comparison with... the USSR's planned economy! "It evokes the rousing verse in *Red Fly the Banners Oh*, sung at many a union conference: 'Five for the years of the [Stalin's] Five Year Plan, and four for the four years taken'."

How much longer before "Mr John-

son" becomes "Comrade Johnson"? □

• Correction: in the last Antidoto I included Iran amongst the regimes that the *Morning Star* considers to be "goodies"; this was incorrect as the paper regularly carries articles in solidarity with Iranian trade unionists and pointing out the regime's human rights abuses. On the other hand, I did not include North Korea in the list, even though the CPB and many *Morning Star* contributors do, in fact, consider it to be a "socialist" state.

Brexit, the Tories, Labour: What sort of "State Aid"?



In the propaganda the government is putting out about their conflict with the EU over a Brexit Trade deal the Tories are making much of "State Aid" being a point of contention.

The EU's State Aid rules are often a crux of Lexiter arguments for Brexit. They argue that State Aid rules will be used to stifle attempts to nationalise industries or intervene actively in the economy.

Another Europe Is Possible and socialist remainers like John McDonnell argued that the existing State Aid rules need to be reformed or scrapped as part of the "reform" programme of "Reform

and remain". But as of now is very little evidence these rules do stop such actions. The British government actively nationalised banks and parts of the rail network while part of the EU. The French government under Emmanuel Macron nationalised a shipyard in trouble.

Meanwhile Tory Brexiters have made very little noise about State Aid - until now we are told it's one of their key sticking points.

This is complete hypocrisy. British governments of all stripes over the last 30 years have consistently being amongst the governments handing out the least State Aid in the EU, much less than Germany, France, and Italy.

There has been no evidence

this is likely to change under Johnson.

In fact, [according to the Financial Times](#), the UK trade deal with Japan signed on 11 September and loudly lauded by the right wing press has more stringent State Aid rules than the EU is proposing for an EU-UK trade deal.

How should the unions and Labour Party respond?

Of course we should call out the government's hypocrisy and empty posturing. However we should call the government's bluff, asking what specific State Aid they propose that would be denied by such a deal.

We should push our priorities for that "State Aid", such as taking into public ownership transport, energy, communica-



tion and water as per Labour policy, and demand those priorities be included in talks with the EU. And nationalising the banks in line with TUC and FBU policy.

The government postures about State Aid because they think politically it puts pres-

sure on Labour. Let's make it instead pressure on the government to carry through with public ownership and interventions to save jobs and build public infrastructure. □

Luke Hardy, Leeds

Activists need better tools than Facebook



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

When tens of thousands of people in Belarus decided to protest in the streets, they first of all needed a way to communicate with each other. With internet being widely available, they chose to use the Telegram messaging app.

Telegram is not nearly as well known in Britain, where Skype (owned by Microsoft), Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (both owned by Facebook) are more popular. But it should be – especially by those of us on the Left.

Telegram was set up in Russia in 2013 by Pavel and Nikolai Durov, tech millionaires who originally created the social network Vkontakte, which competes with Facebook. They and the tools they created put them on a collision course with the Putin regime. Eventually the Telegram developers had to leave Russia and today they run their system from Dubai. But they're aware that no place is entirely safe, and say on their website that while Dubai is fine for now, they "are ready to relocate again if local regulations change."

What makes Telegram special and very appealing to civil society groups like the protesters in Belarus is that it's secure in a way that WhatsApp cannot be. In addition to offering basic on-line chat, it also does video calls, file sharing, and much more. Telegram groups can have up to 200,000 mem-

bers. Everything including the voice and video calls is fully encrypted. And Telegram, unlike WhatsApp, works natively on a desktop computer as well as phone and tablet.

The rise of tools like Telegram and its open source rival Signal, which is also very good, came in response to growing threats to free speech online.

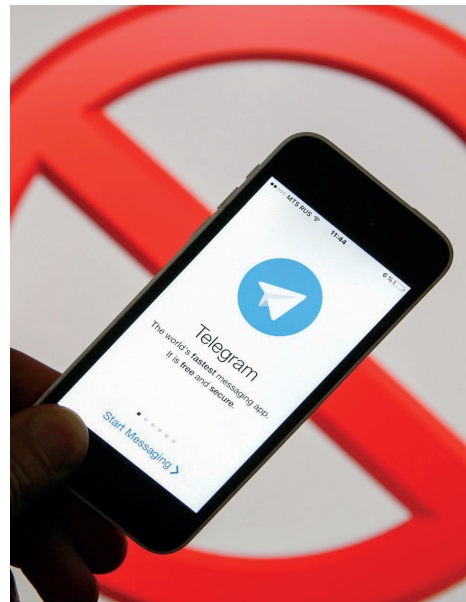
Some of those threats are reactions to genuine problems. The rise of hate speech and "fake news", and foreign (mostly Russian) interference in elections in democratic countries have meant that the social media giants – particularly Facebook and Twitter – are under pressure to censor content.

At the moment, some pretty bad groups are suffering from this, which is a good thing. Social media companies can remove content and close down accounts without a moment's warning, and with no right of appeal.

Of course we all cheer when Twitter tags one of Trump's ignorant racist rants as "fake news" or when YouTube (owned by Google) takes down a white supremacist video. None of us are upset when Holocaust-denying Twitter feeds are closed, or Facebook pages defending the KKK are banned.

But the same thing could happen to groups on the Left – for instance, Antifa or Black Lives Matter groups in the US, which are also the targets of media criticism, particularly on the right.

All these platforms – the social networks, the messenger services, videoconferencing tools including Zoom and Skype, mailing list services like MailChimp – are already feeling the pressure to regulate and censor.



Should unions and the Left continue to use those platforms? Of course we should.

But we should be wary of becoming over-dependent on them. And we should be open to change, and trying out alternatives.

For the most popular tools like WhatsApp, there is usually a more secure alternative like Telegram or Signal. An app like Sendy is a far better option (and much cheaper) than MailChimp. Jitsi Meet is a popular open source alternative to Zoom. DuckDuckGo is a search engine that, unlike Google, respects your privacy by default. Firefox, run by a non-profit foundation, is a better choice than Chrome or Safari.

The tools we choose will help determine how effective we are as campaigners and activists. The opposition in Belarus made the right choice in using Telegram. We can learn from them. □

• Eric Lee is the founding editor of LabourStart. He writes this column in a personal capacity.



Agenda



This is our second issue in an experimental "endorse-folded" format. So far, reactions to the first experimental-format have been good. We'll see. The test is whether the more compact-looking format, with the same amount of content as the old plain-tabloid format, attracts more readers and sells more papers.

The 12 September NHS pay protests didn't give us as good a test as we hoped. As Angela Driver explains on page 11, street protests are still legal – and still politically and industrially vital! – but the Tories' "rule of six" announcement on 9 September depressed turnout.

In London anyway, it remains a fact that if you see people on the streets careful to wear masks and covid-distance, it's a left-wing protest or street stall (and if there's a group nearby not masked or covid-distancing, that's probably the police). Left-wing outdoor political activity remains one of the safest things you can do, and anyway vital if the government is to be budged.

It's still not clear how many students will be on campuses and when as "freshers' weeks" and new university terms start from about 20 September, but Workers' Liberty students will be out with posters and leaflets advertising a series of Zoom meetings to start from 21 September. □

• workersliberty.org/students

GMB: investigate the charges!



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The GMB and the wider labour movement must act on the findings of the investigation by Karon Monaghan QC, which found that the GMB union is institutionally sexist.

The union began an independent investigation in May into sexual harassment in the GMB, after announcing it had received an anonymous letter accusing General Secretary Tim Roache of "sexist and aggressive" behaviour towards

women.

The report found women are under-represented throughout the GMB's ranks, and that bullying, misogyny, cronyism and sexual harassment are endemic within the GMB. The report tells of a senior official who has now been [revealed](#) to be former General Secretary Paul Kenny intervening to save a man accused of serious sexual harassment. The report claims he wrote to GMB HR and suggested that the accused should be relocated to a new job and given a £30,000 payoff.

The report locates much of GMB's problems in a democratic deficit. The regional sec-

retaries hold disproportionate power in the GMB. Many use that power to bully and manipulate members of the GMB's lay bodies, from branches up to the CEC (the union's lay executive). It points to lay control of the union as necessary for cultural transformation.

All true, but lay control of the union is not simply a recommendation that can be "actioned" by the GMB and monitored by the TUC in the same way as other recommendations such as new policies, sexual harassment training and equalities targets.

The CEC and in particular President Barbara Plant have already made some assertion

of lay control by voting for and welcoming the report, against the interests of the bureaucracy. To continue will require a sustained battle to move power to lay committees and rebuild GMB organisation at the workplace level. That will certainly not be easy.

The problems highlighted by the report are not unique to the GMB. We need to fight bullying, misogyny, cronyism, patronage and sexual harassment in all our unions. But we cannot let the political big picture distract from the specifics in the GMB.

We must do the job of the long term rank and file transformation of our unions. But in

the short term we must ensure specific allegations are investigated.

[Journalists](#) have said that Roache resigned after allegations of sexual assault, and the [Daily Mail](#) reports that GMB were aware of allegations against Roache of "spiking" a woman's drinks and allowed him to avoid formal investigation process by taking a lie detector test. Specific investigations must be made into specific allegations of misconduct. □

• These issues will be discussed in more detail in the next issue of *Women's Fightback*.

A letter to Andy Newman about gas



Environment

Comrade Andy Newman: Like you, I have many criticism's of Extinction Rebellion's [XR's] Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) bill (bit.ly/xr-return). But in your Labour List polemic against the bill bit.ly/an-see, writing as technical director of the "Gas Users Organisation" (GUO) and as a GMB and Labour Party activist, you come down squarely on the wrong side of the crucial issues.

You warn of "another culture war divide" over the twin needs of tackling climate change and "protecting well-paid, skilled jobs, and protecting the interests of families and households".

Your answer?

Not radical socialist environmentalist policies, confronting climate change at the expense of the rich, and so dissolving that apparent divide. No: you take one side in that war, the side of not tackling climate change. You champion conservative and limited transitioning which, while not actually *improving* the lives of working-class people, seeks comfort in the status quo with some imagined technical tweaks.

You oppose electrification of domestic heating, moving it away from fossil gas, on the grounds of cost.

Comrade Newman, the image of electrification you argue against is a politically and technologically limited straw man. Socialist environmentalists don't argue that all heating systems should be replaced with individual heat pumps, one per house, with the cost transferred to the tenants.

The costs of transition must be

[funded](#) by taxing the rich and expropriating high finance, enabling social programmes to build and retrofit electric heating systems, heat pumps and solar thermal panels, insulation and passive heating designs, reduced bills – and larger [integrated heating systems](#). We want electric generation from geothermal, concentrated solar, or nuclear power to be integrated into district heating systems.

Your "alternative: to maintain the gas grid[...] but to green the gas within it, perhaps to a blend of hydrogen and biomethane".

Blowing smoke in the reader's eyes, you assert that "[t]he viability of such a conversion is proven." By the fact that there have been previous changes in the composition of gas? But that does not mean that your scheme would be technologically possible, environmentally sound, or economically viable.

Producing hydrogen by "splitting water, using electricity," and then later burning it, remains a much less efficient way of transporting or storing energy than, for example, through electric wires and into batteries and heat reservoirs. So-called "biomethane", like biomass and other biofuels, is not green. Gas systems invariably leak, and methane – whatever its source – is over seventy times as potent a greenhouse gas (over a twenty year period) as carbon dioxide.

To create biomethane on the scale you advocate would depend primarily on purpose-grown biomass, which would then be converted to biomethane through either anaerobic decomposition or, more likely, thermal gasification and methanation – followed by removal of any remaining carbon dioxide and monoxide by-products.

Burning biomass releases more CO2 per unit energy than burning coal. An intermediate step of conversion to methane adds inefficiencies and can only amplify this, when taking both conversion and combustion into account. Biofuel's extravagant consumption of vegetation causes deforestation and soil degradation, releasing further CO2 and limiting the ability to grow new forest.

It does not take much digging to see that the [GUO](#) that you, Andy Newman, proudly direct is actually not primarily concerned with winning this imagined "green gas". No, it is primarily concerned with championing "domestic gas", and for the foreseeable future, "continued use of natural gas", which "(methane) is the fossil fuel with the lowest carbon footprint."

The motivation behind your other technological focus, Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), becomes clearer in this context, Andy. Creative accounting with our carbon budget, speculative but not-yet-viable technological fixes, are a favourite Get Out of Jail Free card for many.

The CEE bill aims to mandate the state, and the Committee on Climate Change, to draw up a plan to for the UK to reduce emissions in line with limiting global temperatures to 1.5°C. It requires use of reforestation and the like, rather than CCS technologies, in this road map.

CCS technologies are not yet workable, and achieving climate goals should not be premised on their use. Research, development and even deployment of CCS may be useful; but in *planning* a journey to catch the last train home, I should not *rely* on a shortcut that may not exist, even if I may take it if it be-

comes proven good.

Comrade Newman, your bizarre, unsubstantiated and untrue assertions that the proposed "natural climate solutions" could not "provide sufficient decarbonisation without an almost complete dismantling of our modern, urban way of life" are not a case for reliance on speculative CCS technologies.

The "Citizens' Assembly" as proposed by XR is indeed undemocratic, and a bad idea (bit.ly/xr-return). How would you, Andy, instead "involv[e] affected workers and trade unions in any just transition"? This is unclear.

A Citizens' Assembly is indeed less democratic than parliament – there is no accountability – but I counterpose a democratic class-struggle environmentalist labour movement.

Class struggle does not feature in your article. Nor does it, obviously, on [GUO's website](#). Indeed, this website it gives the impression of class harmony and shared interests between bosses, workers and consumers – but not with environmentalists.

Without class struggle, we cannot win the environmental changes we need, we cannot safeguard or advance the economic interests of workers you claim to be concerned with, and we lack coherent democratic visions of how we can achieve any changes.

Andy, you warn against "what seems to be an elitist plan to bypass democracy, and to narrow down the technical options by which we can achieve our shared aims."

Yet you simultaneously advocate a conservative plan, elitist insofar as it sees democracy as reducible to parliament, and narrowing down our political options. □

Zack Muddle

Conspiracy theorists out again on 19 September

By Will Sefton

Saturday 19 September is due to see another anti-mask, anti-lockdown, anti-vaccination demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

MC'd by currently suspended nurse Kate Shmirani, a host of conspiracy theorists and "medics" of dubious qualifications and views will take the stage to denounce "enforced vaccination", to call Covid-19 a hoax, or to blame it on 5G. They will be joined Jon Wedger, "police whistleblower" into "elite paedophile rings".

The "medics" include an osteopath, a holistic and homeopathic dentist, a lecturer in mental-health nursing, a "nutrition and wellness doctor", and

more than one medic currently suspended from their profession. If this protest draws anything like the crowd of 29 August, we should be worried.

Few doubt Covid-19 is real. Only a very tiny minority believe that Bill Gates will genetically modify people via a vaccine he has funded for a disease he created. But vague general scepticism is much more widespread.

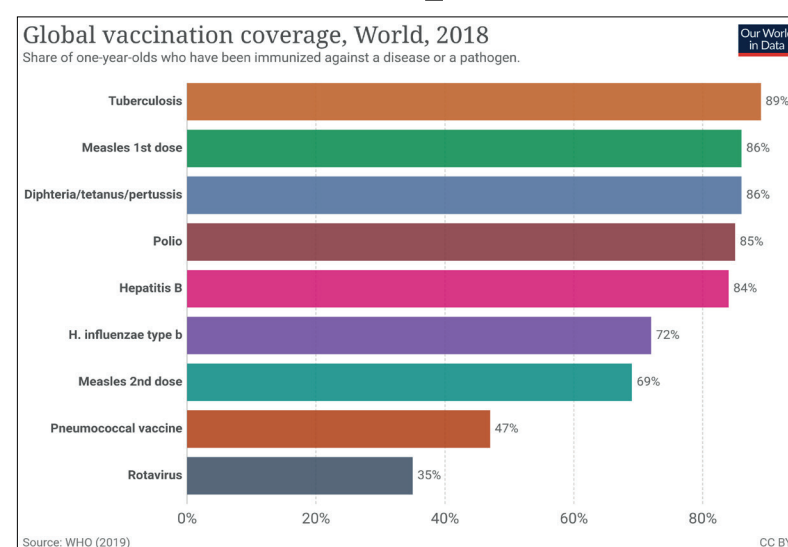
The constantly changing and contradictory guidance given to people by the government lends itself to the conspiracy theorists. They can hang their more bizarre claims on genuine mistrust of the government and of the official handling of the crisis.

At the moment resistance to vaccinations in Britain is much

smaller than in the US. Totnes, the area with the lowest level of vaccination for diseases including MMR, has 78% coverage. The national average is 94.5%. But scepticism is growing worldwide about vaccinations.

In 2019 US doctors reported that 77% of US parents who refused the MMR vaccine for their children did so because they thought it "causes autism". The disgraced British doctor Andrew Wakefield now operates from the US, where he still peddles this long discredited and dangerous theory.

There are thousands of claims made each year in the US for so-called "vaccine injury," only a tiny proportion of which have any real link to injury or death caused by a



vaccine. In the US over half of deaths linked to vaccine injury in the last 30 years are linked to an old vaccine for whooping cough, discontinued in the 1990s. An adverse reaction to a flu jab is not uncommon,

but it is very unlikely to be severe, still less to result in a life-changing injury.

It is part of the job of socialists to popularise and demystify science and to weaken the grip of reactionary twaddle. □

Johnson heads for “disaster Brexit”

By Mohan Sen

Brexit is destructive. It means higher borders between countries, and a drive by the British government to slip down from EU-agreed social standards to what will suit getting a trade deal with the USA.

That's true for any Brexit, and even more true for the “no deal” Brexit the Tories are edging towards.

Also, the *moment* of Brexit is bound to bring turmoil and dislocation. Even if you think that will be passing, and worth it in the long run, those will be complications which should be avoided when trying to devise virus-control policies in the depths of winter.

Since the Tories have a large majority, Labour may now not be able to stop Brexit, or even to delay it. But a government crisis caused by Tory resistance to Johnson's “no deal”, “break international law” bias is still possible. In any case, not being able to stop Brexit is a different matter from positively approving it, or from offering to help the Tories out of their difficulties (even if the “offer” is a bit of “cunning” hypocrisy, designed in fact to sharpen the Tories' internal divisions).

Yet Labour leader Keir Starmer has called on the Tories to “get Brexit done”. He offered to support the government's Brexit plans if they dropped the element allowing them to make customs and state aid regulations inconsistent with the EU Withdrawal Agreement.

Strictly speaking, Starmer was “only” offering to support the Internal Market Bill – which got through on “Second Reading” with many Tories abstaining and will surely have trouble further down the road. But that is no excuse for the headline “Tories, get on with it” message.

The Internal Market Bill specifically breaches the Withdrawal Agreement, a treaty which the Tories signed with the EU. The government admits that. The Bill also allows ministers to make customs and state aid regulations regardless of their incompatibility with “any rule of international or domestic law whatsoever”.

Partly, the Tories may be hyping it up to squeeze last-minute concessions out of the EU, in the way that the USA tried to get concessions from Vietnam in the 1970s by offering the “madman doctrine” (“you can do a deal – or, you know, [president] Nixon is a madman, he might resort to nuclear bombs”). But they are also working to evade democratic scrutiny by Parliament, the courts, and society, and thus implement regressive, anti-working class policies more freely – in the spirit of populist right-wing regimes around the world, and in the spirit of Johnson's attempt to send Parliament home in August 2019.

The evidence suggests that Johnson positively wants a “disaster Brexit” – “no deal”, or some botched last-minute formula adopted with little scrutiny – so that he can use the chaos, throwing so-



ciety off balance, to rush through right-wing policies.

Even John Major and Tony Blair have been more vocal than Starmer about condemning Johnson.

At the TUC's online Congress, 14-15 September, Starmer will call on Johnson to “Get your priorities right. Get on with defeating the virus”.

But if Starmer was serious about focusing on the pandemic, he would at least call for Brexit to be delayed, not sped through so that Brexit turmoil complicates and impedes virus-control policies.

Labour should at least call for a lengthy pause to deal with the virus and subject the growing Brexit mess to proper democratic discussion and accountability.

The row about the Internal Market Bill may be the harbinger of bigger crises over Brexit over the next months. The labour movement must be prepared for that; and it can only be prepared by telling the truth now about what the Tories are doing.

Remaining silent or hypocritically endorsing their plans is no substitute. □

Giant Belarus potash mine joins strikes

By Sacha Ismail

The slogans for the massive demonstrations on 13 September across Belarus, including one of 100,000 in Minsk, included “We won't let

him [neo-Stalinist president Lukashenko] sell the country”. Police attacked demonstrators, and even the official government figure said 774 had been arrested.

Incidents caught on camera

show that the police are now, for the first time, willing to openly use violence against female protesters – but also women fighting back successfully.

The protests are not fading. Strikes have also continued to spread. The workers' committee at the huge Belaruskali potash mine, which produces a fifth of the world's potash, has announced an indefinite strike demanding the annulment of the stolen election of 9 August and release of all political prisoners.

The regime has victimised and in some cases prosecuted other groups of strikers. Belarus' embattled neo-Stalinist president Alexander Lukashenko has held lengthy talks with Vladimir Putin, telling him “a friend is in trouble”. Most reporters reckon that Putin is

not a fan of Lukashenko, but willing to help him because he does not want to see pro-democracy protests defeat a government in a country close to and linked with Russia.

Russia will offer Belarus a \$1.5bn loan. Putin has rejected Lukashenko's public call for Russian military intervention, but says he has prepared a contingent of special police to send if things get worse. This week Russia will send paratroopers for ten days of military exercises entitled “Slavic Brotherhood”, and there will be similar military drills monthly over the next year.

Many, including in Belarus' protest movement, speculate that Putin is pushing the weakened Lukashenko to accept some form of soft annexation by Russia. On paper the two countries already form a

“union state” with common institutions, but only on paper.

Socialists and labour movement activists in Britain should step up solidarity with the protests in Belarus, and with the working-class and socialist forces there in particular. We should insist on Belarus' right to self-determination, against Russian intervention or interference. □

- Online solidarity campaign organised by trade union news website LabourStart: bit.ly/lbbelarus

- John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn and others have put forward a parliamentary Early Day Motion supporting the protests. Please ask your MP to sign: bit.ly/belarusedm

- The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign is publishing regular updates from Belarus: ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org



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David Graeber's anarchism

By Daniel Taylor

The news that David Graeber had died so young, at only 59, was shocking and saddening. He had one of those inherently lively, energetic personalities that seems to contradict the concept of death itself. He earned respect as one of the few modern anarchist thinkers who tried to really apply anarchism systematically as a total worldview: anarchist principles informed his anthropological and historical research, his economics, and his interventions into real world politics.

Graeber's anthropological work is fascinating and valuable; his major book, *Debt*, is thought-provoking, though basically flawed. But his most important role was as an activist. He was one of the people who could truthfully be called a leader of the theoretically leaderless Occupy Wall Street movement. That movement (and its local expression in Australia) was also the phenomenon that first got me involved in active politics, and I still feel quite sentimental about it. Occupy was one of the first real mobilisations of anti-austerity sentiment, one of the early moments when the breakdown of neoliberalism went beyond a crisis of bourgeois decision making, and began to generate real resistance. In one year, 2011, we were given the Arab revolutions, the European movements of the squares, and finally Occupy Wall Street. Graeber was then at the peak of his fame. His book on debt had just come out, and he was a central organiser of Occupy's founding protest - camp in New York. He determined its initial slogans (including "we are the 99%"), its principles, and its organising methods.

Graeber made the Occupy movement probably the most important recent experiment in anarchism. He wrote copiously on how anarchist theory led

him to insist that the movement adopt specific principles: a refusal to make political demands, a focus on consensus decision-making, and the use of totally autonomous affinity groups where consensus couldn't be reached. Instead of presenting demands that could be realised or refused by existing political power structures, or taking any binding decisions at all, Occupy was to prefigure a new society based on the autonomy of the individual, operating on the social margin (in a park) rather than the centre of capitalist social relations (the workplace) - although the new marginal, autonomous spaces were provocatively established within some of the big urban centres of capitalism.

Graeber and other anarchist Occupants wrote extensively on how these principles - the refusal of politics, the consensus and autonomy, and the prefigurative search for marginal spaces rather than any attempt to construct a revolutionary counter-power - derived from the fundamentals of anarchist theory. In this, Graeber was absolutely correct. The refusal to make decisions or hold the movement accountable to votes, the refusal to take up demands, and the attempt to execute a daring escape from the capitalist production process by sheer force of will, can all be traced directly back through to Bakunin, Proudhon, and the other theorists of classical anarchism.

Principles

He also argued that these principles were the reasons the movement was so successful, why it gained a mass character, and how it could resist incorporation into capitalism. In his retrospective book on the origins and nature of *Occupy*, *The Democracy Project*, he merged together Occupy's hostility to the political establishment with its refusal to take any political positions at all. He likewise linked its (unfulfilled) promise of radically democratic internal decision-making with its aspiration to prefigure a future anarchist society:

One would imagine that people in such a state of desperation would wish for some immediate, pragmatic solution to their dilemmas. Which makes it all the more striking that they were drawn to a movement that refused to appeal directly to existing political institutions at all... It was only when a movement appeared that resolutely refused to take the traditional path, that rejected the existing political order entirely as inherently corrupt, that called for the complete reinvention of American democracy, that occupations immediately began to blossom across the country. Clearly, the movement did not succeed despite the anarchist element. It succeeded because of it... The original

conception of [Occupy Wall Street] reflected this anarchist sensibility in several different ways. Most obviously, the refusal to make demands was, quite self-consciously, a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the existing political order of which such demands would have to be made. ... Direct action is, ultimately, the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free.

Those claims look very different now. Occupy's lasting legacy was in its identification of the 1% as the enemy, its claim that capitalist democracy was inadequate, and its mission to develop a more radical democratic practice as part of its very existence as a movement. And Graeber was right: Occupy's prefigurative approach did immediately appeal to people who for a time felt deeply disillusioned with the current political order, with its fake democracy and with its rotten institutions; people who hoped that the endless General Assemblies in the parks could provide a more authentic expression of participatory, collective democratic decision-making that would serve the majority, not the minority. But the principle of consensus has the opposite effect. It makes it impossible to make decisions on a mass scale - as Graeber explained, that's the intended effect. It then forces anyone who aims to achieve any particular goal to spin that off into a small and unaccountable affinity group:

You'll only get broad and tepid solutions if you bring everything to the General Assembly. That's why we have working groups, empower them to perform actions, and encourage them to form spontaneously. This is another of the key principles in dealing with consensus and decentralization. In an ideal world, the very unwieldiness of finding consensus in a large group should convince people not to bring decisions before this large group unless they absolutely have to. That's actually the way it's supposed to work out.

In the end, that meant that the Occupy movement was unable to live up to its promise of radical democracy: it could inspire lengthy discussions about democracy, but could not make any democratic decisions. It became the powerless mirror of bureaucratic capitalist politics: real decisions could only be made by the tiniest unelected and unaccountable groups.

The proposition that Occupy gained a special power from its refusal to take up demands has also aged badly. Graeber himself became fairly fixated on a particular demand, a "debt jubilee", while the last two years have seen the explosion of movements of far greater power and mass participation than Occupy, all adopting demands that mobilise the loyalty and participation of millions.

In fact, Occupy's principles would forbid a movement adopting the demand to abolish or defund the police - or even to vote on whether to adopt it. Occupy's marginality and its decentralisation meant it couldn't resist a short, sharp assault from the centralised power of Obama's Department of Homeland Security, which swept the parks clear from coast to coast: Occupy had no social power rooted in the production process that could resist such an assault, no capacity to organise swiftly, and no popular demands that could inspire others to come to its defence when it was under attack. When each Occupy camp fell into its terminal crisis, usually under police pressure, it would generally be consumed by unending General Assemblies engaged in a futile, days-long search for consensus as participation dwindled, as I witnessed to my despair in Melbourne.

Anti-political

It would have contradicted the anti-political principles of Occupy to declare that all those who supported its program should have swarmed to its defence: the movement was based on the principled refusal to take up a program.

In the years following the exhaustion of Occupy, some of its energy (and not a few of its activists) found a new home in highly centralised, state-focused, and demand-driven reformist and liberal political projects, from Podemos to Bernie Sanders. Occupy rejected the traditional power structures of capitalism, but refused to directly challenge them. The electoral projects simply embraced the traditional power structures, and aimed to transform them. Neither worked.

Occupy refused to seek power, so it has no rap sheet of crimes equivalent to Syriza's implementation of austerity, Podemos' coalition with the establishment, or Sanders' incorporation into the machine of Clinton and Biden. But by leaving the vacuum of power open, it contributed to the prestige of those later state-focused movements that did, ultimately, betray the hopes of their supporters. Occupy presented its anarchist ideology as the only alternative to capitalist politics-as-usual. The exposure of the anarchist model's limitations led many to embrace the quest for power within the state; the failure of that quest will lead some back to approaches like that of Occupy, which can't resolve the problems of structural racism, police violence, economic inequality, or climate change.

Since Occupy faded from the scene, the principles of consensus decision-making, affinity-group direct action, camp-based prefiguration, and the

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and the Occupy movement

rejection of politics have continued to operate on the fringes of the environment movement, outside the cities, around camps that aim to prevent logging and disrupt the construction of mines. For a brief period, Occupy's principles reemerged as the organising logic of something approaching a mass phenomenon, as Extinction Rebellion briefly absorbed the energy of a new wave of urban climate - change activism. For that short time, Occupy found a real spiritual successor, when Extinction Rebellion chapters set up protest camps in which the refusal of politics, the focus on consensus, and even the unforgettable hand gestures of Occupy returned to the cities. The passing of movement energy through Occupy and Extinction Rebellion shows that not just the process, but also the demands of the moment - for equality, and for climate justice - drive new activists into movements; the distinctive anarchist strategic contributions we tested at Occupy limit their development. Movements need demands and democracy. Graeber was right that if they are to deepen, movements need more than slogans: to become really radical, they need to create space for discussion. But they also need the ca-

capacity to put demands, and to make decisions.

Graeber's intervention helped to take anarchist methods from the fringes of squats, zines, and academic conferences, and made them some of the defining attributes of one of recent history's more important social movements. Under Graeber's influence, anarchism provided the strategic framework for the first popular expressions of opposition to austerity in the US. That means that activists now have the advantage of considering that legacy, and learning the lessons of a real test of whether these principles, applied on a large scale, are suitable for challenging the deep structures of capitalism. The promise of radical democracy developed in a movement was attractive, and remains vital if capitalism is to be overthrown.

Development

The development of Occupy was an important experiment in applying the principles of anarchism, powered with a new energy that came from a widespread desire for an alternative to austerity and a willingness to embrace radical solutions. Those principles failed. In that movement's wake,



David Graeber speaking at an Occupy Democracy protest in London

so has a wave of state-focused reformism been tested, and that strategy has failed as well in its turn. Over the course of the crisis of the last decade, activists have experimented with rejecting politics and trying to create a new society outside the structures of capitalism. After that, they've tried using political demands to mobilise mass support for a project of capturing and transforming the structures of capitalism. Another option still remains untested

in this prolonged crisis: constructing a revolutionary counter-power out of workers' struggles within the capitalist production process itself, taking up demands that can mobilise support for a direct challenge to the capitalist state. Let's hope we have a chance to test this method before too long. □

• This article is taken, with thanks, from the Australian socialist fortnightly *Red Flag*, bit.ly/dt-rf

The case for Paul Holmes

By a Unison member

As we approach close of nominations (25 September) in the election for a new general secretary for the big public services union Unison, Paul Holmes' campaign is picking up momentum. He has reached the threshold to make it onto the ballot paper, with far more than the 25 branch nominations required.

He has also been nominated by the Local Government Service Group, the largest service group in the Union. This is the first time a rank and file candidate has got the nomination of the Service Group. The two unelected Assistant General Secretaries, Roger McKenzie and Christina McAnea, have both got the required nominations.

The Socialist Party's Hugo Pierre has announced the support of thirteen branches and may not make it to the threshold.

Paul Holmes' campaign has been holding virtual meetings based on Regions and Service Groups of the union. His campaign provides the possibility for activists to link up and build an organisation which goes beyond the narrow confines of Unison Action, which has thus far been only a precarious electoral alliance.

Paul's campaign has the best programme, far to the left of the bureaucracy candidates. Hugo Pierre is a respectable rank-and-file activist, but the Socialist Party are running a sectarian campaign with little rank and file perspective.

The programme produced by the Holmes campaign in August will need to be developed as part of the campaign. The Service Group meetings could feed in proposals for demands and industrial strategy in each sector.

His nomination letter calls for:

- General Secretary on a

worker's wage.

- Unified pay claims across sectors with a minimum wage of £15 per hour

- An anti-austerity campaign for decent jobs and pay, proper training and affordable homes for all

- Fight racism, sexism, and all discrimination

- A green agenda for Unison, including an audit of the use of company cars by the union and the promotion of green travel

- A racism audit of Unison, taking inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement, and so the allegations at the heart of the Labour Leaks scandal can be dealt with

- A leadership school with real investment so we can bring on a new generation of leaders

- Selling Unison's two "prestige" office buildings in central London and re-investing the proceeds into branches and organising, and a new more

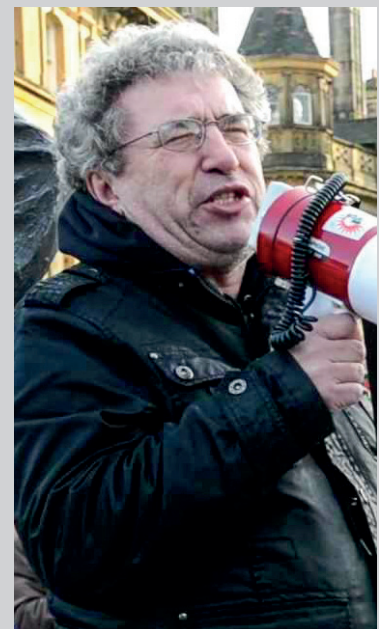
functional HQ in the Midlands with good transport links

- 50% of members' subscriptions income going to the branches

- A fully-funded, massive plan of action, driven by the branches, to improve collective bargaining rights in the community/private sectors. This will replace the current system where our members in these sectors are often hard to service by branches who themselves are under pressure with not enough resources

- A clear dividing line between elected officials and employed staff. This can best be implemented by an elected lay General Secretary and the election of Assistant General Secretaries and Regional Secretaries.

Paul Holmes is currently suspended from his employer and the union, reportedly for different allegations. Several activists have been sus-



pended from Kirklees branch and as yet they have not received the charges from Unison. We know Unison has suspended key activists and shut down branches in a witch-hunt against militants or left-wingers.

We know even in Labour Councils, employers victimise trade unionists through disciplinary processes. We are not privy to details of either investigation, and all allegations should be investigated fully and fairly. □

Manctopia? Remaking Manchester for capital



TV review

By Bruce Robinson

The population of city centre Manchester is set to double in the next five years. 105 complexes of flats are planned. Already tower blocks, usually of little architectural merit, are being built on any available land regardless of the effects on the local environment. Where the land is not free, historic buildings are often demolished or left to rot until they become impossible to save.

Until the 1990s, few people lived in the city centre. Now it is becoming "Manc-hattan".

A number of traditionally working-class areas on the fringes of the city centre are being redeveloped as part of a plan to create a Northern Gateway to the city, and existing residents are being forced to move.

A recent four-part BBC documentary entitled [Manctopia: Billion pound property boom](#), followed events in Manchester for a year, focusing on a range of people affected by or involved in the changes to the city. The programmes made it clear that the costs and benefits were very unequally distributed, with most benefits to the better-off, and that the changes would not provide the solution to the city's serious housing crisis. There are nearly 100,000 people on the housing waiting list and 5,000 homeless people across Greater Manchester, some of whom were featured in the first episode.

Social engineering accompanies the remaking of the city. One graphic example is the charity Lifeshare, which provides food and assistance for homeless people. They were forced out - literally locked out - of their premises on the edge of the city centre because the building had been acquired by a developer. They could not find an alternative in the city centre as nobody wanted homeless people on the doorstep of upwardly mobile streets (the Council has for years been trying to move homeless people out of the city centre) and they ended up relocating to an area that homeless people found difficult to access. The charity may now close.

Two people who were prominently

involved in the programmes personify the conflicting interests that exist around the changes.

Tim Heatley is a local lad turned property developer who is developing two sites near Piccadilly station. He insists that he wants to create a new community of owner occupiers in his buildings, who will not be as transitory as the renters we see being welcomed into the new West Tower by a representative of the owners Legal and General. Tim is presented sympathetically as different from such corporate developers, but he can still complain that "there's no profit in affordable", while people will "pay for a community vibe". (Neither Tim's development nor the West Tower provide any so-called affordable housing.)

Anne Worthington lives in a council house on the Collyhurst estate about a mile north of the city centre. She's lived there since the estate was built in the early 70s and is now worried because she has been told her house might be demolished in order to build new homes as part of the Northern Gateway project.

Uncertain future

She does not object to new developments as such but does not want to leave her low rise house with its meticulously tended garden and her local community. She is unable to find any definite information about what is going to happen. The programme follows her and her friend Donna as they anxiously try to learn what their future is. In the end, we learn that a decision has been postponed for another three to five years until the second phase of the project. In the meantime she has noticed that the maintenance of the area is being neglected.

The contrasts between Tim and Anne, between the millionaire looking for a penthouse flat and the single mother made homeless, all point to the question of who benefits from the redevelopment of Manchester. The *Guardian* revealed two years ago that none of the developments then underway included any affordable or social housing. The council evidently wants to avoid anything that may deter private capital investment, so that the inhabitants of the new tower blocks will be people who are at least capable of paying a high rent or mortgage.

Yet the human interest documentary



format of Manctopia means that it did not investigate the background in any depth. There is no explanation of why there has been a boom in property development over the last five years. It appears just as a fact that everyone has to come to terms with and accept.

There is a void where Manchester Council might have been - perhaps they refused to take part - so there is no opportunity to challenge their motivation or methods. Just as in the broader political arena, there is no accountability.

Labour's massive majority on the council does not, with few exceptions, challenge the right wing leadership. The mechanisms for the party rank-and-file to intervene have long withered away, and most decisions pass the planning committee with little challenge from outside. The council leadership is basically free to pursue its own agenda, which sees the solution to government cuts, not in opposing them, but rather in a competitive bid

for private money.

Manctopia did not examine the political mechanisms behind the boom. The more left-wing Mayor of Salford is seen accepting public pressure to reject Tim's plan to build 60 houses in a public park and points out that limited funds force his council to sell land and cooperate with private developers. But, apart from a few passing references to the Far East Consortium as the funders of the Northern Gateway, there is no examination of the financial relationships between the council and developers, which has included turning public assets over to private interests. That is just taken as given.

The remaking of Manchester will change its social make up, the physical environment and its traditional "vibe". In this, the interests of existing working-class inhabitants are largely being ignored in favour of what private developers want. Manctopia gave us some access to what is going on, but failed to ask enough of the right questions. □

Free Osime Brown!

By Josh Lovell

Without urgent action, Osime Brown, an innocent 21 year old black learning-disabled man, will be moved to a detention centre on 7 October, awaiting deportation to Jamaica. This is a country he left aged four, and where he has no friends, family or support.

Osime's situation is a grim example of the racist and ableist nature of the British immigration and policing systems. We must urgently stop Osime's

deportation, cancel his conviction, and fight to overthrow the brutality that puts anyone in this situation.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement is asking everyone to:

- Submit an emergency motion to their CLP or union branch or trades council
- Like or follow the Facebook and Twitter accounts found at bit.ly/os-ime
- Sign and share this petition found there
- Donate to the campaign via the GoFundMe there. □

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.

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources □

Can we still protest? Should we still protest?

By Angela Driver

In *Solidarity* 562 we carried an article bit.ly/r-t-p clarifying the law around protest. Despite the threats the police made to organisers of a 5 September trans rights protest (which led to it being cancelled), protesting was still legal.

Then on 9 September Boris Johnson announced that further restrictions would be made so that no more than six people are allowed to gather socially. The change came into force on Monday 14 September.

At the time of the announcement NHS campaigners were busy organising protests for 12 September, and were reassured that the new changes would not have taken effect by then. But they asked the question – after 14 September can protests that involve more than 6 people still happen?

The answer is yes.

The changes are about socialising. The exemptions for other purposes remain unchanged. These include gathering for work, education... and by political campaigning organisations. The law requires only:

- An adequate risk assessment (but there is no requirement to show it to the police)
- Steps to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid 19 (e.g. using facemasks, distancing, hand sanitiser)
- The protest must be called by an or-

ganisation that seeks to change policy or law (i.e. it should not be anonymous).

Despite the reassurances, the moves by the government and media coverage of rising Covid numbers meant that many nurses were reluctant to join the NHS pay protest, and protests were smaller than the previous round on 8 August.

The government's rules seem arbitrary. The risk of transmission is generally higher indoors than gathering socially outdoors, but bigger gatherings are allowed inside at work. The government would like people to take more risks to ensure they earn money for their boss. In their view being able to see friends and family is less important than working.

Just because protests are legal doesn't mean they are the right thing to do. Are they? Workers' Liberty continues to participate and build for demonstrations. We think this is right because:

- The risks of contracting Covid-19 at outdoor demos is small, especially if masks, hand sanitiser and distancing are used. The rate of transmission outside is lower, and outbreaks of Covid-19 have not been linked to demonstrations.
- Demonstrations are as important as any "essential service". People's ability to protest is an inalienable human right, and an essential tool for the working class in campaigning.

After the death of George Floyd in



May there were huge protests in America. Health professionals and epidemiologists had been campaigning hard in favour of measures to reduce infection. At the time they thought the risk posed by those protests was likely to be higher than it now seems it was. Yet they came out strongly in support of the protests.

At the time infectious disease physician Dr Cassandra Pierre predicted: "I am really worried we'd see a second wave of infection." When asked why then were so many public health re-

searchers supporting the protests, she said "the reason they are in favour of it is because the cause is objectively just. There's just no way around it". bit.ly/c-pie

It is as right now as it was then. Socialists continue to support and defend our civil liberties to protest – for trans rights, for increased NHS pay, against racism and police brutality, in solidarity with Uyghur people, and against every other horror and injustice capitalism throws at us. □

Scottish Labour: mobilise to push back

By Ann Field

The campaign by the right wing of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) to oust Richard Leonard as SLP leader, which began on the day he was elected in late 2017, reached a climax on 12 September with the tabling of a "no confidence" motion for an SLP Executive Committee meeting.

Signatories to the motion included Suzan King and James Adams, "representatives" of CLPs in Glasgow and Central Scotland. They had no mandate from members to have signed it and had made no attempt to obtain one.

Other signatories to the motion who had no mandate and had made no attempt to obtain one included Jacqueline Martin (USDAW), Monique McAdams (Scottish Labour Women's Committee) and Baroness Meta Ramsay (who, inexplicably, sits on the EC as a member of the House of Lords – gifted the ermine for her ser-

vices to MI6).

Another signatory to the motion with no mandate was Jane Prinsley. She sat on the EC as member of the now dissolved National Organisation of Labour Students. A non-existent organisation cannot provide a mandate.

When the non-existence of the body she supposedly represented was raised at the meeting, she was shown the door. She then posted a tweet accusing Richard Leonard supporters of "dirty tricks". The SLP right wing does not do irony.

If the no-mandate signatories to the motion had been disregarded, the motion would never have even made it onto the EC agenda.

In the course of the discussion Ian Murray – the sole SLP MP, who, we now know from the recently published book *Left Out*, pulled back from quitting Labour and joining the right-wing "Independent Group" only at the eleventh hour – spoke in favour of the

motion.

So too did the SLP Deputy Leader, the ultra-right-wing Jackie Baillie. "Union Jack" Baillie was sacked from the SLP front bench in Holyrood in 2018 for briefing the press against Leonard. The only result of her sacking was that she had even more time to brief against him.

After two and a half hours of discussion the "no confidence" motion was withdrawn. But by then the damage had already been done (divided party, leader not backed by deputy leader and sole MP, etc., etc.). Not that the SLP right wing cares anyway.

As a result of the right-wing stranglehold, the SLP has been in steady decline for two decades. Gerry Hassan's *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland* was published in 2012. And the SLP has died a lot more since then.

Taking Labour voters for granted, rigging selection contests, supporting the Iraq War,

calling in the police in 2013 to investigate Unite members in Falkirk for recruiting people to the SLP, allying with the Tories in *Better Together*, installing Jim Murphy as SLP leader, discriminating against low-paid local authority women workers – all bound together in a toxic culture of bullying, intimidation and contempt for democracy and accountability.

That has been the record of the right wing and the reason why the SLP continues to languish in the polls. Voters do not believe that it has changed for the better. And the tabling of the "no confidence" motion is rightly seen as evidence that the SLP still smells too much of what drove voters away from it.

Which SLP are voters being called on to vote for in the 2021 Holyrood elections?

The one with Richard Leonard as leader and some left-of-centre policies? Or the party of Baillie, Murray and Anas Sarwar (who was lining himself up for leader if the "no confi-

dence" motion had passed) which substitutes a Union Jack for an election manifesto?

In 2016 Jeremy Corbyn was re-elected Labour leader at national level. But the right wing did not accept the result and go away. They continued to brief against him and undermine him at every opportunity, as confirmed by the Labour Party report leaked earlier this year.

The SLP right wing will behave in exactly the same way, except to the extent that their behaviour will be even more toxic, even more dishonest and unscrupulous, and even more fatal to the task of rebuilding the labour movement in Scotland.

The left should not take last weekend's defeat of the right wing as a signal for "unity for the good of the party". It should be the start of cleansing the Augean Stables of the SLP. Especially in the West of Scotland, where they are their most sordid. □

Making “equality” more than a buzzword

By Becky Crocker

In recent months I have become increasingly aware of the lack of diversity in my workplace, a Network Rail office in London.

My suspicions about Network Rail were confirmed when I read in its 2019 Ethnicity Pay Gap Report that only 8.6% of its workforce is from a black or ethnic minority background compared to the national BAME population of 13%.

According to the report, the lowest proportion of BAME workers is in the Operations and Maintenance section, where the overwhelming majority of Network Rail’s employees work. Those are the people who go out fixing the tracks. BAME workers make up over 16% of clerical and technical staff and 10.7% of management grades.

Network Rail also has an ethnicity pay gap, which is calculated in the same way as the gender pay gap. It’s the percentage difference in the average hourly pay of white workers compared to BAME workers. Network Rail’s median ethnicity pay gap is 8.7% com-

pared to the UK average of 3.8%. For black workers the gap is 10.7%.

A major reason for the gap is that the lowest paid quartile of the workforce has the highest proportion of BAME workers (21.8%), while the top earning quartile has the lowest proportion of BAME workers (10.1%).

In response, Network Rail has launched the Race Matters strategy and set itself a target of a 13% BAME workforce by 2024. It is focusing on increasing the representation of BAME people in senior positions as a way to tackle the pay gap. It pledges to listen to its workforce, identify barriers to inclusion and publish data.

But what actually needs to happen to produce a change? There is no colour bar in Network Rail, as there used to be across sections of British Rail. There are no exclusionary policies that we can point to.

As a white person, I have observed discrimination towards black colleagues which is often subtle. If you’re a black person, you’re cut a lot less slack if you’re struggling with your work. If

you’re a white person, you’re “all right”, “you’re one of the lads”. From what I see, the expectations of incompetence, or underappreciation of achievement, seem to be doubly present if you’re a black woman.

But a lot of this is impressionistic. How do you quantify the impact and make sense of everyday comments and encounters?

Just as Network Rail has said it will “listen”, our rail unions need to do the same. In an industry with still relatively high rates of unionisation and pay, the rail unions, especially the RMT, are used to applauding their successes, including in the fight against racism. But listening will also probably mean hearing some uncomfortable truths.

Does the behaviour of colleagues, including union members, contribute to a culture of subtle racism and discrimination? How can we build workplaces where “equality” is more than just a management buzzword?

We might look into the history of the colour bars in the rail industry or political education about race and class



oppression. If our unions challenge themselves, then Black Lives Matter can begin to have a lasting impact on subtle but pervasive racism. □



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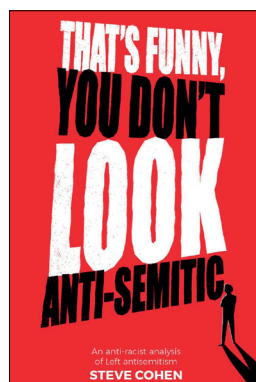
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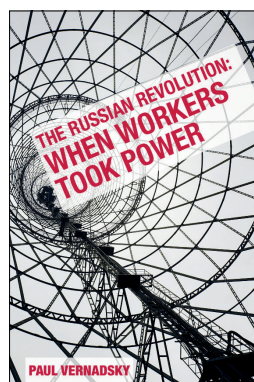
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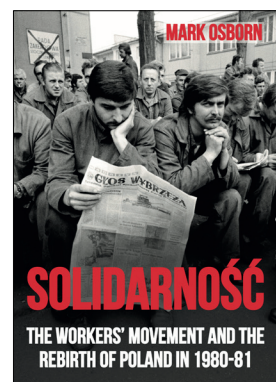
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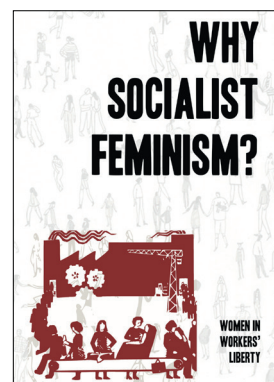
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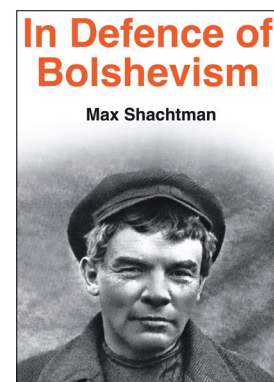
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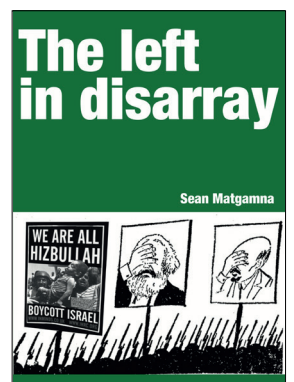
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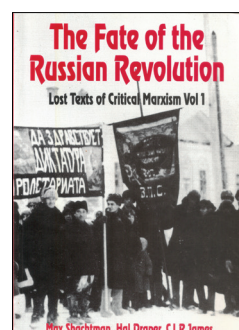
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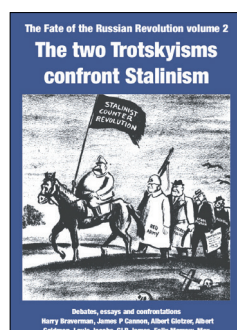
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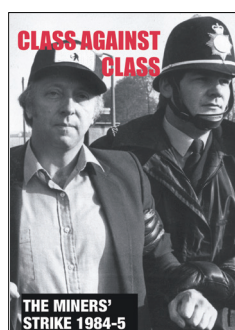
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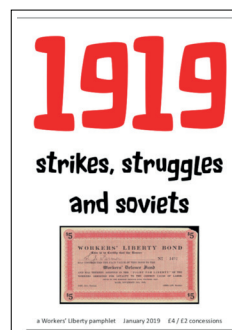
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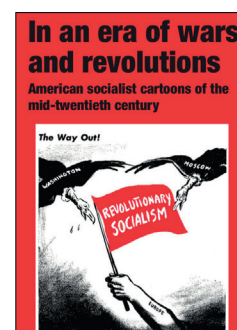
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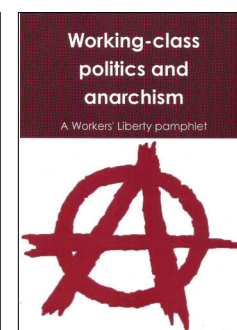
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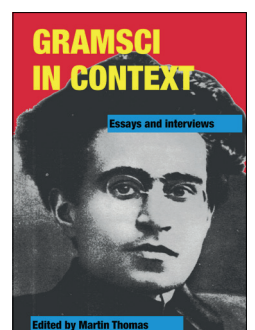
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Tim Hales: a tribute

By Patrick Murphy

On Sunday 6 September my good friend and comrade Tim Hales passed away several months after a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

Tim will be known to many readers of *Solidarity* for the colourful and vibrant cartoons he produced regularly for the paper over recent years. He had been an art teacher since the 1980s, first in Barnsley and then Leeds, and was able to devote more time to his own artwork after retirement. He took the responsibility for producing cartoons very seriously and was always proud to see his work published in the paper.

I first met Tim as an activist in the Leeds division (branch) of the National Union of Teachers in the early 1990s. He was someone who lacked any self-importance; quiet, friendly and unassuming but always willing to contribute whatever he could. We were both part of a group of socialist teachers determined to ensure that both the national union and the local branch had policies and leadership which would fight for members.

When the very experienced local secretary announced his retirement in 1992, we met as a group to decide how we would respond. Proposed and encouraged by others, Tim agreed to stand as secretary on condition that some of the rest of us would take some of the available time and support him.

Pioneering

He became Leeds NUT secretary and from that point until his retirement we worked together as local union officers, though I replaced him as secretary when he decided to step down in 2003.

Everything about the way Tim carried out this work was impressive but what struck me most was his diligence and commitment. Injustice was one of the few things that could produce anger in this gentle man, and he would leave no stone unturned to challenge it. He did pioneering work on tackling workplace bullying, searching for ways to build



collective response to this modern plague.

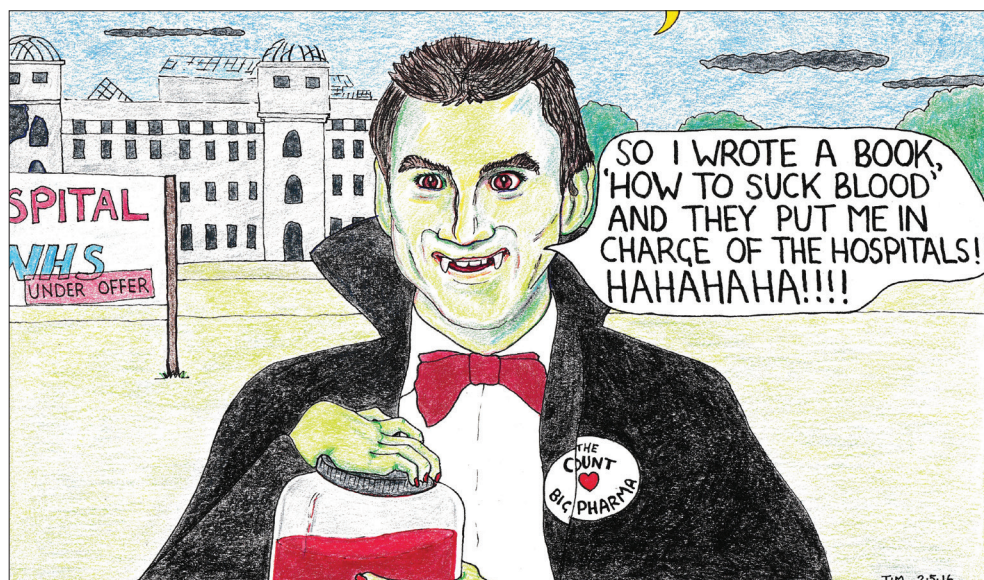
Politically, Tim had been a member of the Militant Tendency. Later, when that group left Labour and split, his loyalties remained with the Granite group, Socialist Appeal. When I first got into political discussions with him, his practical connections to this group seemed slim.

Certainly, that tradition informed his world-view and his understanding of Marxism. In an almost startling departure from the norm, however, he was always up for political discussion and hungry to hear about new ideas. In keeping with his overall personality there was not a sectarian bone in his body.

Inevitably our discussions focused more and more on the areas where our politics differed. It was clear that, as with most of the British left, Tim had never come across third camp socialism. He was open to many of the ideas but immensely respectful of all he had been taught by the Militant tradition.

A turning point came when, after a series of discussions about the Russian occupation of Afghanistan (which Militant had supported/excused), I gave him our pamphlet *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*. This is a lengthy, dense piece of work which uses a detailed account of the Russian invasion and occupation to explain the nature of Stalinism, the state, imperialism and the socialist response to national oppression and reactionary ideas.

Tim worked in an immensely time-consuming job and had a young family at this time. It came as a shock



Tim contributed many cartoons to *Solidarity*

to me, therefore, when he returned to work the next day having read the entire pamphlet and hungry to discuss it. No doubt there was a cumulative effect of our many discussions up to that point, but he didn't hide the fact that this reading had had an immense impact.

Shortly after that Tim became a Workers' Liberty sympathiser and remained so until the end. He began to attend our teachers' (later school workers') fraction, annual summer school and Leeds branch public meetings. Later came the invitation to contribute cartoons to the paper which he accepted with pride.

Tim remained politically active in retirement and had much still to give.

He carried on doing health and safety work for the NEU and attending local union meetings. Like so many he was drawn back into Labour Party activity from 2015 by the Corbyn surge. He was also enjoying the time that retirement had finally given him to spend with his family, his art and our shared passion for football.

This cruel and arbitrary disease has denied him more of that and taken him from us. It goes without saying that the loss will be felt deepest and hardest by his wife Wendy and daughters Jenny and Sally. Our heartfelt condolences are extended to them. We will remember him as a great friend and a serious, thoughtful and dedicated comrade. RIP Tim. □

More online

Rank and file newsletter for Queensland MUA

Speaking out against the new regime since June 2019
bit.ly/rf-mua

Breaking international law

What are the implications of the British government "breaking international law"?
bit.ly/int-law

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](https://www.facebook.com/workersliberty), and (if not before) [instagram](https://www.instagram.com/workersliberty), [youtube](https://www.youtube.com/workersliberty), and often [twitter](https://twitter.com/workersliberty).

Every **Thursday at 1.30pm** we have *Solidarity* editorials with Stephen Wood (see page 5)

Every **Monday at 1.30pm** we have a longer (10-50 minute) video, such as meeting opening speeches

Shift in Tower Hamlets

John Biggs, mayor of the Labour council in Tower Hamlets, East London, has at last agreed to talk directly with the public services union Unison about his "Tower Rewards" plan to cut terms and conditions.

He will meet Unison Regional Secretary Maggie Ferncombe, other officials, and branch representatives. This move follows nine days of strikes by Tower Hamlets Unison in July and August in response to the imposition of "Tower Rewards".

Unison branch secretary John McLoughlin says: "If management were genuine in their claim that Tower Rewards was not in part about making it easier to make staff redundant on the cheap, they should listen to our comments and amend the proposals". As an "act of good faith [...] our request for a re-ballot to enable us to take further industrial action if necessary will be temporarily put on hold". □

• fb.com/TowerHamletsUnison/

“What we stand for

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

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

- 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, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

If you agree with us, take copies of *Solidarity* to sell – and [join us!](#) □

“If no-one else bothers”



Diary of an tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

Mask enforcement has faded on the Tube since July. Now the company want to do something about it.

TSEO (Transport Support and Enforcement Officers), who mostly work as revenue inspectors on the buses, are now being deployed across stations. They stand around, looking a bit meaner than the rest of us. They remind people to wear masks. Some listen, others just breeze past them. Unless people kick them out of the station they'll still come through no matter what.

We get reminded everyday to use the apps on our l pads that allow us to record people travelling without a mask. It is probably easier to just say that in the time I am out there, 30% of people don't have a mask, a bit less weekdays,

a bit more weekends. Some for valid reasons, most because they don't see the point. It's a frustration for those of us wearing them every day, and sometimes it shows.

"I'm not going to wear mine, if no one else bothers, waste of time". T says. "Unless they get police to kick them out, what's the point in telling them one way or another." "More police, and more powers for us, that's what we need".

Police

"What about all the times police cause trouble on here, and how many of us have had the police turn on us over incidents?" "If I saw a copper getting a kicking outside, I'd shrug. Not my problem, is it? They don't give a shit about us". "Just electrify the gates anyway, people will think twice about pushing through".

"And with the money now, they aren't going to pay for anything new now to help. It is just going to get worse. Best

for us, is more people travelling anyway, then our jobs are safe".

O says: "They say no money, but then can always find it. In the 90s Margaret Thatcher, I think, was visiting Charing Cross, so they got it all cleaned up, kicked out the tramps, polished it up nice". "Yeah, but that's just a one off thing isn't it. Some official visit. If The Queen came through here every day, then yeah I bet they'd make it look nice, but that isn't what we want. It's not about them splashing out once in a while, they'll tell us they can't do what we want, and still polish the tiles at Charing Cross for photos".

"Never believe anything they say. That's the best way to look at it. They never change. One reorganisation, becomes another one".

"If I can get out during this, then I will. I'm not having the pension touched. I'm out if that's on the table." □

• "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube worker.

Drivers hit Wagamama

By Michael Elms

On Thursday 10 September Deliveroo drivers in Sheffield took action against Deliveroo, by hitting one of their biggest clients, Wagamama, with an all-night boycott, wiping out that evening's sales. They were striking over falling pay and unfair sackings.

The drivers of Sheffield, despite the hardship many face as wages fall, and despite a recent influx of new drivers to the app, threw themselves into the strike in a show of wonderful solidarity. Picket line conversations were conducted in many different languages, as drivers made a point of rejecting orders from the targeted restaurant on the spot, in view of their colleagues.

An unjustly sacked worker led a mixed picket of drivers on the one hand; and on the other, union supporters from the local community who had been drawn together by activists from the Sheffield branch of Workers' Liberty. Local Labour MPs have offered words of support to the campaign too.

Local supporters of Workers' Liberty have been assisting Sheffield food couriers in building their union branch – part of the IWGB – for over a year. Many workers were hesitant about taking strike action at the height of the pandemic. But as 2020 has worn on, Deliveroo has driven its prices down further and further. 18 months ago drivers would make no less than £4.25 per delivery. But today in Sheffield it is rare to make more than £4 on any delivery.

This drop in prices, combined with a rash of unfair sackings, has spurred

local drivers into action. There are at least eight drivers in Sheffield who have been "sacked" from the app. Deliveroo insists that these workers are "independent contractors", so they are sacked simply by having their account frozen, as one might be barred from Twitter.

Drivers get little more due process than what Twitter offers unruly users, either. The Sheffield Eight have been fired following anonymous complaints against them by members of the public or restaurant bosses, without offering a chance to answer the charges, let alone see the evidence against them. Some of the allegations levelled against the sacked drivers relate to claims that the breached the app's coronavirus safety code.

How seriously Deliveroo really takes coronavirus safety is for the reader to judge. The "Covid-19 safety training" that drivers have received is limited to a video and a couple of emails. The sick/self-isolation pay that the app offers drivers is a hard-to-access pittance. But if a restaurateur with an axe to grind alleges that a driver has carried out a collection or delivery procedure incorrectly, they're for the chop right away.

There is no right of appeal: once a termination decision has been made, Deliveroo stops responding. So the drivers have been obliged to find ways of making Deliveroo pay attention. They did this by hitting one of their biggest clients. Deliveroo is in ferocious competition with its rivals for market share. Their exclusive con-

tract with Wagamama is worth a lot of money – Wagamama made £41 million in delivery sales in 2019, all through Deliveroo – and more in terms of strategic advantage.

Wagamama's silence over Deliveroo's poverty pay and abusive practices, as well as its sensitivity for Deliveroo, make it a prime target for industrial action. That action began on Thursday 10th. The task for the couriers now is to spread it out across the country. □

£7,768 towards £10,000

Donations from Stan, Jonathan, Sarah, and Stephen take us to £7,768. If October and November prove fruitful, we will go beyond our target of £10,000 by 21-22 November. We still face uncertainty (as many smaller businesses do) over the future of our office. We have been assured that the mooted project of converting the whole industrial estate to housing is unlikely to move until April 2022. But neither our landlord nor any of the other units expected there to be a pandemic in 2020! The more money we raise now, the greater our longer term stability and ability to grow, and the better our options in looking for a new office, as eventually we will have to. □

• workersliberty.org/donate

The conflict in RMT



Off The Rails

An explosive conflict has broken out at the top of the RMT rail union. Assistant General Secretary (AGS) Mick Lynch, who was covering the General Secretary (GS) role due to the illness of incumbent Mick Cash, has gone off sick from work, citing stress-related ill-health, publishing a long letter to national president Michelle Rodgers detailing the background.

Mick Cash then returned to work on 15 September, sending out a further circular to members, "...appealing to you directly to work with me in ending the toxic culture that has developed..."

Like Cash, Lynch accuses the National Executive Committee majority of bullying him; of "undermining the role of the general secretary"; of "constant questioning and nit-picking over staffing matters"; of submitting "coordinated resolutions"; and of and generally making it "impossible for the union to be managed properly, efficiently, or professionally." Actual differences of strategy or politics between the NEC on the one side, and Cash and Lynch on the other, are not known to the wider membership.

That Mick Lynch's, and before him, Mick Cash's, health has deteriorated to the point where they found it impossible to continue working is a serious matter. We wish them well.

More involved

Just a week prior to Mick Lynch going off sick, Dave Marshall, an RMT employee working in the Organising Department, was sacked from his job due to a long-term absence due to mental ill health. This is despite Dave and his representative putting forward a clear roadmap and timeframe for his return to work, which was approved by Dave's line manager within the union.

As numerous RMT branches which have passed resolutions about Dave's dismissal have noted, sacking someone for long-term mental health absence rather than supporting their recovery and helping them return to work at their own pace, is the kind of callous, uncaring action for which RMT reps and activists routinely indict employers.

Many activists are now calling for an externally-run investigation into these matters, so RMT members can comprehensively assess how our union is operating as an employer, and how the officials, both elected and appointed, who staff it are treated, particularly in terms of workplace mental health and bullying. Off The Rails supports those calls.

But there is more involved here than how the union acts as an employer. Is-

sues of bullying and mental health also affect reps and activists, and this is an opportunity to address that as well.

Also posed are fundamental democratic questions about how the union is run. The key theme of Mick Lynch's letter is that he, as the AGS covering the GS role, has been obstructed from running the union by the National Executive Committee. In fact, the NEC's constitutional role is precisely to lead the union. The general secretary and other officers are not in charge; their job is to carry out the decisions of the Executive, which in turn are based on policies passed in branches, the basic building block of RMT democracy, and other democratic bodies such as equality committees.

The RMT's NEC is a lay body, made up of rank-and-file members effectively seconded to the employ of the union for a limited three-year term, after which they return to the workplace and resume their shop floor roles.

The tension that appears to be expressed by Mick Lynch's letter is between two conceptions of how the RMT should operate: one in which it is run by its officers, who are union staff, substantively employed by the RMT rather than seconded from a shop floor job, and who can stand for consecutive terms, thereby constituting a "permanent" bureaucracy at the core of the union - and one in which it is run by lay representatives on the NEC, taking their lead from branches.

Independent rank-and-file organisation is badly needed. A network that can assert the democratic right of RMT members to run their own union via their elected lay executive is an essential counterweight to the power of the bureaucracy. Ongoing discussions about founding such a network amongst an informal group of activists which has occasionally issued statements under the "Campaign for a Fighting, Democratic Union" banner over the last two years must now proceed with renewed urgency.

While the NEC asserting itself as a body, and insisting on its democratic right to lead the union, is positive, the

NEC majority needs to reflect on its own recent record, and learn from the past. Despite occasional spasms of opposition, the NEC has been largely pliant under Mick Cash's leadership since his re-election in 2019.

Last year, the NEC voted to approve a pay deal on Network Rail that signed away a "no compulsory redundancies" agreement. More recently, when the pandemic began, the NEC went along with Cash in summarily calling off, at a single stroke, every single live industrial dispute the union was currently running, sparking protests and objections from rank-and-file activists and RMT branches. The NEC has also responded to issues raised by equality advisory committees in a perfunctory and sometimes dismissive manner.

Complaining about the bureaucracy throwing its weight around after the fact, or lamenting Cash and Lynch's more cautious and conservative approach to industrial strategy and equalities campaigning, is not much use if the NEC doesn't stand up to it at the time.

Those members now looking for another "strong leader" - whether Steve Hedley, who has been covering the GS role, or anyone else - to put the lid back on everything are therefore misguided. Such an effort would be highly unlikely to work, and the attempt would make matters worse. We also have long-standing criticisms of Hedley's record and politics. If the burgeoning debate calcifies into "Lynch vs Hedley", with members expected to line up behind one or the other "strong leader" figure, that would be a disaster.

As the great revolutionary union organiser, railway worker, and socialist Eugene V. Debs put it: "Too long have the workers of the world waited for some Moses to lead them out of bondage. I would not lead you out if I could; for if you could be led out, you could be lead back again. I would have you make up your minds there is nothing that you cannot do for ourselves." That is the attitude we need from our "leaders": an understanding that true leadership is about empowering people to

realise their own strength, capabilities, and potential, not cultivating individual power bases to build personal authority and prestige.

We need a democratic union, led from the shop floor up, where power lies as close to the workplace, the point of production, as possible. That is how we can forge the union into the most effective weapon possible for fighting our immediate industrial battles. Anything that inhibits that, anything that increases the distance between rank-and-file members in the workplace and decision-making in the union, must be resisted. In order to organise such resistance, we need an independent rank-and-file network.

- RMT must address mental health issues and bullying allegations
- External investigation needed, but union must change itself
- Genuine debate, criticism, and accountability is essential, and is not bullying
- For a union led by members, through our lay representatives, not by officers
- The National Executive Committee must run the union, but run it more effectively
- Urgent, militant action is needed to fight job cuts and attacks on terms and conditions
- The rank and file - grassroots union members in workplaces - must organise. □

• Abridged from bit.ly/rmt-conflict

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Spread this Open Letter!

A new open letter, with its initial signatories including several Labour MPs and leading trade unionists, commits to "fighting for repeal of all the anti-union laws and their replacement with strong legal rights for workers and unions, including strong rights to strike and picket."

"We welcome the policy to this effect passed at TUC Congress last year and at multiple Labour Party confer-

ences, and will campaign actively to achieve it".

Both the Black Lives Matter struggle and the ongoing climate crisis, it says, highlight "the need for a right to take action over wider issues than only wages, terms and conditions. Workers need the right to strike as an instrument of political protest and social solidarity". □

• bit.ly/fou-ol and freeourunions.org

Trump's rigged election bid

By Barrie Hardy

On 13 September, one of Donald Trump's political dirty tricksters, Roger Stone, signposted a Trumpian future. Though convicted, Stone has avoided prison thanks to a presidential pardon.

To pay back the favour, he has suggested that should Trump lose the 3 November election, he should declare martial law and arrest political opponents such as Bill and Hillary Clinton and Mark Zuckerberg.

According to the *Washington Post*, Donald Trump has made over 20,000 false or misleading claims during his presidency. The serial liar did however let the truth slip when he admitted that the Republican Party would never win an election if it was easy for Americans to vote.

Then there was a half truth – that the election on 3 November will be rigged. What Trump left out of the claim was that he and his co conspirators would be the ones who'd be doing the actual rigging.

The Republican Party, representing the most rapacious wing of the American capitalist class, is entering a demographic cul-de-sac as the country's population becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse. To maintain their grip on power, they have resorted to means of voter suppression such as gerrymandering voter districts and purging electoral rolls. Under Trump the suppression of voters' rights has reached a whole new level.

Trump's wants to create total chaos come election time. His primary attack is on postal voting. He has consistently undermined it, despite this being the safest way of voting for a country which leads the world in victims of the coronavirus pandemic. Trump made one of his cronies, Louis DeJoy, postmaster general, the better to delay mail in ballots by cancelling overtime, eliminating sorting machines and reducing post office hours.

The US Postal Service is held in high regard by most Americans, almost as the NHS is here, so outrage at DeJoy's actions forced a pause to his acts of sabotage. Nevertheless, DeJoy refused to reverse measures already implemented and postal workers were ordered not to reinstall sorting machines. In defiance postal workers have taken direct action to get some machines working again.

During his testimony before Congress it turned out that DeJoy was involved in an illegal straw

donor scheme. He has an added incentive to want a Trump victory – escape from prosecution!

In Trump's America you're above the law provided you're one of his supporters. The President actively encourages you to break the law, as witnessed by his recent advice to supporters to try to vote twice, once by mail and once by turning up at the polling station on the day.

Like most Trump stories, his claims of widespread voter fraud are invented. There were just four cases in 2016, and three of those were people who tried to vote for Trump twice. Yet Republicans will recruit 50,000 volunteer monitors at a cost of \$20 million to challenge voters at the polls. It will be a massive exercise in harassment and intimidation of African-American and Latinx voters.

Trump can also expect help from Putin, whose troll factories will be working overtime in coming weeks. Gone are the days when US security services were worried about Russian interference in elections. Trump appointed officials are downplaying Russian meddling and talking up (without any evidence, of course) a supposed role of China and Iran.

John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence, has announced he will no longer brief Congress in person on foreign election interference.

Pandemic

New revelations about Trump's approach to the coronavirus pandemic are coming in a 15 September book by Bob Woodward, reknowned for his work on the 1970s Watergate scandal. Trump knew how serious the virus was as early as January, but continued to play it down "to avoid public panic." That meant; to avoid panic on the Stock Exchange.

His disregard for human life is also highlighted by reports that he regarded members of the armed forces as "suckers" and "losers".

Time was when just having an extra marital affair was enough to see off a candidate's electoral prospects. Now none of these revelations seem to damage Trump electorally with his core supporters. He is standing on no political platform or recognisable manifesto. It's simply a matter of vote Trump. As ever it's all about him, only now even more so!

What of Joe Biden, the only person who could actually defeat Trump? Trumpists portray Biden as a socialist. Laughably. Biden's platform is mildly



A US Postal Service sorting machine taken out of service at the behest of Trump

reformist – tax increases for the super rich, some minor environmental reforms, maintaining the Affordable Care Act – but nothing like Medicare for all or banning of fracking. Essentially Biden offers a return to the pre-Trump "normal", a loveable granddad figure, a safe pair of hands.

Whether or not Biden's approach will win enough votes, there will be no return to the old normal. Sharp socio-economic inequalities have been exasperated by the pandemic, and a mass movement has been developed against racial injustice with Black Lives Matter.

If Biden is elected, then socialists must first mobilise to block any "Trump coup", and then challenge Biden on social issues with particular emphasis on the need for universal health care, now more important than ever.

Socialists also need to address the question of democratic rights and argue for legislation that outlaws voter suppression. The undemocratic na-

ture of the Electoral College was starkly revealed in 2016, when Trump lost the popular vote but won the Electoral College.

The institution needs to be abolished. Calls for a vigorous prosecution of Trump and his clan for all the crimes they've committed must also be made. Biden must not be allowed to let Trump get off the hook.

Trump could still win. He will, for example, abolish payroll tax, thereby drastically cutting social security and devastating the lives of millions of poor Americans. Trump season two would certainly be more authoritarian than his first outing.

Bourgeois democracy is fragile in the "land of the free". Add in armed vigilantes turning up at polling stations to supplement the work of the "monitors" and you get a good idea of how things could develop. Only mobilisation from below can push back the threat. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

VIRUS: INDICT THE TORIES!

Of people who test positive for the virus and should self-isolate, only 20% or fewer are doing so fully.

That's an official estimate bit.ly/s200831

No-one knows what percentage of people who are identified as contacts of the infected – and may be infectious themselves, without having symptoms – are self-isolating. Most people asked to self-isolate get no or minimal isolation pay, so isolated properly is economically difficult or impossible.

Of those who do self-isolate, many can do so only in overcrowded housing. However careful they are, they're likely to infect others there.

In New Zealand, the government pays for workers self-isolating for the pandemic to get £291 a week bit.ly/nz-is. In a number of countries, full sick pay is a legal right for most workers. In Senegal, a country with far smaller accumulated economic resources than Britain, hotels have been transformed into quarantine units, and people can self-isolate safely rather than in crowded housing bit.ly/is-ho

In Britain, too, the labour movement can win changes.

In Germany, despite an aged population, the death rate has been much lower than in Britain. At least one factor is clear. Housing for the frail elderly (and generally) is better there than in Britain, where large and crowded care homes have heavily-casualised staffing and overcrowded private rentals

have [doubled](#) in the last 10 years.

The labour movement must fight to bring care homes into the public sector, with staff on regular public-sector pay and conditions.

In Australia, the right-wing government has conceded paid pandemic leave at least for care-home workers. In Britain, very few care-home workers had full isolation at the start of the pandemic. It has now been won for something like 40% of care homes, though as yet for few domiciliary care workers bit.ly/40pc-isol

The labour movement can win changes beyond that.

The NHS has 100,000 unfilled vacancies. Many, at least, could be filled with the 15% pay rise NHS workers are demanding. In France, all health workers won an increase of about £2000 a year after they struck and demonstrated on 30 June bit.ly/fr-hw – and the conservative Macron government has been pushed into a big budget boost for hospitals.

In Britain, too, the labour movement can win changes.

Partly thanks to dogged resistance by the civil service union PCS, the project of pulling workers-from-home back into offices – just so that they can cram the pubs and cafés round the offices, and restore their profits! – has so far moved slower in Britain than in most European countries, much slower than in France or Germany.

The labour movement can

restore work-from-home until workers feel confident to go back to offices.

Back in March and April, many groups of workers (post workers, refuse collection workers, others) won better virus-precautions in their workplaces by using their legal rights to refuse unsafe work. The labour movement can win further change there, too.

The Tories's new "rule of six" from 14 September (no more than six people can meet socially) may have some epidemiological rationale in the abstract. Countries with better tracking of infections than in Britain have found that more originate within households than even in pubs and cafés.

In the round, however, it makes little sense. It can only ever be very patchily enforced. Especially with a government which, by months of floundering and bluster, has lost trust on such issues.

The attempt to enforce the "rule of six" will sharpen divisions in the working class. The very-anxious will be spurred to turn against neighbours suspected of breaking the rules. Others will see the rules as fussy and unequal and bend them when they can.

Make the labour movement fight to construct the social solidarity needed to beat the virus, and round a program of fighting for the social measures needed to underpin effective virus control! □