



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



# PRIORITIES TO CURB VIRUS:

- » **Isolation pay**
- » **Continue furlough**
- » **Bring care-homes and test-trace to public sector**

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## **US presidential contest**

Howie Hawkins; action to counter "Trump coup"; debate

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## **New stirrings within Labour?**

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Can workers take the initiative with their own demands?

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# Priorities to curb the virus



Because the Tories bungled and wasted the summer virus-lull, Britain is heading for new lockdowns.

*Solidarity* defers to majority scientific opinion that some sort of new lockdowns will be needed.

We insist, too, that sustainable control of virus-spread, and escape from having *both* infections *and* lockdowns hit the [worst-off hardest](#), requires social measures to underpin greater social solidarity.

It's not impossible. Some countries, and not just those with the advantage of being remote islands, have kept fairly low death rates (Finland, Norway, Denmark, Germany). If we develop measures to keep infections from exploding in the coming months, then we can reasonably hope for help from a vaccine next year, and have a basis for a sustainable regime if no vaccine succeeds.

The social underpinning we need includes:

- Full isolation pay for all. Continued furlough pay.

## Social care needs changes now

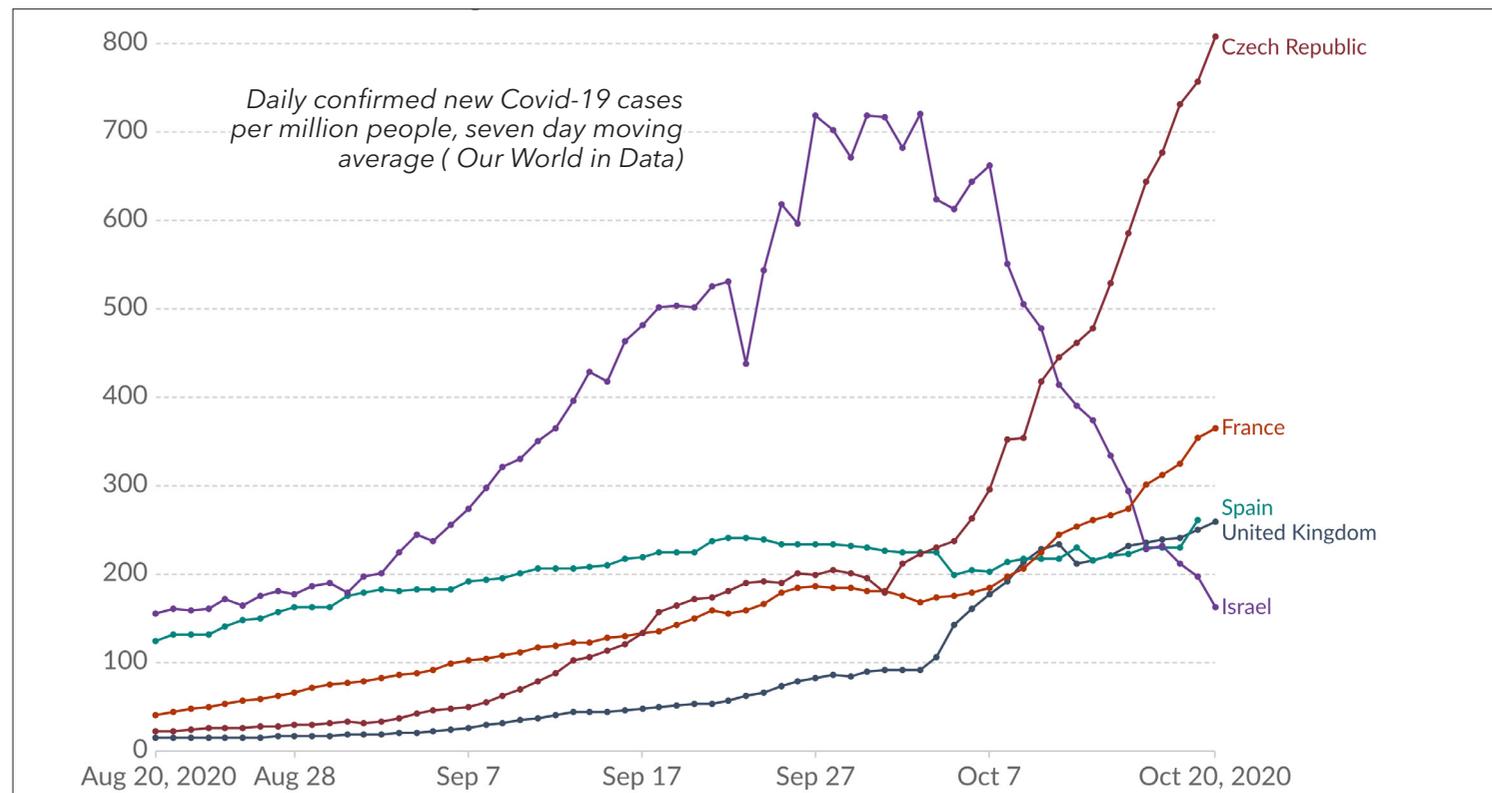
The public body which inspects and regulates care services in England has warned the social care sector is "fragile" in this new wave of Covid infections and called for the government to make changes "now - not at some point in the future".

As the Care Quality Commission published its annual State of Care report, its chief executive Ian Trenholm challenged the government by declaring that the coming months may turn "faultlines into chasms". Strong words from someone in Trenholm's position.

The CQC report suggests or nods towards higher pay, better training and more funding. What is striking is not that this official body fails to go further than that, but that Labour and trade union leaders fail to.

The labour movement should fight for the policy demanded by last year's Labour conference, for social care to become a free and fully public service, with decent public funding and workers on public-sector terms and conditions. In the context of the second wave, that is indeed needed now. □

- Sign and share this statement for public ownership of care: [bit.ly/socialcarestatement](https://bit.ly/socialcarestatement)



- Publicly-provided alternative housing for those quarantining, and for those in overcrowding

- Bring elderly care into the public sector, with staff on union-agreed public-sector pay and conditions

- Expand the NHS, give NHS workers the 15% pay rise they demand, take NHS logistics in-house and requisition supply industries and private hospitals
- Public-health test-and-trace, in place of the Tories' Serco mess
- Increase funding for schools. Workers' control of workplace safety.

We know that the virus is transmitted from person to person, and mostly through the air rather than via surfaces. We know that it transmits more in closed and crowded and ill-ventilated spaces, and when individuals are talking to each other.

Thus lockdowns, forcibly reducing social contact, are likely to work to some extent. The general idea has been known since the Middle Ages.

Exactly how the early-2020 lockdowns worked, and which parts of them worked most, nobody knows.

Abrupt lockdown-easing led to renewed surges of infection from May in Israel and Iran. When the lockdowns were eased more cautiously in Europe, from April, reopening shops, factories, construction sites, and schools didn't observably pause or slow established downward trends of infections. Some factories, notably in meat-processing, have been big transmission sites, but many of those were open during lockdown too.

The reopening of cafés, pubs, and tourist trade later in the summer was followed by a new rise of infections. Scientists have long predicted that infections will probably get worse as winter sets in, people spend more time

indoors, and a new flu season compounds problems.

Labour leader Keir Starmer has picked up the idea of a two-week "circuit breaker" lockdown, mooted in mid-September and [written up recently](#) by scientist Matt Keeling.

### Quick-fix

Keeling and his co-authors do not say that a "circuit-breaker" would be a *sufficient* "techie" quick fix to the social problems. Their paper is a mathematical study of infection curves on the *assumption* that the "circuit-breaker" lockdown dampens infections like (*best guesses* of what) early-2020 lockdowns did. It is explicit that its argument depends on "good compliance with the measures across all... sections of society", "the associated societal harms" being minimised, and the hoped-for break being used to establish sustainable measures for afterwards.

Lockdowns have usually taken at least three weeks to get infection figures even starting to drop. Israel's infection rate turned down only a couple of weeks after a full second lockdown was introduced (but that lockdown is being eased only now, after a month's duration). Spain's infection rate plateaued for four weeks with only scrappy new restrictions, at least until another spike on 19 October. Other European countries, France, the Netherlands, etc. have cases rising faster than the UK.

So we don't know. But it is probable that a "circuit-breaker" will in fact last more than two weeks, and have only moderate effect.

The Tories' version of test-and-trace, with its maze of profiteering subcontractors, has increased Serco's profits a third above 2019's, and brought (so the official scientists confirm) only "mar-

ginal" health benefit. For weeks now, *Solidarity* has been hammering away at the fact, which we dug out of the small print of an official [report](#) dated 31 August, that fewer than 20% of people self-isolate properly after testing positive for the virus.

High numbers of total tests are useless unless they lead to better tracing of contacts (both "forwards", and "backwards" to identify clusters or hubs of transmission) and efficient quarantining facilitated by social measures. Studies of South Korea, for example, suggest that good test-and-trace is useful, but secondary to a good covid-distancing and quarantining regime.

In spring Britain's lockdown was largely self-enforced by all of us, unlike in Spain and France, in each of which police imposed about a million fines. Social contact in all age groups, in Britain, has been drifting [upwards](#) steadily since May.

### Effect

The effect of lockdowns depends not just on official "closings-down" but also on voluntary effort for a reduction in "private" possibly-infectious contact (socialising in households, after work and in work breaks, etc.) which no police effort short of the Wuhan ultra-lockdown (23 Jan to 8 Apr) by China's police state could enforce.

We need social solidarity. We need a labour-movement effort to impose social measures on the Tories, and to win rules that are not just makeshift guesses by a government wanting to show it is "doing something". They must be part of an effort, fallible but real, by us all, to look after each other and help the worst-off, those hit hardest by infection risks and those hit hardest by lockdowns. □

# Start of a new fightback in Labour?

By Sacha Ismail

After a parliamentary rebellion over the Tories' Overseas Operations bill, the Labour leadership has faced a larger one, in parliament and outside, over its failure to oppose the "Spycops Bill".

Where the Overseas Operations Bill seeks to ease human rights abuses by British forces abroad, the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill would allow undercover police and other agents inside Britain to commit crimes in the course of their work. Murder, torture and sexual violence are not ruled out, and the frameworks to authorise criminal activity are very widely drawn. Given the history there is every reason to think these powers will be used in infiltration not just of criminal gangs - alarming enough given what that could mean for victims - but also trade unions, anti-racist and human rights organisations and environmental campaigns.

Activists previously subject to police infiltration and surveillance, including anti-blacklist campaigners in the construction industry and campaigners for victims of police violence, sounded the alarm with particular urgency.

Yet the Starmer leadership whipped Labour MPs to abstain. The Bill tells us something about the aggressive right-wing authoritarianism of the Tory government, but also the bankrupt political "strategy" being pursued by Starmer and co.

Unusually, all 34 Labour MPs who voted against were sent a formal written warning. (Claudia Webbe, currently suspended from the Labour Party on an unrelated issue, also voted against.) Six junior shadow ministers, mainly on the left of the Parliamentary party, resigned their positions in order to vote against - Dan Carden, Rachel Hopkins, Sarah Owen, Mary Roy, Kim Johnson, Margaret Greenwood, and Navendu Mishra. This follows Nadia Whittome, Beth Winter and Olivia Blake losing their positions over the Overseas Operations Bill. Interestingly, 16 of the rebels were only elected to Parliament last year.

27 of them joined the general secretaries of fourteen trade unions (Unite, FBU, BFAWU, CWU, TSSA, ASLEF, RMT, NEU, UCU, PCS, NUJ, POA, NAPO and UTR) plus organisations including Momentum, Open Labour and a range of human rights and justice campaigns in an open letter calling on Labour to oppose the Bill: [bit.ly/spycopsletter](https://bit.ly/spycopsletter)

A number of leftish Labour front-benchers - Andy McDonald, Imran Husain, Marsha de Cordova, Cat Smith, Rachael Maskell, Sam Tarry, Charlotte Nichols and Alex Sobel - did not resign. LabourList reports that they have been promised Starmer will do more to promote "union issues", including a bill for an Orgreave inquiry.

So in the same way that Starmer supports an Orgreave inquiry but not repeal of anti-trade union laws which would have made the miners' strike completely illegal, he refuses to op-



pose a Bill that would have made state infiltration of the NUM easier and more dangerous... This is window-dressing, to provide those who failed to vote against and resign with cover.

Left-wing MPs taking positions in this leadership is a hopeless strategy, and always was. (We said that when Nadia Whittome and Lloyd Russell-Moyle took positions in April: [bit.ly/betterindie](https://bit.ly/betterindie).) Starmer has used the opportunity of the resignations to promote more right-wing MPs, including Wes Streeting, into positions. The end results can be a gain for the left if the rebel MPs use their new freedom to put consistent public pressure on the leadership while helping organise grassroots members and trade unionists.

We should work to make the uproar over the Spycops Bill the beginning of a more coordinated left opposition

to and pressure on Starmer's leadership. Part of that is votes for the (not very good, [in our view](#)) left slate for the National Executive in balloting which started 19 October. A bigger part is getting local Labour Parties (CLP) meeting again and discussing motions.

After some pressure, the National Executive licensed CLP to meet and make decisions again, online, after lockdown, on 15 July, a number of CLPs still haven't met, or have met only to do National Executive nominations, or are starting to meet again only this month.

On Overseas Operations, Spycops, Brexit and many issues, strong opposition to Starmer is sorely needed. To be effective, and linked to progress for the left, it needs to go alongside a sustained and positive campaign for the left-wing policies passed by 2019 conference and for party democracy. □

## Murdered by fascists

The French socialist group Lutte Ouvrière has responded to the murder on 16 October of school teacher Samuel Paty, targeted because he let students view the famous "Mohammed cartoons" in a lesson on freedom of expression.

"An 18-year-old fanatic, influenced by the fascists of the Muslim world (called Islamists), has killed a school teacher who had displayed the Charlie Hebdo cartoons. Because of those lowlifes who want to impose their moral order on us, Muslims will be singled out. Dividing us is their ultimate goal. These types feed on each other. Other fascists have been seen attacking mosques.

"They have only one goal,

to impose their domination on us, and to that end they want to divide us by religion or by nation. We workers are and will remain in solidarity to change this world where it is more and more barbarians who for the moment hold the stage."

The Workers' Liberty website has a longer response from Algerian socialist-feminist Marieme Helie-Lucas: [bit.ly/mhl-sp](https://bit.ly/mhl-sp)

"One of the many problems in the analysis of crimes such as the one committed... in France against a history teacher whose only crime was to teach the official curriculum on freedom of expression is the lack of an adequate vocabulary to name the perpetrators. We

need to qualify them in political terms, not in religious ones as is currently done in France.

"The crimes and violations we witnessed in Algeria during the nineties, which are still currently perpetrated today in so many predominantly 'Muslim' countries, could not possibly be defined as perpetrated by 'Muslims' in our contexts; we were forced to identify them as political forces of the extreme right.

"Naming these political forces is essential. This is the conceptual blessing I wish for France and for Europe, if we don't want to face here as we did in Algeria, another 'war against the civilians'. That is why I say, we have to stand up and be counted, now". □

## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom. **Until 30 November:**

**Monday 19 October, 7.30-9pm:** Inessa Armand and the Bolshevik feminists - Heroes from socialist history study series

**Sunday 1 November, 6.30-8pm:** Covid-19: what do we know so far? With George Davey Smith (Professor of Clinical Epidemiology at Bristol University)

**Monday 2 November, 7:30-9pm:** Antonio Gramsci and the "Modern Prince"

**Monday 16 November, 7:30-9pm:** Max Shachtman and the "Third Camp"

**Monday 16 November, 7:30-9pm:** Ta Thu Thâu, Ngô Văn Xuyet, and the Vietnamese Trotskyists

### Plus

**Every Monday, 6-7pm:** Workers' Liberty Students online political discussions

**Thursdays, 8-9pm:** "Revolution Betrayed" study group

**Every Friday, 6.30pm:** Young Labour Internationalists. 23 Oct: LGBT repression in Poland

**Our calendars** of events: browse or subscribe! □

### All online

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, visit [workersliberty.org/meetings](https://workersliberty.org/meetings)

# Teach anti-capitalism, but get it right



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Very little happens by accident or oversight at the *Morning Star* (despite the paper using that excuse whenever their periodic lapses into blatant antisemitism provoke complaints from leading CPers).

So it was, I'd submit, no accident that a quite good article by NEU activist Robert Poole (7 October, electronic edition), protesting at government guidelines banning anti-capitalist materials in schools, was accompanied by this picture. The slide that the teacher is showing his pupils contains the following text:

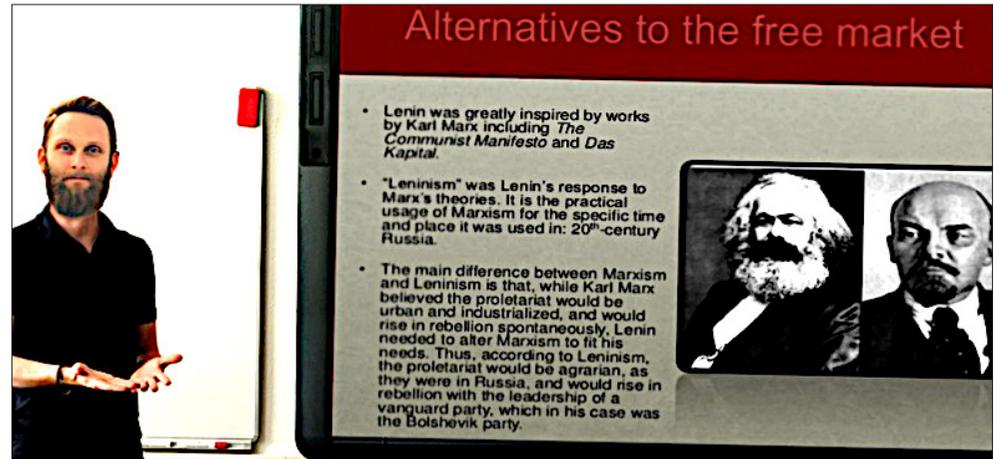
"The main difference between Marxism and Leninism is that, while Karl Marx believed the proletariat would be urban and industrialised, and would rise in rebellion spontaneously, Lenin needed to alter Marxism to fit his needs. Thus, according to Leninism, the proletariat would be agrarian, as they were in Russia, and would rise in rebellion with the leadership of a vanguard party, which in his case was the Bolshevik party."

That statement contains at least two downright falsehoods: Marx most certainly *did* believe that workers required a party, and Lenin did *not* believe that the proletariat in Russia was "agrarian".

The term "agrarian proletariat" has to mean "peasantry" since there wasn't a significant industrialised-agriculture waged-worker class in Russia at the time. So Lenin differed from Marx in thinking that forces other than the working class can create socialism? And so also, logically, the Chinese peasantry, or Russian armies in Eastern Europe, or the Afghan officer caste could do that? What that teacher is promulgating to his young pupils is not Marxism or Leninism, but *Stalinism*.

I'm told that the "Features" section of the *Star* is run by a particularly crude Stalinist faction, so it's (again) probably no accident that the picture appeared there.

For the record, here's what Lenin actually said about the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry: "Yet no alliance, even with the most honest and determined revolutionary democrats [rebellious peasants], will ever make the proletarians forget their still greater and more important goal, the fight for socialism, for the complete abolition of the rule



of capital, for the emancipation of all working people from every kind of exploitation. Forward, workers and peasants, in the common struggle for land and freedom! Forward, proletarians, united by international Social-Democracy, in the fight for socialism!" (*The Proletariat and the Peasantry*, 12 Nov 1905).

Meanwhile, the *Morning Star* editorial of October 17-18 contains the usual anti-EU bluster and implied backing for Johnson that we've come to expect: "having been rumbled in their ploy to bind Britain to other single market rules via Northern Ireland, EU leaders resent the enshrinement in law of Tory contingency plans to prevent it".

What's new, however is the recognition that "no deal" and trading on WTO rules would "damage industries, especially in dairy and animal products, confectionery, chemicals, financial services and to a lesser extent Britain's biggest export, namely, petroleum."

The innocent reader would naturally conclude that the *Morning Star* therefore opposed "no deal": but, of course it doesn't. Like its political masters the Communist Party of Britain, the *Star* positively supports "no deal".

The "line" hasn't changed, but presumably they're aware of just how badly their real position would go down with most of the unions that pump money into the paper. □

## Marsha De Cordova, the Law Society, and the Equalities Act



Letter

My article last week referred to a tweeted comment by Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities Marsha de Cordova, and her failure to respond to calls to apologise.

It's worth spelling out the detail. The Law Society had published some good guid-

ance on how to support gender-transitioning employees.

A transphobic response was published by a blog called "Roll on Friday". It criticised the Law Society for saying transitioning employees should be able to use the toilet that they are comfortable using, saying that it meant abolishing "single sex spaces" and implying that it went against the Equality Act 2010.

Marsha de Cordova re-

tweeted the "Roll on Friday" blog post, and appeared to agree with their conclusions, saying: "Not clear how the Law Society thinks this fits with the Equality Act 2010". That implied that Marsha de Cordova think trans women should not be able to use women's toilets. In fact the Equality Act 2010 says trans people can use the single sex services appropriate to their lived gender unless there are exceptional circum-

stances.

It is worrying that the Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities seems unwilling or unable to defend the rights trans people currently have under the Equality Act 2010, especially when Liz Truss has signalled that the government may reduce these rights. The Labour Party must defend trans rights! □

Angela Driver, London



## On-the-spot strikes



Letter

In September 2020 New York City teachers planned a [strike](#) over school reopening. NYC was the only big school district in the USA reopening then. The planned strike was illegal under New York state law, but pushed the city into a postponement of the reopening, and a detailed checklist of precautions, monitored by committees in schools. For example, ventilation systems in schools have been

independently checked (with results published on some school [websites](#)).

In Queensland, Australia, in late March, a planned [strike](#), also illegal, pushed the state government to close schools. Initially, just early for the Term 1/2 holiday, but in fact for four weeks (or more, for some year groups) into Term 2. Queensland's other lockdown measures were already in place, introduced bit by bit after the state government had declared a state of emergency on 29 January.

Teachers' strikes can make a dif-

ference. One difference with Stuart Jordan ([letters](#), *Solidarity* 567) is that I think ballots for strikes done on the basis of giving mandates for unpredictable future circumstances, and at times when most members are at home or in school only odd days, are difficult to pull off. Also, I don't believe in the scenario of school strikes triggering mass strikes.

In any case, that debate is behind us now. We have exploding infections and government disarray. And the NEU has called no ballots. Let's say

Stuart is right about the message "we should have started a ballot six weeks ago, or six months ago". That cannot strengthen a response now.

There were many walkouts over workplace safety back in March-April, not balloted-for, but on-the-spot responses. The USA has seen a wave of small strikes in the pandemic, as [reported](#) in *Solidarity* 567.

Building up on that action is the way to go. □

Colin Foster, London

# Belarus: strike plans from 25 Oct

By Pete Radcliff

On 13 October, following increasing attacks and imprisonments on protestors in Belarus, exiled oppositionist Svetlana Tikhanovskaya gave her "People's Ultimatum" to president Lukashenko.

Tikhanovskaya was the challenger to Lukashenko in the rigged 9 August election. She declared that if political prisoners (now running into thousands, including leaders of the liberal opposition, are not released); if Lukashenko doesn't stand down; and if the attacks on protestors on the streets don't stop, then she would call on Belarusians to "paralyse the life of our country" from 25 October.

The following day, 14 Oct, she made a [video appeal](#) to workers. "For decades, pro-government trade unions have been taking your money without representing your interests". She talked about the moves to build independent trade unions, and the industrial action at the tram-factory Kommunmash, the huge chemical plant GrodnoAzot, and many other factories. Three days later, she held an online session with the leaders of strike committees.

A leaflet distributed around the weekend protests and organising independent unions, claimed that 5,000 leaflets had been distributed at the MTZ factory alone. It called on workers to join the independent union.

## Miners

The striking potash miners of Belaruskali are mobilising for action after 25 Oct. The regime summarily re-imprisoned strike leaders Yuri Korzun and Pavel Puchenya as soon as they finished their 15-day prison sentence on Monday 19 October. On the same day, representatives from the complex met with Tikhanovskaya.

Some on the Belarus left argue that the strike call should not be supported.

They argue that Tikhanovskaya is not an advocate of socialism. That no immediate demands are made that can alleviate workers' grievances.

It is true that Tikhanovskaya is a bourgeois liberal, as far as we can see. Workers have yet to make their demands central to the rebellion against Lukashenko.

It does not follow that socialists should stand aside as workers have their heads beaten and are jailed as Lukashenko tries to maintain his dictatorship. If the strike call is not linked to broader workers' demands, it is up to socialists to link it.

Others in Belarus, claiming to be on the left, say that Lukashenko's regime should be defended from these strikes because he defends state property from privatisation.

Such arguments are the legacy of decades of Stalinist rule and misled-



education, inculcating an idea of socialism as state ownership (no matter who "owns" the state) and having nothing to do with workers' liberties and working-class power.

A recent interview with a strike-committee member from a factory supplying the Belaruskali complex, released through the left wing Telegram site [Flame](#), indicates some of the issues.

The factory maintains and repairs metal structures and technical equipment for Belaruskali. This is a machine translation of excerpts: we hope to post a better and fuller translation on [workersliberty.org](#).

"The strike committee represented the majority. Dissatisfaction with the police terror of 9-11 August was simply off scale. Some of the strikers even admitted that they voted for Lukashenko, but they do not accept terror. All those who did not take part were either very afraid of the reprisals of the regime, or were poorly organised

Yet efforts of propaganda still have an impact on the minds of the working class. People condemned the strike for nationalistic demands...

The current demands are all standard according to the "manual" of the liberal opposition. In response to my proposals about economic and social demands, many said that at the moment those were not important...

An independent trade union, along with a strongly opposition-minded engineering and technical staff, constituted the organisational backbone that played a key role at the start of our strike... The leader of our official trade union, who arrived on the first day of the

strike, in general, supported us. Later, of course, we did not see him again.

In other places with strikes, for example the *Shakhtospetsstroy Trust* and *Kaliyspetstrans*, they do not have an independent trade union and the entire organisation fell mainly on the opposition-minded engineering and technical personnel.

The strike of Belaruskali [the potash mine], became the largest and most organised, and took the full brunt of repression. For example, the most active and competent leader of the strike committee, Anatoly Bokun, served 25 days in jail and then received another 15 days without going free. Probably by now there are no leaders of the Strike Committee who have not have been in prison for days.

Despite the repressions, workers still join the strike from time to time...

The prospects for the workers' struggle have improved significantly thanks to this strike. But I do not think we should delude ourselves. It will not be possible to do a future strike with economic demands as easily, due to the fact that the initial political strike was initiated by workers of different layers of the hierarchy at the enterprise.

The working class lacks organisation, and when the demands represent the interests of only the working class, they will receive resistance from the engineering staff and bosses, which will greatly complicate the task.

The task of the communists is to be fully prepared for a turn at any time, through the means of trade unions, active organisations, and parties ready to help the workers". □



## Activist Agenda

Workers' Liberty is now selling second hand books online! We've catalogued our stock and have titles such as *The Revolution Betrayed* by Leon Trotsky, *The State and Revolution* by Vladimir Lenin, *A History of Communism in Britain* by Brian Pearce and Michael Woodhouse, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* by Walter Rodney, and many more listed on Amazon.co.uk. To check availability for specific titles, or to help out by donating books (we now have capacity to catalogue them), please email [office@workersliberty.org](mailto:office@workersliberty.org).

Safe and Equal continues its drive to get invitations to speak at online meetings of Labour Parties and trade union branches, with its latest invitation from Harborough CLP.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign's next protest at the Chinese Embassy in London is on 5 November.

Solidarity's production team has discussed plans if England goes into another lockdown, as Northern Ireland and Wales are doing. For circulating *Solidarity*, street stalls (usually) still do well in England. However, already there are no in-person meetings and few street protests, and these are not good times for door-to-door sales.

A new lockdown will probably not ban street stalls outright, but it may reduce the response they get. Our contingency plan, if it comes to it, is to revert temporarily to the smaller A4 format we used from late March to 2 September, with a smaller print-run for the time being.

We expect that the industrial estate where we have our office will remain open, rather than shutting as it did in March-May. □

• Campaign links and info at [workersliberty.org/agenda](http://workersliberty.org/agenda)

# Sea levels will rise. How



## Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Residents of Miami, Florida are bracing themselves for their next king tide on 14-17 November. In recent years, due to rising sea levels, autumnal tides advance into town washing through the streets and houses, and turning one of the most glamorous cities on earth into an open sewer.

These sunny-day flooding events are also common on the Marshall Islands. Last month President David Kabul called for the recovery from the pandemic to involve a rapid transition to zero carbon emissions. This island nation - home to a substantial US military base and nuclear test site - will sink beneath the waves with just 0.91 metres sea level rise. It is becoming vanishingly unlikely that it will survive even if we achieve radical emissions reductions.

The fate of Miami, the Marshall Islands and our whole civilisation depends on the answer to three questions that will increasingly define the future:

- Will we reduce carbon emissions and transition swiftly to renewable energy?
- Will we prepare and adapt for the coming climate crises?
- Will displaced people be given refuge?

We know that climate change is not gradual. It accelerates. It's accelerating now. Measurements from 2020 show that Greenland and the Antarctic are melting much faster than predicted. The seas could rise very quickly.

The rising sea puts coastal regions under threat of inundation and storm surges. More than [one billion people](#) live less than ten metres above sea level. Most of these people live in 570 coastal cities that are central to the infrastructure that has developed over the past 150 years and now sustains 7.8 billion human lives. It's worth naming the top 25 cities at risk from sea level rise by population size and wealth: Kolkata, Mumbai, Dhaka, Guangzhou, Ho Chi Minh City, Shanghai, Bangkok, Rangoon, Miami, Hai Phong, Alexandria, Tianjin, Khulna, Ningbo, Lagos, Abidjan, New York, Chittagong, Tokyo, Jakarta, New Orleans, Osaka-Kobe, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Nagoya. Even a small rise of 0.5 metres could compromise key infrastructure such as the water supply, power plants, ports, sewage works. This could happen within the next few decades, leading to much larger sea level rise by the end of the century that would destroy trillions of dollars of property value and displace



Miami

hundreds of millions of people.

The accelerating melting of the West Antarctic and Greenland icesheets is a result of warming that has already taken place. The oceans have already warmed by one degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels and the effects on ice sheets are locked in. If we stopped burning fossil fuels tomorrow then the seas would still continue to rise for the next few centuries.

The IPCC expect a 60cm-110cm sea level rise by 2100. But maybe much sooner. Ex-NASA scientist James Hansen [predicts](#) a 3 metre rise by 2100. Hansen's prediction is an outlier. But the history of climate science is one where the extreme outliers becomes increasingly more likely. Just a few years ago the IPCC thought the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets would not start melting for another hundred years. But the ice sheets are already melting and the melt is accelerating.

### Rising

The waters will eventually rise to a level they almost certainly wipe out coastal cities or leave these cities unrecognisable. The geological record suggests that for every one degree Celsius of warming, there is a 10-30 metre rise in sea levels (see *The Long Thaw*, David Archer (2008), and Rahmstorf, *A semi-empirical approach to projecting future sea-level rise*: Science, v. 315, no. 5810, p. 368-370 (2007)). Most scientists think this will take many centuries to occur. But the speed of acceleration is unknown. If these models are correct even the most space-age sea defences will only buy time for a planned retreat. With the one degree of warming already we are locked in to this trajectory and have little time to act.

The poorer nations will be hit particu-

larly hard but sea level rise will have an impact everywhere. Miami and New Orleans will almost certainly be destroyed. London, Tokyo, Amsterdam are far from safe. Within each nation the poor will be hardest hit and the rich will seek their own protection. Already in Manhattan, luxury flats are being marketed with rooms that are sealed "[submarine-style](#)". In Lagos, an 8 metre high sea wall has been created to defend a new development, Eko Atlantic, which could house 250,000 residents built on reclaimed land. This gargantuan sea wall is [expected](#) to bring worse floods to millions of Lagos' poor who already live in floating slums. None of these efforts by the rich for personal protection will protect the infrastructure or workers that the rich depend upon. The rising sea level is a problem the bourgeoisie cannot solve. A civilisation where several hundreds of millions of people have lost their homes, and major infrastructure is destroyed by ever more ferocious natural disasters, is a civilisation in its death throes.

The one saving grace is that we know this is going to happen and we can plan for it. The difficulty, as has been shown by 30 years of failed attempts to reduce carbon emissions, is that free market capitalism is an extremely bad system for planning on any significant scale. Despite knowing the catastrophic consequences of climate

change, global emissions continue to rise.

### Shareholders

In order to satisfy shareholders, fossil fuel companies have to show they have over a 100% replacement-reserves ratio. This means new sources of fossil fuels for everything currently in reserves, driving tar sands extraction and fracking. Fossil fuel companies now enjoy \$5 trillion subsidies a year (David Coady et al. *How Large are Global Fossil Fuel Subsidies?* World Development 91 (2017)) and the rules governing international trade are rigged in their favour (see ch.2 of *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein (2017)). Fossil fuel giants now have five times the amount of fossil fuels that we can possibly burn if we are to meet the Paris targets (James Leaton et al. *Unburnable Carbon 2013: Wasted Capital and Stranded Assets*). This is the logic of deregulated capitalism overriding human reason. It is the anarchy of the marketplace and unrestrained profit-making, taking precedence over rational planning.

At present there are either no plans or inadequate plans to defend the cit-



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# do we save our cities?

ies from rising sea levels and no plans anywhere to prepare for the evacuation of hundreds of millions fleeing climate chaos. (The one exception: the island nation of Kiribati has bought 20 sq km of Fijian jungle for \$8.77 million from its previous owner, the Church of England). In many urban centres waterfront property prices remain high and large scale developments are underway. Even in London, which from a geological point of view is relatively easy to defend, there is no plan to start building new sea defences until 2070 and then only to meet a maximum 1.15 metre sea level rise. Far from being a place of relative sanctuary in an increasingly chaotic climate, London could become a net contributor to the refugee crisis.

There are reasons for this are simple to understand. It is inconceivable that free enterprise will deliver a solution. Only the state can build the massive infrastructure we need to defend and move the cities. Around the world, all governments, authoritarian and democratic, run capitalist states whose primary aim is to provide a favourable environment for the capitalist class to thrive and profit. Precisely because this is the primary aim, the state seeks to provide this favourable environment as cheaply as possible. Heavy taxation of capitalists to spend on public works defeats this purpose. The state performs a cost-benefit analysis based on the returns it is likely to see from its investments. It operates like a private business and measures its success in economic growth. The cost of building sea defences grow exponentially for each metre of sea level rise.

## Public

At a time of accelerating sea level rise, this inbuilt tendency to do public works on the cheap will mean our current political leaders will delay big investments and make inadequate preparations. Marshalling resources to avoid hundreds of millions of displaced people and adapt the world's infrastructure to ensure we could continue to house, cloth and feed the world population in an increasingly hostile climate would involve wresting control of our productive wealth from the capitalist class. It would mean taking control of the means of production (the factories, land, mines and machinery) and putting them to the service of a well designed plan. No government in the world is making preparations of this kind. Most are delaying even the construction of sea defences.

A further difficulty for making adequate preparations is that the advice government's receive is based on a scientific process that tends to under-esti-

mate. The most authoritative scientific body on climate science the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) insists that 95% of its members agree with its published findings. But to reach this consensus means dropping the least likely and most extreme scenarios. There are many unknowns in climate science such as tipping points where small changes in the Earth's climate trigger more rapid warming. It is impossible for 95% of scientists to reach consensus on the less likely scenarios, so the predictions tend to underestimate. Since its inception IPCC predictions have consistently underestimated the speed of climate change. (See *Discerning Experts* by Oppenheim et al (2019)).

## Capitalist

From the point of view of the capitalist politician, it makes sense to avoid spending money today that could be spent in 5 or 50 years time. But from the point of view of basic human reason, it makes sense to make preparations in good time for the inevitable. If we mis-time then hundreds of millions of people will be displaced, trillions of dollars of infrastructure destroyed, it is quite possible that we will see the breakdown of nation states, the rule of law, and many of the comforts and essentials we take for granted. We could find ourselves in a spiral of ever-worsening preparedness to respond to the multiple crises caused by climate change.

The world's coastal cities must be preserved if we are to stand a chance of avoiding civilisational collapse and an apocalyptic collapse of the world's population. As the planet warns large areas of the Earth will become uninhabitable due to drought, heat and flooding. Sea level rise is just one of a number of unprecedented crises that climate change will bring. The World Bank predicts over 200 million climate refugees by 2050 including 86 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million in South Asia, 17 million in Latin America. The UN's worse case scenario is one billion climate refugees by 2050. (World Bank, *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration* (2018) and United Nations International Organisation for Migration, *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Assessing the Evidence* (2009)). In the temperate regions there needs to be a massive expansion of infrastructure to accommodate this unprecedented movement of people. There are engineering solutions to dealing with scorching temperatures, droughts, floods and extreme weather but they need to be planned, resourced and implemented.

We need a political force that can de-

velop and implement rational plans for the crisis and replace capitalist control of the earth's resources and our skills and time as workers, with democratic control. The efforts of the environmental movement over the last half century have failed. We have failed to build a movement powerful enough to deliver the nebulous goal of reducing global CO2 emissions. However, mobilising workers around a plan for protecting our homes and livelihoods against the inevitable rising tide may have a chance of success. A workers' campaign for adequate sea defences and preparations for rising sea levels in one city could inspire similar efforts in other coastal cities, creating the possibility for international working-class collaboration across borders. By defending the cities from coastal flooding we are also creating relatively safe havens for the millions of refugees fleeing the other devastating consequences of climate change and maintaining vital infrastructure to meet the coming storms. By popularising the idea of planning, against anarchic capitalist business-as-usual, we may have a chance of much more far reaching plans to transition to negative emissions and avoid the most apocalyptic climate scenarios.

Putting blind panic, denial and our carefully cultivated feelings of powerlessness aside, we, the organised working-class, should set our minds to addressing the practical challenges that face us. The past 150 years has been the most productive and dynamic period of human history. Although our toiling over this time has radically altered the earth's atmosphere, it has also brought unparalleled human progress in the form of extraordinary technological capacity and scientific knowledge, and for many, huge social advances in terms of human freedoms. We should use this material, intellectual and socio-political inheritance to preserve as much of our civilisation as we can. We

must defend our cities as best we can and where we cannot we must prepare a planned move to higher ground. We need to use the few years and decades we have before the accelerating sea level rise and other catastrophic disasters caused by climate change start causing real damage to our ability to respond to unfolding crisis.

The wealth of our planet was created through our labours and the labours of our ancestors. Often this labour was given in exchange for payment, sometimes under the whip, but at no point did workers enjoy full fruit of their labour. This wealth and expertise of our civilisation is our common wealth and should be ours to direct democratically according to a plan to avoid the forthcoming catastrophe. We should demand that the world's productive wealth is turned to this most urgent task of building sea defences and adapting and where necessary relocating our coastal cities. We seek to build an organisation of workers who can democratically organise such plans, city by city, and fight for the resources necessary to enact those plans. □



## Democracy in the labour movement

Hundreds of Labour and union activists have signed the appeal to reinstate expelled Broadland (Norfolk) CLP member David Heywood [bit.ly/re-dh](https://bit.ly/re-dh). We also have reports of many other Labour members suspended or expelled without due process. Very few have mounted any campaign against exclusion. We should challenge the growing acceptance that members suspended, often without precise charges, must keep quiet about it. □



# How transport workers beat the colour bar

By Janine Booth

This story of colour bars in the UK railway and bus industries begins after the Second World War, when Britain had a labour shortage and people moved to Britain in increasing numbers from Caribbean countries and elsewhere.

The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR, predecessor of the RMT) declared in 1948 that: "we have no objection to the employment of coloured men in the railway industry" and that "coloured men had been satisfactorily employed on the railways over a long period".

But although the top of the union was getting it right, in some areas the grassroots was not. In 1950, white workers at King's Cross goods depot complained to the NUR through their branches that coloured men were being recruited above the entry grades and they would not stand for coloured men having seniority or authority over white men.

To his credit, Jim Campbell, Assistant General Secretary of the NUR (who later became General Secretary), went to the workplace and convinced a meeting of workers from six London depots to get behind the union's opposition to the colour bar.

## Obstacles

The following year, the NUR Executive agreed to co-operate with the Railway Executive (the governing body of the railways) in removing obstacles to the employment of black workers. A black NUR member summed up the importance of the union's stance in the workplace, saying: "Yes, there has been hostility from white staff but on the transport you have so much backing from the union they can't do much."

However, racism among transport workers did not go away.

In the mid-1950s, there was a spate of industrial action by bus workers, who were organised by the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G, now part of Unite).

In 1953, Wolverhampton bus workers held an overtime ban, "as a protest against the increasing number of coloured workers employed", demanding the employer impose a quota of only 52 black workers out of the nine hundred workers on the Wolverhampton buses.

In the same year, West Bromwich bus workers held a series of one-day strikes against the employment of a single Indian bus conductor. The T&G official said that, "I do not think there is any racial antagonism behind this!"

Three years later, the BBC showed a Panorama documentary about the colour bar on the railway. Workplace interviews at Smithfield depot showed a manager defending the policy of



not employing black workers, but it seemed that the pressure for the policy was coming from white workers, and their union rep gave voice to this.

NUR representative Mr Geary assured the BBC interviewer that there was "no prejudice" against coloured men, explaining that instead, the issue was that coloured men worked too slowly, did not speak the lingo well, and were "apt to lose their temper and resort to tactics that the average white man would not resort to". The interviewer concluded by asking, "Have you ever worked with a coloured man?", to which the rep answered "No, I haven't."

Until the 1960s, there was no particular restriction on immigration from Commonwealth countries, but that changed with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962.

Peter Fryer explains in his important book *Staying Power, a history of black people in Britain*, that, "Between 1958 and 1968 black settlers in Britain watched the racist tail wag the Parliamentary dog... as sop after stop was thrown to racism, attacks on black people... mounted from year to year. But the worst violence of all, since it affected every black settler without exception, was their relegation as 'immigrants' to the permanent status of second-class citizens. This was brought about in 1962."

This Act began a series of laws over the next few decades to restrict the

right of black people to move to Britain from Commonwealth countries. Racism and restrictions on immigration fed each other.

What was the NUR's response? In 1962, the union did the right thing, its AGM heavily defeating a motion in support of restricting immigration. But then in 1966, it did the wrong thing, endorsing the Labour party's acceptance of the 1962 Act and voting down a motion opposing immigration controls.

In 1963, Bristol's black community launched a boycott of the Bristol Omnibus Company in protest at its refusal to employ black workers. Black Bristolians and white supporters marched through the city in support of the boycott, which won a historic victory, overturning the colour bar.

## Asquith Xavier

1966 saw a battle that RMT rightly celebrates every year. When Dominica-born Marylebone rail worker Asquith Xavier applied for a job at Euston, he received a response from the staff committee, which was made up of NUR reps, stating they were not prepared to accept the transfer of coloured staff. As RMT's excellent pamphlet *Unity In Diversity* describes, "a network of white shop stewards was running a closed shop which included a colour bar". There was no law against that at the time.

But Marylebone NUR got behind Asquith. His workmate Tony Donaghey had applied for the same post and got the job, despite Asquith having more seniority than him. Tony felt strongly against racism; he was Irish and had experienced racist discrimination. He refused to take up his new job in solidarity with Asquith. Tony Donaghey went on many years later to become RMT's National President.

Marylebone NUR made the union put up a serious fight. In July 1966, British Rail overturned all colour bars. The next month, Asquith Xavier started work at

Euston, where there is now a plaque paying tribute to him and the role he played in fighting racism.

We can see from this story that racism does not usually announce itself explicitly. Mostly, it doesn't say "Hello, I'm a racist"; it starts with "We're not racist, but ..."

We do not have colour bars any more. They are illegal and have been for a long time. But there is still racism against black rail workers, in different forms. Perhaps an examination of those forms may be the topic of another article.

The poisonous symbiosis of racism and opposition to immigration is still with us. Even some avowed socialists and trade unionists say that they have nothing against, for example, EU migrants, they just want to stop them coming here and undermining jobs and conditions. They would do well to recognise the echo in that of arguments made by advocates of the colour bar.

These stories tell of the importance of trade unions in tackling racism. Unlike the employers' class, the working class has an organic drive towards unity, because we win more for all workers when we involve all workers. However, that drive to unity does not happen automatically. Part of the role of trade unionists is to challenge racism within our unions.

We want rank-and-file control of our unions - even the best of them are still very top-heavy, very officer-led, very bureaucratic - but we need to know what we're going to do when there is racism among the rank and file. Fortunately, the story of the fight against colour bars gives us some very good examples to learn from. □

• More: Peter Fryer, *Staying Power*; Philip Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*; RMT, *Unity In Diversity*; BBC Panorama documentary, 1956



# “We need a left party that organises in the unions”



Howie Hawkins, a socialist running in the US presidential election on the ticket of the Green Party, spoke to Stephen Wood from *Solidarity*. [Part 1](#) of this interview was in *Solidarity* 567. *Workers' Liberty* backs Hawkins in the election.

**Bernie Sanders, during the Democratic primaries, was clear about his policies. But it looks like now he's making almost no demands on Biden?**

Bernie Sanders is saying if we get Joe Biden in there, we can push him. But in the course of this campaign, he's compromised on his signature issue, Medicare for All.

He went on MSNBC and said: I'm willing to compromise to Medicare for All over 55s. That leaves in place hundreds and hundreds of private insurance companies and creates this enormous administrative overhead in the health-care system because providers have to figure out which plan you're covered by and what services they cover.

So we're going to have Medicare for all with Biden, but only for the over 55s? That undermines the whole idea of the efficiencies of a single-payer-funded healthcare system.

**How has Covid affected how the campaign runs?**

On the ground, it's mostly phone calls. We are phoning seven million voters in various states. We have a whole phone banking operation in some states, like New York and New Jersey. Lots of DSA members will vote for Biden, we know that, but we have four DSA chapters backing our campaign now. I hope lots of Sanders voters see us as a real alternative.

And then, as candidates, we are trying to get media coverage. We tend to be able to get coverage in smaller media markets. It's very different from being on the network news and the cable news every night. And when we do get coverage, it's usually for ballot access stories.

The subtext is the Republicans are trying to get us on. Democrats are trying to get us off. They try to treat us like pawns on their chessboard.

And so the issue is being able to talk about our policy issues. Our website crashed during the first Trump/Biden debate. Once that debate got nasty, people were turned off. Lots of people did go to look then for other candidates and other policies.

**What do the Greens do outside an election? Are they there to support**

**strikes, and demonstrations?**

The Greens are reliable participants in those kinds of movements. The Greens show up to events that other groups initiate. But I think the Greens need to learn how to initiate some campaigns and really show how we can have a united front around an issue.

The campaign groups, the NGOs, want us to be there in the audience but not on the speakers' platform. Because most of those non-profits are oriented to the Democratic Party. Their funders and the wealthy donors want to funnel these movements towards the Democratic Party.

If we were able to shape these movements, we would invite people that agree with us on the issues to speak as well, even from the Democratic Party. It's like the movement against the Vietnam War. We didn't take it easy on Humphrey because Nixon was worse. Our demand was Out Now! Even during the primaries, Kennedy and McCarthy were seen as anti-war when in fact, they were calling for negotiations. We put pressure on them, too. That's the kind of thing I think that Greens can do if we become better organisers.

We had a statement out on 12 October about renaming that federal holiday Indigenous People's Day, instead of Columbus Day, and about honouring the treaties with Indigenous nations that have been violated and other measures to end discrimination and violence that these communities are experiencing. We have been trying to popularise and work with progressive movements throughout this election.

We've highlighted, with my background as a Teamster in a warehouse for UPS, the dangers that people in those industries face even while they are called essential workers. The PPE has not been available. A lot of them are getting sick. There have been some wildcat strikes at Amazon. There's a new report about XPO worldwide treating its workers appallingly. We have tried to add our voice to those concerns and those actions.

We've had a hearing in particular with rank-and-file and local organisers of Black Lives Matter activities. The national Black Lives Matter group that's got some big foundation funding has been oriented toward mobilising people to the Democratic Party. And one of their leaders just came out with an explicit statement to vote for Biden.

The way the Democrats deal with BLM is to focus on reforming use-of-force policies, for example, banning chokeholds. New York City has had a ban on chokeholds since 1993, yet Eric

Garner was still strangled to death by a chokehold in 2014.

We're saying community control of the police. As long as the police are able to police themselves in internal affairs, they're going to cover up their crimes. So we're going to need an independent commission, elected or even selected by lot like juries. That's an old demand in the black radical tradition, starting with the Black Panther Party.

In most places, the local movements have focused on use-of-force reforms. And it is not enough to have the same politicians appoint advisory review boards who have built the police forces we now have. We've got some traction in the movement with that discussion about community control.

We'll also talk about what can be done if you defund or re-allocate resources in police departments to services that people need, homes rather than vagrancy charges for the homeless for instance, ending the war on drugs etc. We also say there's not enough money in police department budgets to really provide those services. Part of our Green New Deal is investing in homes, in schools, healthcare, and jobs in racially-oppressed communities.

**How do you respond to demonstrations with increasing numbers armed and prepared to shoot each other?**

I think it's important that we take a non-violent approach and make that very clear publicly. Anybody who is in violation of that is not with us, even if they say they are. There are some fringe people who call themselves left who have been doing some provocation. A lot of that is the far right and law enforcement themselves, posing as BLM. And we also have the problem that in a lot of police departments and sheriff's departments, and amongst state troopers, are people who, if not directly affiliated to them, are sympathetic to these right wing vigilantes.

Mass actions can build a broad base of support, whereas if you start getting into gunfights with these right-wing vigilantes, that's just what Trump wants, because then he can say, they're coming to burn out your suburbs, and we need law and order.

I don't think [Trump's line] has worked out too well. Particularly among women voters, who don't think having a right-wing militia patrol the streets is better than a demonstration in their suburb.

**Do you think there is any prospect of organised labour supporting a third party challenge to the Democrats, or backing left challengers?**

We do have some limited support in

union rank-and-files and among some union staff. I did have a meeting with a local Labor Council here in New York that has been very supportive in the past.

But most of the unions, if they don't like Biden, are just saying very little and keeping quiet. In terms of building anything left within the labour movement, we do have the remnants of the Labour Party that was pretty big in the late 90s. And their leadership says when 10 percent of the unions are ready to start a Labour Party, we can start one, right? I told them when 10 percent of the people start voting for the Green Party, then the unions will start looking at us!

I don't think we're going to get it through the structures of the unions we have now. The United Electrical workers are committed to independent politics, but most of the reform caucuses tend to avoid partisan politics.

Even the national AFL passed a resolution in support of supporting independent candidates and looking to an alternative to the Democrats or Republicans. That reflects a sentiment amongst a lot of workers in unions. But there's no organised effort like Tony Mazzochi of the Labor Party was trying to do 20, 30 years ago.

I think it will take a left party that organises within the unions to bring the labour movement to working-class political independence, to campaign around its own program and its own banner.

If you end up working for one of the non-profit organisations, you are limited in what you can say. They want Democrats on staff. I went for one of those jobs, but then I saw it would limit what I could do.

Here in New York there were Greens looking to get jobs in those organisations. They were told you can be registered as a Democrat or even Working Families Party, but if you're a Green, it's too controversial. So if you want the job, you've got to change your party registration.

I think we're better off organising as rank-and-file workers with other workers on the job than trying to get staff positions in the unions and the non-profit organisations.

We need an independent party with local branches where people sit down together and they talk things through, educate themselves, and make themselves smarter. We've got to be smart and develop ourselves as thinkers and speakers and writers. That's what's missing, because the NGO organisations are very top down. □

# Lesser-evilism in the 2020 elections



By Barry Finger

If there is one proposition that most anti-Stalinist socialists should agree on it is this: capitalism does not need democracy and democracy does not require capitalism. Only socialism does.

Socialists in every struggle are the left-wing, the revolutionary wing of democracy. This is what distinguishes us from the left-wing of capitalism and why, in comparison to the small gaps that separate the conservative from the liberal wing of capitalist democracy, we as socialists stand a mile apart from both in irreconcilable opposition. Or to put it concisely, as long in the contest is between the left and the right wing of capitalist democracy, socialists have proclaimed and will continue to proclaim our unwillingness to leap over a mile for the sake of an inch.

This is the crux of our refusal to capitulate to lesser-evil politics. For whatever wing of capitalist democracy prevails electorally, the working class and the oppressed are the losers. That is why we reject the blandishments of cooptation, of subordinating our organisations and our perspective to advance the cause of an enlightened, liberal capitalism.

Socialism, in its drive to extend and empower democracy, is ultimately compelled to destroy the economic and social base of capitalist power; capitalist democracy is a contest about the minimal level of concessions the state can or must provide to maintain social peace while preserving the interests of the ruling class.

And if this election were no different than most others, we would be foolish to advocate a vote for the Democrats. Whatever pressure we can place on the system to grant concessions can be waged more effectively from the outside, through mass mobilisations. But whether we sit out such "normal" elections or vote in protest for a "third" party, we should be clear. Such votes as we cast are not votes for independent politics. Only a mass working-class party has the coherency to propel independent politics.

The Green Party and previous movement-oriented parties are cross-class, issue-oriented alliances, no different than the movements from which they arose. Votes for such parties are a vote of no confidence in the system. And nothing more.

But this election is like no other election and the insistence on a formulaic response based on past assumptions is woefully inadequate. Modern Republicans have always rooted their power in the institutional arrangements that

are most hostile to democracy: voter suppression, gerrymandering, the unrepresentative Senate, the electoral college and the unelected federal judiciary. And this is true of the Trumpian Republican Party as well.

But a Trump victory takes this miles further and is the harbinger of a post-democratic America. The pre-Trumpian Republicans availed themselves of the built-in constitutional holes in American democracy. Even they, however, drew a line at undermining the institutional safeguards of accountability. They released their taxes, turned their business interests over to blind trusts and acceded to the conventional norms of transparency. They were weak democrats, but democrats nonetheless, who never renounced the peaceful and orderly transition of power.

I have no interest in navigating the competing claims that Trump is a fascist or a bonapartist. His authoritarianism has different roots. Trump's narrow world view, if you can dignify it as such, was probably shaped more by the organised crime milieu that is a fixture of New York City real estate development scene and by his mentor, Roy Cohn - of Joe McCarthy fame, who guided him through the strong-arm labyrinths of that world - than it is by any past European dictator.

We have already seen in terrifying embryonic form what a post-democratic America would look like. The justice department, intended as an independent agency, has been converted into Trump's personal consigliere. Government has become a means for enriching his family. His emissaries are sent abroad to invent scandals made to discredit opponents. His crowds routinely demand that enemies be locked up. Bureaucrats unwilling to tow the line and whistle blowers are summarily fired, deprived of pensions and black listed. White nationalism and Qanon conspiracies gin up an ever roiled base, who are conditioned to see Trump as their knight on horseback defending them against real and invented threats from evil, Democratic pederasts who unleash Antifa to maraud cities and terrify its occupants. He has winked at the KKK, the Proud Boys and race war accelerationists such as the Boogaloo Bois.

We have seen the Center for Disease Control and the National Institute for Health being strangled as reliable sources of scientific data and guidance. Environmental regulations are being torn up. And bureaucracies are warned not to collect data that contradict business interests. Democratic cities, with large minority populations, are being starved of federal assistance. Trump incites private armed goons to "open" the economy and intimidate elected

officials of states run by the opposition party.

Trump had administration officials employ military helicopters and military police clear a path through unthreatening BLM protesters for a Presidential photo-op. And he has dusted off the 1807 Insurrection Act, which permits the armed forces to suppress civil disorder when law enforcement is unable to. It was a law used to end railroad strikes by Rutherford Hayes in 1877, a strike led by a 22 year old Eugene Debs. Of course it has been used many times since. But rarely so ominously.

Barr has deployed the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense and the Department of Justice against demonstrators under the pretext of "protecting" federal property against demonstrators, who may have black bloc anarchists, looters or agent provocateurs in their midst. Federal intervention initiated by "operation Diligent Valor" unleashed hundreds of agents to the streets of Portland. 225 federal agents were sent to Kansas City, Missouri and over two dozen sent to Albuquerque, Chicago, Cleveland Detroit and Milwaukee. For personnel, Trump has drawn on the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Customs and Border Protection, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Immigration Enforcement, the US Marshals Service, the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Federal Protective Service. They have been deployed in unmarked vehicles, wearing combat fatigues and with insignia of their affiliations obscured to pluck people off the street.

## Demonstration

In other words, Trump has created a veritable praetorian guard and provided us with a clear demonstration of what life will look like for the left in a Trumpian future. Are we paying attention?

And as far as challenging the election results, he has pre-loaded the courts with compliant reactionaries, stated brazenly that he may not accept results that depend on mail-in ballots and is ready to deploy an army of election intimidators in contested districts to challenge minority voters and make sure that every vote does *not* count. He has made it clear that he will tie up the election in the courts in the hope of throwing the elections into the hands of state governments where Republicans outnumber Democrats. And he has hinted that he sees no reason for him to restrict himself to only two terms.

So comrades, the question is whether you can make common cause with all other small-d democrats - the trade unionists, minorities, environmentalists, anti-militarists, alarmed citizens of all classes - who flock to the Democratic Party as a means to defend their and

our hard won rights?

Or are you going to insist that *the defence of democracy is simply a lesser evil to authoritarianism* and therefore not worth making common cause as the left wing of democracy with other democrats through the only electoral vehicle that can effectively mount that challenge within the next two weeks? □

- See [bit.ly/bf-le](https://bit.ly/bf-le) for "Endnote".

## Trump and epoch

By Luke Hardy

Trump is a central part of a global wave of authoritarian nationalist populism, but he goes beyond it towards fascism in that:

- the idea of violence and locking up his political opponents is a central part of his political thought. The nature of the US state has made that impossible on a grand scale. However, where he can, by rhetorically encouraging his supporters or using the Department for Homeland Security, he has pushed this violence.

- Trump has been in actual dialogue with the existing organisations of the violent far right and fascism. They support him, they have re-branded themselves to be his champions, they have entered into the MAGA movement. He speaks to them both openly over the air-waves and Twitter and via go-betweens.

Now the nature of his threat has crystallised and hardened in response to the Black Lives Matter protests and the election. The left, anti-racist activists, and socialists are now squarely in his and his supporters' sights. In terms of the elections, subverting and dismissing the election process is Trump's way out the crisis.

Obviously, even if Trump is a fascist, no automatic conclusion follows as regards who socialists vote for in the election. It does mean building the working-class movement to sweep him from power is vital. That movement exists, and it sees one tool in that fight as voting Biden to oust Trump. Revolutionary socialists should be involved to present a program and an organisational pole fighting for independent working-class politics. Whether that leads to calling a vote for Biden against Trump everywhere or only in the "swing states" I am open on. I worry though that a mixed message could blur how dangerous Trump is to the bourgeois-democratic space that allows workers to organise. □

# Social self-defence against a Trump coup

By Jeremy Brecher

President Donald Trump has refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power no matter who wins the election. What is to be done if Trump loses the election but refuses to concede?

Tyrannical regimes from Serbia to the Philippines to Brazil and many other places have been brought down by “people power” – non-violent revolts that made society ungovernable and led to regime change. While the US has a strong tradition of social movements based on people power, it does not have a tradition of using mass action and general strikes for the defence of democracy. However, in other countries where democratic institutions have been so weakened or eliminated that they provide no alternative to tyranny, such methods have emerged and been used effectively.

After the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino, Jr. in 1983, Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos met growing protests. Marcos called a presidential election to be held in February, 1986. Aquino’s widow Corazon Aquino was backed by all major opposition parties. Marcos’ campaign included vote-buying and the murder of more than 70 opposition workers. On election day casting of fake ballots and falsification of returns was widely witnessed.

## Marcos

Marcos claimed victory, but Mrs. Aquino met with opposition leaders and proposed a long non-violent campaign of what she dubbed “people power.” Top military officers resigned, withdrew support from Marcos, recognised Aquino as the legitimate winner, and fled to military camps in Manila. The city’s Roman Catholic Church leader appealed on nationwide radio for people to non-violently protect the officers and prevent bloodshed. By midnight 50,000 surrounded the camps; two days later it was more than a million. Marcos ordered tanks and armoured transports to attack. Nuns knelt in front of the tanks and priests climbed on them and led a million protesters – plus soldiers – in prayer. The troops turned back. Next day Marcos ordered another assault, but the commanding officer ordered his troops to return to their base. The military rebels announced that ninety percent of the Armed Forces had defected. Large crowds took over the government television station. The next day Marcos fled the country and Aquino was inaugurated president. Ever after mass non-violent direct action has been known around the world as “People Power.”

This summer a group called the Transition Integrity Project held a series of “war games” with more than 100 current and former senior government

and campaign leaders and other experts to review possible scenarios for the upcoming election and presidential transition. The result:

We assess with a high degree of likelihood that November’s elections will be marked by a chaotic legal and political landscape. We also assess that President Trump is likely to contest the result by both legal and extra-legal means, in an attempt to hold onto power. Recent events, including the President’s own unwillingness to commit to abiding by the results of the election, the Attorney General’s embrace of the President’s groundless electoral fraud claims, and the unprecedented deployment of federal agents to put down left-wing protests, underscore the extreme lengths to which President Trump may be willing to go in order to stay in office.

Their likely scenarios included: Trump’s refusal to concede; Attorney General William Barr opening investigation of vote-by-mail fraud allegations and Democratic ties to antifa; and rival selection of pro-Trump electoral college slates by Republican state legislatures. Meanwhile Trump would call for armed supporters to challenge pro-Biden demonstrators, leading to multiple killings of demonstrators; Trump says he will invoke the Insurrection Act to teach anti-American terrorists a lesson. All this before Thanksgiving. Except in the case of a big Biden win, each scenario “reached the brink of catastrophe, with massive disinformation campaigns, violence in the streets and a constitutional impasse.” In two of the scenarios there was no agreement on the winner by Inauguration Day.

An extended article in *The Atlantic* by Barton Gellman released in late September presented evidence that Trump and Republican officials are already laying the groundwork for such scenarios. The disruption of the Post Office and the plans to intimidate voters and prevent full vote counting are already under way... Preparations are already being made for red state legislators to replace elected members of the Electoral College with their own appointees. Barton spells out in detail this and many other strategies available and likely to be used to prevent a losing President Trump from being forced to leave office.

In late September, four movement activists and experts on civil resistance issued a manual called *Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy*. Reminiscent of the Indivisible manual that helped launch the resistance to Trump in 2016, it presents a detailed plan for locally-based resistance to a Trump Coup. It lays out various scenarios in which Trump refuses to leave office. It calls for forming community-based “election protection” groups. These can start immediately with meetings



by a small core group that develops a response plan and recruits others to participate in it. These groups will “hold the line” that all votes must be counted; all irregularities must be investigated impartially and remedied; and election results must be respected, regardless of who wins. Public officials can be called on in advance to state their commitment to these principles. Violation of these “Red Lines” by Trump or other officials will trigger these groups into action.

## Guide

The guide provides sample meeting agendas, templates for “Power Maps” of forces to influence, tactics “brainstorming sheets,” and other planning tools. It outlines targeted action to “undermine the pillars of support” for an illegal Trump regime. It calls for mass popular mobilisation based on disciplined non-violence because “violence will backfire badly against the side that uses it.” It discusses tactics including displaying symbols of protest; engaging in demonstrations, marches, and non-violent blockades; strikes of all kinds; deliberate work slowdowns; boycotts of all kinds; divestment; refusing to pay certain fees, bills, taxes, or other costs; or refusal to observe certain expected social norms or behaviours.

Trade unionists Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Jose La Luz have made a related proposal for organised labour to establish “pro-democracy volunteer brigades” in preparation for the election.

We need volunteers who will assist with voter registration; mobilise in large numbers should law enforcement and right-wing militias show up at polling places in order to intimidate voters; block the right-wing from challenging legitimate voters and ballots; and lay the groundwork for massive civil disobedience should the Trump administration attempt to forestall the elections and/or refuse to recognise the results.

The Trump presidency has been an era of mass resistance. A social science organisation called the Crowd Counting Consortium listed more than eighty-seven hundred protests with six to nine million participants in the first year of the Trump administration, 90 percent opposing Trump’s agenda. The Black Lives Matter protests following the 2020 murder of George Floyd constituted the largest mass uprising in the

US in half a century with an estimated 15 to 26 million participants. The base for contesting a Trump Coup is already in motion.

At the start of September, a coalition of 50 organisations called the Fight Back Table, which includes Service Employees International Union, the American Federation of Teachers, Color of Change, Indivisible, and MoveOn, established a post-election planning vehicle called the Democracy Defence Nerve Center. Taking off from the Transition Integrity Project war games, they have begun to chart out what it would take to stand up a multi-state communications arm to fight disinformation, a training program for non-violent civil disobedience, and the underpinnings of what one official described as “mass public unrest.” They began to struggle with such questions as how do you maintain sustained strikes and occupations and what do you do if armed right-wing militias show up at polling places?

A number of other groups have been mobilising to forestall or overcome a Trump coup. Protect the Results, a joint project of Indivisible and Stand Up America supported by 80 other groups, is planning mass mobilisation in more than 1,000 locations. Keep Our Republic is organising to support a “civic creed” to “Let all citizens vote. Let all votes be counted. Let the count stand.” The group People’s Strike has issued a Pledge of Resistance committing to occupy civic squares on Wednesday, November 4th, to occupy state capitols on Saturday, November 7th, and to engage in “strategic rolling strikes” thereafter. No doubt other preparations are under way as well.

Resisting the rise of tyranny will no doubt require sacrifice. After all, we are dealing with an aspiring tyrant who lionises someone who shoots down demonstrators in the street. But that sacrifice will not be primarily on behalf of one political party vs. another, of Democrats vs. Republicans. It will be a defence of democracy – defence of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Beyond that, it is the protection of that which makes our life together on earth possible... Overcoming a Trump Coup is Social Self-Defence. □

• Abridged, with thanks, from [bit.ly/jb-tc](https://bit.ly/jb-tc)

# Pandemic hits women's mental health



**Women's  
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

New studies indicate that the pandemic has caused a crisis in mental health in women and girls. CARE spoke to 6,200 women and 4,000 men in nearly 40 countries around the world. They found 27% of women had reported increased mental health challenges. This compared to 10% of men.

They identified increased unpaid work in the home and worries about food, work and health care. Women were almost twice as likely to report that accessing quality health-care services that they needed had been harder during the pandemic.

CARE identified three key areas of difference between the genders during the pandemic - mental health, food

and jobs. 55% of women who spoke to CARE said they'd experienced some sort of income loss in relation to Covid-19. This compared to 34% of men. Job losses, which we will see many more of, trigger stress and anxiety particularly where there is less of a welfare safety net: the suicide rate in the United States roughly doubled among most age groups after the 2008 economic downturn.

## Anxiety

Another report by Plan International found most girls and young women have experienced high levels of anxiety as a result of the crisis. Of the girls and young women surveyed, 88% had experienced some levels of anxiety ranging between high and moderate levels. Only 12 per cent of those surveyed reported not being anxious. Over 90% of girls and young women in Brazil, Egypt, Ghana and Viet-



nam reported being "very" or "somewhat anxious".

Overall, the main reason cited for the anxiety among girls and young women across the 14 countries was the fear that their family or friends would get sick from the virus (40 per cent), followed by themselves falling ill from the virus (33 per cent) and the household would have less money than before (26 per

cent). There is a natural increase in anxiety due to the pandemic, but when it is combined with extended periods of social isolation it can take a heavy emotional and mental toll.

This is the case for young LGBTQ+ people who are already at higher risk of mental health problems, and many of their support systems are now unavailable or inaccessible.

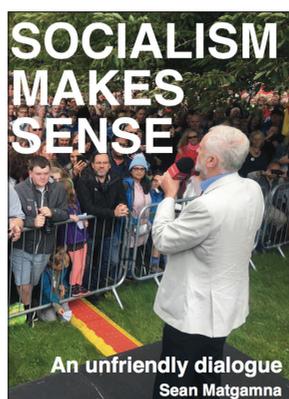
Since the onset of Covid-19, the volume of young people reaching out to the Trevor Project, the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organisation for young LGBTQI+ people, has increased significantly - at times double the normal volume.

Our response to the pandemic must foreground social solidarity to curb the virus and mental health crisis. □

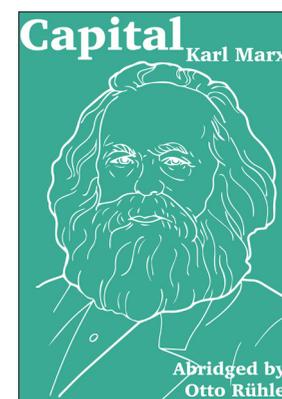
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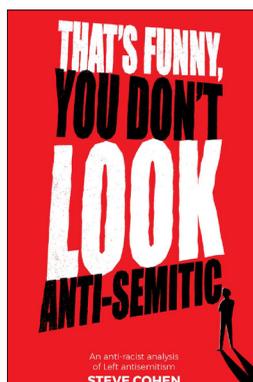
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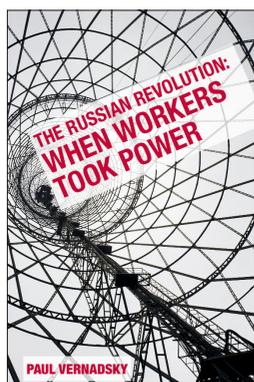
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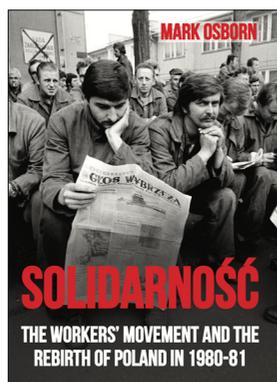
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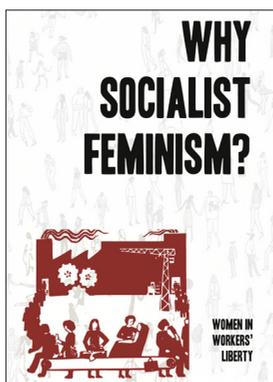
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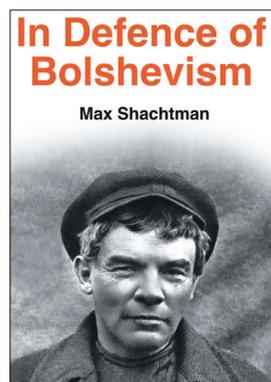
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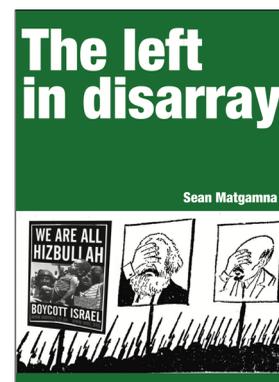
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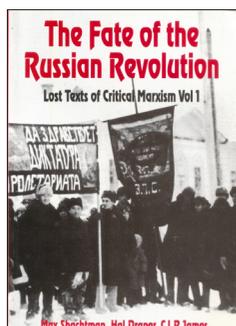
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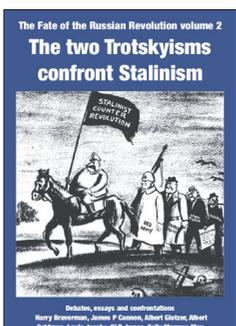
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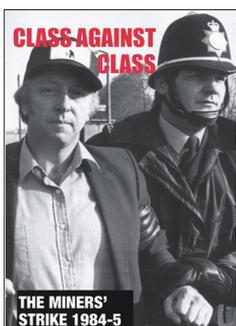
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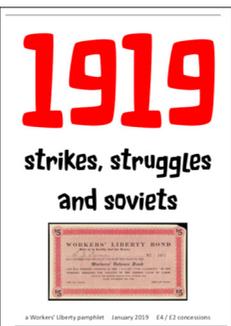
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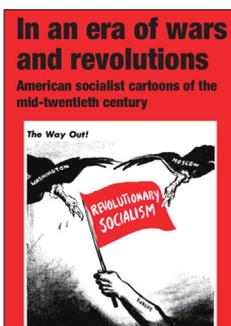
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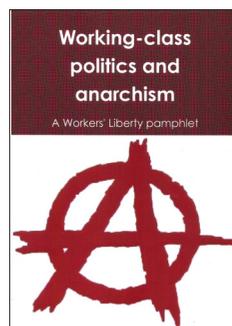
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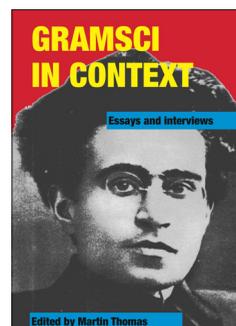
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# Use election to build socialist politics



By Daniel Randall

Much of the debate amongst Workers' Liberty members about the US election has focused on the question of whether Donald Trump, and the movement around him, can meaningfully be described as "fascist".

Whilst this question has an analytical significance (personally I think "proto-fascist" is a more accurate description), it does not, in and of itself, settle the matter of how we think the class-struggle left should orient in the election. One might think Trump is a fascist, and think it's *even more* important to focus on building a working-class alternative to the Democrats and Republicans, the two parties of capital. Conversely, one might think Trump isn't a fascist but still think advocating a vote for Biden is the only option for the left in the circumstances. So some broader analysis is required beyond the question of whether Trump is a fascist.

What is under debate here is not whether Trump, and Trumpism, are egregiously reactionary. Nor is the question of whether Biden and the Democrats represent a "lesser evil" under debate. Undoubtedly they do, and a significantly "lesser" one than that. But we have a responsibility to do more than express a preference

between two variants of ruling-class politics. We have a responsibility to advocate an independent politics for our own class.

There is a respect-worthy argument to be made, from a class-struggle socialist point of view, for supporting a Biden vote. That argument, roughly, runs as follows: the imperative to remove Trump from the presidency overrides all other immediate concerns. We acknowledge a Biden vote as the immediately available means of removing Trump from office, but see this as something to be lamented rather than celebrated. Therefore we will making propaganda about the nature of the Democrats as a party of capital, the need for an independent workers' party, and criticisms of Biden and his programme the leading edge of our intervention, as these are essential elements of our political analysis that no-one else is going to make.

That is not, on the whole, the position comrades inside Workers' Liberty arguing for a Biden vote have advanced. Instead, a Biden vote is presented as the only possibly way of "relating to the vast majority of class conscious workers" (Jim Denham, "Not just hope, action", *Solidarity* 566, 7 October), or, worse, located in an argument for a thorough-going orientation to the Democrats (Thomas Carolan, "A socialist vote for Biden", *Solidarity* 566, 7 October).

If "the vast majority of class conscious workers" are already convinced to vote Biden as the only means to remove

Trump, they don't need us to affirm that for them. You might not have an alternative to advocate, you might not want to argue that they *shouldn't* vote Biden, but even if you think they're right to vote Biden to stop Trump, the main job of the revolutionary left is to try to *develop* their consciousness, not make a virtue of its existing limitations.

We might be sympathetic to the sentiments of voters who see the election as a "referendum on Trumpism", but part of our job is to explain what is limited in that view. The election is not any such thing; neither Trump nor Trumpism will be vanquished as social forces on 4 November, and the social conditions that generated them will remain very much intact. Socialists have a responsibility to use the election to build up organisation around the socialist politics we believe necessary to change that.

## Premise

Jim Denham acknowledges as much when he says "our job is to educate advanced workers and other progressive forces in the need for [an independent workers' party]", but doesn't try to resolve the obvious contradiction posed by attempting to do this job at the same time as going along with its opposite premise - that supporting a bourgeois lesser-evil is the best our class can hope for.

Accommodating to lesser-evilism in US politics is a serious political retreat. I understand and respect the assessment of comrades who have concluded

that it is a retreat made inevitable and necessary by profoundly adverse circumstances. I have less respect for the arguments of those comrades dressing up that retreat as if it's an heroic act of anti-fascist valour. The Green Party campaign of Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker will not, in and of itself, lay the foundations of a future independent workers' party. It is already a limited instrument.

But an independent campaign on the basis of explicitly socialist politics ought to give the left a concrete means of expressing its platform directly. If our message is that class-struggle socialist politics and independent working-class organisation are necessary to defeat not only Trump but his movement, it provides a means of organising around that message in the election itself, rather than having to say, "those things are for the future - for now, vote for the lesser evil."

Very possibly the left in the US will not be able to realise the potential for strengthening organisation around socialist politics that the Hawkins/Walker campaign represents; that should not stop us from expressing those potentials as we see them. And even if my judgement is wrong about that, and those potentials are even more limited than they appear, that does not by itself justify a "vote Biden" position.

The Hawkins/Walker campaign being marginal does not somehow transmute the Democrats, or cancel out traditional objections to lesser-evilism. □

## Why American unions back Biden



By Eric Lee

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden is "lamentable", "utterly useless", a "creep" and a "shit". Those are not the words of Donald Trump, but they are all used in an article in this newspaper last week.

The author of that article, it seems, does not like Joe Biden. He prefers that American workers throw their support behind the little-known candidate of the Green Party, Howie Hawkins.

American trade unionists have a rather different view of the former Vice President.

They are throwing everything they have into ensuring a massive voter turnout and a convincing win for Biden - especially among working-class

voters in battleground states like Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin.

If you were to ask union leaders and activists why they were backing Biden, they would read off a long list of campaign commitments Biden has made, many of which echo the ideas of Senator Bernie Sanders.

One of those commitments that socialists should find particularly interesting is Biden's promise to seriously reform America's labour laws.

A half century ago, American unions were a force to be reckoned with. But in recent decades, union membership has plummeted. The reason for that is primarily the employers' war against workers, using tactics both legal and illegal to bust unions and to deny workers their basic human right to join and form a trade union.

Under the rule of the Republican party, it has gotten much worse, with public sector un-

ions being the target of relentless attacks.

Here's what the Biden campaign says: their candidate "strongly supports the Protecting the Right to Organize Act's (PRO Act) provisions instituting financial penalties on companies that interfere with workers' organizing efforts, including firing or otherwise retaliating against workers. Biden will go beyond the PRO Act by enacting legislation to impose even stiffer penalties on corporations and to hold company executives personally liable when they interfere with organizing efforts, including criminally liable when their interference is intentional."

The Democratic Party platform could not be clearer about this: "Democrats will prioritize passing the PRO Act and restoring workers' rights, including the right to launch secondary boycotts. We will repeal so-called 'right to work'

laws that undermine worker power." It goes on like that for several paragraphs.

The PRO Act was introduced in Congress in May 2019 and went nowhere, because Republicans control the Senate and the White House. Among its sponsors are Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The passage of this bill will do much to revitalise the American labour movement, by recruiting millions of new members in a way that hasn't happened since the 1930s. At that time, with the Democrats controlling Congress and the White House, the National Labor Relations Act was passed and union membership exploded. The same thing might happen again if the PRO Act passes.

This is no small thing, especially if you want to see a much stronger and more influential labour movement in America.

It really does matter to unions, and it is one of many reasons Biden is a better choice for workers.

Cynics will say that Biden is just saying that to win votes. But socialists are not cynics. We look at the reality, and in the real world - not the world in which Joe Biden is a "creep" (which is Donald Trump's world) - Biden needs the support of the unions. He and the Democrats will benefit from a much stronger trade union movement, and if he wins the PRO Act will become law.

Trade unionists in America understand this, which is why - with the exception of a handful of police unions that are supporting Trump - their support for Biden is unanimous.

And - it's important to point out - they are not wrong. □

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

## 699 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.

Capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, blighting of lives by overwork; imperialism, environmental destruction 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! □

• [workersliberty.org/join-awl](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)

# Distance in the training centre



## Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

We've begun the new college term in strange circumstances. The training centre needs to provide some face-to-face teaching – working remotely and teacher absence hasn't suited many of the apprentices, and the first years need to do six months of practical workshops. My group is split in two; half of us watch classes remotely, and the other half goes into the training centre, the next week we swap.

The training centre is almost deserted. Staff are secluded in their offices, and everyone indoors is masked. We follow a strict one-way system, and the dining hall is spread with small round tables two metres apart for us to sit, alone, to eat our lunch. The canteen and vending machines are closed, and during the day we're not permitted to leave site. All food and drink must be bought with us – there's a rumour a student was sent home for filling her bottle at a water fountain "unsafely". Students can use the smoking area, and sit alone in their cars, but not drive them anywhere during college hours. A maximum of two people is permitted to a toilet block or a changing room, and there are signs on every door with red hands "Stop! Have you checked the coast is clear?"

Our group takes issue with the regulations immediately, but a more pressing problem is our teaching. We've not been given final marks for our work in the previous term when we were working from home, including from a PhD student seized to teach mechanics with no training or notice. To compensate for this, the college are offering evening



mathematics tutoring with a senior staff member – however my classmates can't assess whether they need extra help if they don't know how they did the first time round, and resent having to give up their evenings.

The Fault-Finding teacher is a tall, white-haired, intimidating man with a finger missing from an accident with a machining tool. His teaching style is very old-school talk-from-the-front, quizzing students at random – he talks too much and too slowly, but no-one interrupts. It takes a few weeks, but when he finally begins talking about machines I understand why this style is effective – he's knowledgeable and logical, he asks direct questions and draws out the knowledge some students find hard to write down. He frightens us into taking safety more seriously. One of his test questions is: Q: What is one hazard of compressed air? Correct Answer: Compressed air can enter open wounds in the skin, causing air pockets in the bloodstream. (*Christ!*)

Our PLC [Programmable Logic Controller] teacher has been with us since the beginning, and he videos-in from home. During lock-down our video chats were ten minutes long with time

for questions, then we worked through the lesson content in our own time. Now we have 75-minute classes on screens, with all our activity recorded – we find it tiring, boring, and unproductive. The topic itself is very useful – we all work with PLCs (industrial computers) and need to know how programming works. So why is video learning so unsatisfactory? Is it because of the slight time delay, the inability to read body-language, or because it doesn't feel real?

Even with the class divided, there are fewer students than there should be. Since the summer three students have been made redundant and two more are worried about it – it's a frequent topic of conversation. One apprentice is being nudged into a job role he doesn't want, another is skipping college to do deliveries for a client on the other side of the country. T, who was brilliant at maths and works for a packaging manufacturer, has gone on maternity leave. Relatively speaking the Veolia apprentices consider ourselves on pretty stable ground. □

• Emma Rickman is an apprentice engineer at a Combined Heat and Power Plant.

## The Watergate story



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Another US film seems appropriate this week. *All the President's Men* (1976, Alan Pakula) begins with the 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Committee HQ in the Watergate complex in Washington D.C. *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) and Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) investigate and, on the advice of the furtive "Deep Throat", "follow the money". They steadily unearth a labyrinth of financial corruption and illegal activities pointing to the White House and Republican President Richard Nixon. Despite winning the election of November 1972, Nixon



comes under increasing pressure. The Watergate scandal will not go away. Impeachment proceedings begin. Nixon resigns on 9 August 1974. One of the first actions of Gerald Ford, his successor, is to pardon him. □

## Beating our target

With donations from Bruce, Lev, and a reader in Islington, and some other bits and pieces, our total now stands at £9,444. With a month left and just over £500 to go for our goal of £10,000 by 21-22 November, we can surely beat that target. Street campaigning activity has been curtailed in the second surge, with the People's Assembly, for example, cancelling its London protest planned for 17 October. However, an anti-Trump protest is set for 24 October, and street stalls and paper sales are continuing: we'll be using all the relevant precautions to do as much on the streets as is possible given official restrictions. [workersliberty.org/donate](http://workersliberty.org/donate). □

## Strike ballot in DWP



**John Moloney,**  
PCS AGS

Around 800 workers in Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) job centres in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Merseyside, Sunderland, and Washington will be balloted for action over health and safety concerns.

We're also empowering members to take immediate action to refuse unsafe work using Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act, issuing members with pro forma letters they can use with their bosses. The ballot will likely begin on or around Tuesday 27 October, which will set up the possibility of industrial action in early November.

Union pressure and the threat of a national ballot already secured significant concessions from management over the issue of job centre opening hours and seeing claimants face to face. One of those concessions was that a lot of the decision making about whether to see a claimant in person was devolved down to job coaches themselves - i.e., the individual worker.

The areas where workers have pushed for the ballot are the ones where local management are putting workers under particular pressure to increase the number of claimants they're seeing face to face. In the context of rising infection rates, that's simply not safe.

Our driving instructor members are also continuing to discuss the possibility of balloting. Some workers are still hopeful that the government will act to protect them; we need to empower workers to take action to protect themselves. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the PCS civil service workers' union, writing here in a personal capacity.

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# Win on cleaners' sick pay

From Tubeworker

On 15 October, John Leach, London Transport Regional Organiser for the RMT union, reported to union reps that cleaning contractor ABM had agreed to reinstate its previous agreement, ensuring cleaners would be paid in full for periods of sickness and self-isolation.

In September ABM withdrew an agreement to pay cleaners at their full shift rate for periods of Covid-related sickness and self-isolation. They would get only Statutory Sick Pay, £95.85 per week.

RMT union reps pressed both ABM and the bosses of Transport for London (TfL) and London Underground (LU) to reinstate the agreement. Union branches passed motions calling for industrial and political action to secure the reinstatement of the agreement. A social media campaign was mounted,

with campaigns like [Safe and Equal](#) providing support. A branch of Tooting Labour Party, London Mayor Sadiq Khan's CLP, passed a resolution calling on Khan to act.

Forcing this 180° turn from the bosses is a significant win, and one that would not have been achieved without concerted pressure.

But the fight doesn't end here. We still need to police the agreement, to make sure it's implemented consistently. We need to extend to, ensure it covers all sickness, not just Covid-related absence and isolation. And we need to make it permanent, to guarantee that ABM aren't able to simply withdraw it again a few months down the line.

An emergency motion to RMT's AGM from the Bakerloo branch calls on the union to conduct a national audit of all outsourced contracts where it organises, and demand full sickness and isolation pay wherever this is not being



guaranteed. That demand needs to be levelled at the main employer as well as the outsourced contractor.

The best way to permanently secure what we need would be to bring cleaning, and other outsourced work like catering, security, and protection work on the track, in-house, and employ the workers on LU terms and conditions. □

## Couriers hit Wagamama again

By Michael Elms

Deliveroo workers in the IWGB union in Sheffield struck on 14-15 October against Wagamama over pay and terminations.

From 4pm to 10pm on those two days, deliveries were boycotted at Wagamama, which is a major and exclusive client of the Deliveroo food delivery company. Couriers are fighting against a sustained drop in fees and a threatened mass-hiring drive by Deliveroo; and demanding basic due process be applied to the way that the app handles complaints and terminations. Presently drivers can find themselves dismissed arbitrarily from the app following a single anonymous complaint, with no right of hearing, representation, or appeal.

One driver, Khalid Kalil, has been a prominent feature in the anti-terminations campaign following his sacking on the strength of inaccurate and anonymous complaints. Strikingly, Khalid begged the platform to show him de-



tails of or evidence for his supposed wrongdoing. Deliveroo maintained a haughty silence... Until politicians and journalists intervened in his case at the IWGB union's request. Once "respectable" figures took up the case, Deliveroo was much more forthcoming. The message is clear: to the multi-billion dollar app, the migrant workers who keep its business afloat do not matter.

The move to a two-day strike marked a significant escalation and a test of strength by the union. It passed this test: this strike saw the strongest and most sustained courier-only picketing yet. Non-courier volunteers took a back seat as shifts of couriers ran effective pickets two nights running.

The union campaign against Deliveroo's low pay and bad policies will continue. It is also expanding, as drivers in nearby Penistone and Barnsley are beginning to stir into action. Couriers in Sheffield have also developed a list of badly-behaved local restaurants, from whom they will be seeking redress in the coming days.

One major issue is the reports cou-

riers are hearing of outbreaks in multiple fast-food restaurants in Sheffield. Restaurant managers have been failing to inform staff of when someone from their shift tests positive. Similarly, couriers are being kept in the dark. This is unsafe. Workers must be informed and be able to control the curbs on transmission in the workplaces. □

## Unions must stay active!

In light of the developing surge in coronavirus cases, a Covid-19 subcommittee of the IWGB Union's Executive Committee has issued a ruling stating that all face-to-face union activities - picketing, meetings, recruitment, leafleting - must be suspended, even if they were previously being carried out in a covid-distanced manner. This move is similar to a decision taken by the USDAW shop-workers' union earlier in the year. In both cases, we think it is mistaken. Unions are an essential service. Like all other essential services, they must find ways of working with the increased risk (as all delivery workers do every day).

Unions are right to want to reduce risk to members. But risk reduction also means giving members a means of pushing back against employers and asserting their equal right to safety. Suspending union operations will make workplaces more dangerous. □

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# Build student rent strikes!

By AWL students

At [Manchester Uni](#) a total of 171 students have pledged to withhold £307,000 in rent. At [Bristol](#) 850 students have pledged to strike. Students at many other places are discussing taking such action after being signed up to move into halls of residence and pay rent and then finding almost no teaching other than online.

There are many issues besides lack of support over Covid. At Manchester student accommodation is unsafe, in poor repair, and pest-infected.

At Homerton College, Cambridge, students threatened a rent strike and called it off when their college management agreed to investment in mental health services, increased social and study space, and (following Glasgow University) rent rebates if large numbers of students are forced to self-isolate.

Abbie, a first-year learning disability nursing and social work student and Labour Society Member at Sheffield Hallam University, spoke to *Solidarity*. On Friday 16 October she helped organise a staff-student protest outside uni halls of residence as part of a national day of action called by the UCU Solidarity Movement.

Many students are quite frustrated about the situation; people didn't expect to be accessing an online course. Normally, online courses, like the ones offered by the Open University, are properly resourced. But teaching staff have not had the time and support to switch to remote learning, and have had to spend extra (unpaid) time to adapt materials.

On Covid, I've heard reports about students being informed several days late about the need to self-isolate, being told they have to stay indoors, yet at the same time, they have struggled to get essentials and had to rely on mates or family for food drops.

Uni management should be more open with students about what is going to happen. I would like to see regular updates, rather than sporadic emails that just appear to be responding to crises as they crop up.

At Hallam we don't yet know if and when there is going to be a move to online teaching only. I understand the need for face-to-face for courses like my own. I work as a healthcare assistant, so I am trained to do clinical observations, but that's not the same for people that have come from school or college. Some face-to-face needs to be maintained so that people going into placement are confident and competent in the skills.

Given the increase in cases, the insistence on



face-to-face teaching on courses that don't have a practical element, e.g. business studies isn't really justified. [Both the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam are in the top ten for numbers of reported cases]

I think it's important for students to feel that they have a voice in this mess. We plan to hold regular protests and to run social media campaigns that encourage students to come forward with their stories. Just the fact that there are students visibly doing something can be a boost and will hopefully encourage others to get involved.

We think students should be organised to run rent strike campaigns.

We have regular meetings that are open to all students that want to get active.

Our demands are: • Better support for student and staff well-being • Regular updates from universities • End tuition fees for this year • Regular testing for staff and students and prompt access to results • No staff redundancies • Rent pause. □

• Twitter [SheffStandUp](#) • Facebook [Sheffield Universities Covid-19 Watch](#) • Email the group at [SheffieldStudentsStandUp@gmail.com](mailto:SheffieldStudentsStandUp@gmail.com)

## Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to our pamphlets:

- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers' Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Remain and Rebel
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- Left Antisemitism
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine □

More: [workersliberty.org/pamphlets](http://workersliberty.org/pamphlets)

# Make NHS open to all!

By Mohan Sen

Research from the group Doctors of the World RUK illustrates how anti-migrant policies implanted in the NHS over years were causing serious suffering, even before the pandemic hit.

Their report found migrants waiting much longer to access the health service than non-migrants, with an average wait of 37 weeks. For those requiring "urgent" or "immediately necessary" treatment, the average was 36 weeks. Delays of years were not uncommon, with one respondent with a serious heart complaint waiting four years.

The report highlights extensive wrangling over whether people can access treatment and whether and how much they have to pay, even when they should be eligible for free treatment under the government's rules.

The report found that NHS charges were being applied to many destitute individuals with no prospect of paying, with significant resources nonetheless spent on pursuing them. In one case study, a worker who fled Gambia after being persecuted for campaigning against Female Genital Mutilation was denied decent care, charged for minimal services, and hounded for payment until his death.

In many cases patients were wrongly told they were ineligible for free care, only for the decision reversed after long delays and much harm. The report outlines a case in which cancer treatment was repeatedly denied, and only finally started once the cancer had spread and it was too late.

Often people will eventually be treated with great difficulty and expense when the problem could have been resolved more easily, more humanely, and less expensively earlier on.

What the Tories absurdly call "health tourism" accounts for a tiny proportion of the NHS budget - 0.3% according to the government, most of which is actually down to British migrants overseas who return here to use the NHS. The government is not restricting access to services to tackle NHS underfunding, but to justify underfunding while pursuing its wider bigoted agenda.

In 1989 the Thatcher government excluded a number of migrant groups from access to free NHS care on the basis of not being "ordinarily resident". In 2015 the Cameron government introduced a surcharge of £200 for many migrants to access NHS services, subsequently increased to £400. It also set charges for those who have not paid the surcharge at 150% of the cost of ser-



vices.

In 2017 the May government expanded the range of services subject to charges, mandated NHS bodies to charge migrants upfront wherever possible, and insisted they act as an immigration agency by recording people's status.

The Doctors of the World report recommends changing the definition of "ordinarily resident" to include everyone living in the UK, regardless of immigration status; a payment exemption for those with on low or no incomes; and a transparent system for challenging decisions, with cases resolved in two weeks.

The left and labour movement should demand that all forms of charging are scrapped, as part of restoring the NHS as a genuinely free and comprehensive service, accessible to all. □

- Read the report at [bit.ly/nhsmigrantreport](http://bit.ly/nhsmigrantreport)
- More from Keep Our NHS Public on the Tories and migrant access to the health service [bit.ly/konpigrants](http://bit.ly/konpigrants)



# Solidarity

For a workers' government

## BREXIT: BREAK LABOUR'S SILENCE

By Sacha Ismail

As the threats posed by the Tories' Brexit policy become more serious and more imminent, the labour movement is not speaking up but saying even less.

In the first half of the year, supporters of Keir Starmer argued his refusal to call for a delay to Brexit, despite the chaos caused by Covid-19, was savvy tactics. "Keir" would speak out at an appropriate time. Now, with the end of the Brexit transition ten weeks away, and a No Deal Brexit a strong and growing possibility, Labour is pretty much silent.

If you dig a bit you can find this or that low-profile statement. All of it is pro-Brexit. On 6 October Rachel Reeves, who is responsible for Labour's Brexit policy, gave a speech in which her main argument was that Britain would never rejoin the EU. She also opposed rejoining the single market and customs union. She did make a vague nod towards criticism of the Tories, adding: "Just any old [trade] deal [with the EU] is not the deal that a Labour government would be striving for

now."

Yet on 18 October Keir Starmer appeared on TV precisely to support "any old deal": "The prime minister said he had an oven-ready deal. He should get on and deliver that."

The Labour leadership seems to have calculated that a low-key and blurry pro-Brexit position is the best way to benefit electorally from future Tory disarray. With a wide range of motivations, no doubt, pretty much the whole trade union movement has effectively rallied behind that stance; as has most of the Labour left.

The electoral calculation may prove disastrously wrong. In any case, this is a betrayal of labour movement values and the interests of the working class.

Labour is saying nothing about the growing threat of a madcap No Deal Brexit, which the great majority of the labour movement and indeed of the population dislikes.

It is saying nothing about the wider Tory agenda of which any realistically available form of Brexit will be part: attacking workers' and human rights, slashing environmental protection and consumer

standards, seeking a socially destructive trade deal with the USA...

In so far as it is saying anything, the party leadership is supporting a potential Tory Brexit deal which will still mean heavy economic dislocation right in the midst of the fallout from Covid-19, and which will still advance the Tories' brutal anti-social agenda.

The labour movement should oppose and campaign against every aspect of the Tories' plans. Even at this point, we should demand a lengthy delay to Brexit, to ward off immediate disasters and to allow what the government wants to be subjected to proper democratic scrutiny.

We should open up an urgent discussion in Labour Parties and trade unions, hold our "leaders" to account, and push them to oppose the Tories. □

- For a statement and model motion, see Labour for a Socialist Europe [website](#)
- Another Europe is Possible is running a "Fight for the Future" campaign to oppose the Tories' Brexit plans, [another-europe.org/fight-for-the-future](https://another-europe.org/fight-for-the-future)