

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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

# AGAINST POVERTY, AGAINST THE VIRUS: SOCIAL SUPPORT

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# Against the virus, against poverty



At last, Labour has begun to speak out against the Tories on the pandemic, though only to demand free school meals in school holidays and to back the scientists' idea of a new brief "circuit-breaker" lockdown.

On 21 October the Labour left began, mildly also, to speak out against the leadership on the issue. An [appeal](#) coordinated by the big trade union Unite demanded:

- an extension of the job retention scheme with 80% wage support
- action to support incomes
- helping people to self-isolate by increasing the level for statutory sick pay and enabling all to claim it, and
- equipping our public services with the resources they need.

It was signed by a string of MPs, led by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, almost all the general secretaries of big trade unions except Dave Prentis of Unison, and five Labour mayors of big cities.

The measures proposed, or at least hinted at, are not just about softening the economic impact on the worse-off of the virus and of lockdowns. They are also core public-health measures to reduce the toll. And they are public-health measures which, unlike lockdown, can be continued as long as infection rates demand.

None of the government's piecemeal measures in England since it started the local semi-lockdown in Leicester (4 July) and the 10pm curfew on pubs (25 September) has been effective. Wales, Ireland, and Northern Ireland have moved into new general lockdowns.

Ireland's lockdown starting on 21 October looks like turning the curve there, though it's really too early to say. Spain's infection curve levelled with only scrappy restrictions for four weeks



up to 18 October, but has now turned up again, prompting new restrictions there. Israel's new and fairly full lockdown between 18 September and 18 October brought down infection rates sharply.

So the case for a new lockdown in England of some form (mooted by scientists since mid-September) gets stronger, and, if it's to be done, the sooner the better. It will probably be more than two weeks, and it will *not* be an answer to the pandemic.

At best it can be a gambit to buy time to establish more sustainable measures. No scientist suggests a full lockdown through to next spring or summer (when, with luck, seasonal factors or a vaccine may give some relief). It would be sure to fray (Buenos Aires has had a continuing lockdown since March, and infections are still rising there). The social and even medical impact, especially on the worst-off, might well come to exceed the impact of the virus (which also hits the worst-off hardest).

Reason and evidence indicate that for

sustainable covid-distancing we need *social solidarity* and *social provision*, and police measures like lockdown can at best only be ancillary.

## Social measures

If the labour movement steps up to force the government into measures like:

- full isolation pay for all (something more than a minor increase in statutory sick pay, because even doubling SSP of £95.85 a week will still leave many workers unable to self-isolate and still pay their rent and feed their families)
- publicly-provided alternative housing for those quarantining, and for those in overcrowding
- allowing university students to escape from crowded halls of residence which have become prime infection hubs and get rent reimbursed
- bringing elderly care into the public sector, with staff on union-agreed public-sector pay and conditions
- public-health test-and-trace, in place of the Tories' hugely expensive

Serco mess

- increased funding for schools, to allow for improved ventilation and expanded space and staffing
- workers' control of workplace safety
- expanding the NHS, giving NHS workers the 15% pay rise they demand, taking NHS logistics in-house and requisitioning supply industries and private hospital
- if we do that, then people will be able to see a set of rules which allow us all to protect each other, and are liveable for the worse-off as well as for those in secure jobs who work from big, comfortable, well-equipped homes with good access to gardens and open space.

The government has fouled up test-and-trace, wasted the June-August virus lull with foolish gimmicks like subsidising restaurant meals and back-

to-offices drives, paid huge sums to private contractors, and floundered. No wonder many people no longer respect rules which change from week to week. The way out is not for us to turn on each other, one lot blaming the other for putting us at risk, the other blaming the more cautious for trying to impose arbitrary and unliveable rules. It is for us to unite to impose policies towards social solidarity.

One sign of hope is that even in Spain and France Covid-19 death rates are still only about a fifth of what they were in April, and rising much less fast than in March. According to estimates by *The Economist*, the actual infection rates are much lower than then too, appearing otherwise because of higher testing.

The government is on the back foot. The labour movement has started to stir. Unite and agitate, and we can yet force the government into policies which will save lives and health. □

# Brexit: make Labour speak out!

By Colin Foster

As we go to press on 27 October, talks between the UK and EU for a deal for Brexit are continuing in London and are due to move to Brussels on Thursday 29 October.

Brexit is due to happen on 31 December.

The Tories bluster about being happy to settle for "no deal", and may yet lurch us into that, but will probably prefer to get some sort of deal, at the last minute, which can be rushed through with the minimum of scrutiny and the maximum of us all being distracted by other concerns.

Labour and the trade unions are still not speaking out, or even demanding a pause on Brexit until virus-chaos has abated. But the entire labour movement, except the *Morning Star*, regards "no deal" as certain to bring economic and social damage especially for the worse-off.

Everyone knows that if the Tories can get a deal, it will certainly be worse than Theresa May's formulas which Labour rightly rejected.

Everyone knows that, deal or no deal, the Tories's next step will be to try to get a trade deal with the USA, pushing Britain further towards US-type social

and economic rules.

That Boris Johnson won the 2019 general election imposes no obligation on the labour movement to support whatever he may come up with as an implementation of the vague and demagogic "mandate" he sought then.

Make Labour speak out! □



# Lara McNeill pledges to restore socialism and dignity to Young Labour

By Sacha Marten

Lara McNeill has written a pitch for Young Labour's NEC [National Executive Committee] Rep seat in [Tribune](#).

I rate her chances of getting the seat highly, given that she is the incumbent and the only left candidate on the ballot paper, and, after all, Momentum's National Coordinating Group endorsed her without a vote!

One passage reads "When young people are protesting for social justice, standing up to exploitative bosses, or striking against their landlords, I want them to know that Young Labour will be on their side".

That would certainly be a welcome step. But a question arises. What steps has McNeill taken to build Young Labour on those lines? She talks of some welcome constitutional and financial changes that she has pushed. But the basics that Young Labour should get funding and have some autonomy shouldn't have been the only achievements of two years on the NEC.

In fact, the whole article begs the question, why has she not done more in her time? And in an environment where, most of the time, the Left had a significant majority on the NEC and were in control of most of Young Labour. If there are political or bureaucratic obstacles to making YL the force it needs to be, McNeill should name them and prepare us, since any fight to build up is surely harder now.

The 2018 London Young Labour conference, organised under a more right-wing administration, had 400 people, and debated many motions, bad and good. The [2019 conference](#) had only about 70 people. Only one motion got debated, and that with only one speech for and one against. The fault lay with McNeill's left, not with any outside imposition.

McNeill cites youth involvement in Black Lives Matter, climate strikes and more, by young activists in many towns and cities. Those young people have done that without any reference to, or



support from, Lara McNeill. Young Labour members who got involved did so, as with most of their activism, using their own resources and without assistance.

McNeill also mentions her efforts to reintegrate trade unionism into Young Labour. How has she done that? Union membership is virtually unknown to many young people, although in many ways this is one of the most politically aware and informed generations in his-

tory. With the resources already at the disposal of Young Labour, the contact details of tens of thousands of young workers, there could've been serious efforts to expand trade unions into fast food and hospitality and other industries.

But Young Labour has done nothing, for example, to spread the organising in Deliveroo, which in some areas employs many young workers. □



## Let music live!

By Rhodri Evans

On 6 October the Musicians' Union organised a 400-strong protest in Parliament Square about musicians' jobs.

The union is calling for the government to expand the self-employed "furlough" scheme so that more musicians can qualify. At present 38% of musicians are ineligible.

It wants the Arts Council to be able to distribute money to help individual musicians in England, as is being done in Wales and Scotland.

And it wants the government to fund local government to make municipal venues available for live performances with suitable covid-dis-

tancing.

Another measure that could make a difference would be to re-expand music teaching in schools, [cut](#) in recent years.

As it stands, musicians, and related trades like sound engineers, are among the groups hardest-hit by the pandemic and lockdowns.

70% of musicians have less than 25% of their usual work, and 36% have none at all.

On a [recent estimate](#), 50% of live music employees (about 26,000) are likely to lose their jobs by the end of 2020. And more than 140,000 full-time equivalent jobs for freelancers, crew, and other support staff have ceased to exist since March. □

## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom. **Until 16 November:**

**Saturday 31 October, 9-10.30am:** The principles of socialist internationalism

**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 2 November, 6-7pm:** AWL Students: What is socialism?

**Sunday 8 November, 12-2pm:** Socialist Feminist reading group: Gender Trouble by Judith Butler

**Monday 9 November, 6-7pm:** AWL students – The fight for trans rights

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

**Monday 16 November, 6-7pm:** AWL students – The alt-right and how to fight it

### 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: 31 Oct, class and race in classic horror movies

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

### All online

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



# Nick Wright and the “powerful intellect”



By Jim Denham

Nick Wright is a member of the Communist Party of Britain and frequent contributor to the *Morning Star* – often writing on Labour Party matters.

Two themes recur in Wright’s articles: that Labour’s changed position on Brexit (no longer promising “to honour” the referendum outcome) was the “fatal surrender” that cost it the 2019 election and that allegations of anti-semitism within Labour under Corbyn were “manifestly untrue and malicious” – the work of “not only British and Israeli state actors but an unscrupulous assembly of reactionary forces of all kinds”.

Those particular quotes turn up in a piece by Wright in the *Morning Star* of 22 Oct, purporting to be a review of Owen Jones’s book about the Corbyn years, *This Land*.

I might even agree with some of Wright’s criticisms of Owen Jones (to point out his “vacillations on Brexit” is certainly fair), but Wright’s complaint that the book “substitute[s] office gossip for analysis” and downplays “the serial disloyalty of MPs (and) wildly unbalanced media coverage” is not true and misses the main objective of Jones’ book.

As Jones has put it in numerous interviews, the main aim of his book was to emphasise that Corbyn’s defeat was not inevitable. As he told the *New Statesman*: “If you just say it’s internal subversion or external attack, what’s the point? Give up on politics, then, it’s doomed. That’s a fatalistic conclusion, so I wanted to be clear on what went



Russian tank in Czechoslovakia 1968

wrong.”

And Jones is far from alone in believing that a large part of the blame lay with the people Corbyn appointed to his office, particularly after the 2017 election when “hubris set in, there wasn’t a coherent strategy (and) the mistakes on antisemitism and Salisbury [the 2018 poisonings] cut through” (Jones, interviewed in the *New Statesman*, 11 Sep).

Wright seems stung by Jones’ description of a “dysfunctional” leaders’ office and by criticisms of director of communications and strategy Seumas Milne in particular: “Political journalists are too prone to think they can do politics better than front-line participants and, judging by his discussion of Seumas Milne’s role, Jones must imagine

he could do a better job than this much-maligned comrade in arms to Corbyn’s anti-war campaigning... Milne is a formidable figure whose relentless political praxis is underpinned... with great charm and a powerful intellect”.

Leaving aside the fact that Milne himself came to his (very well paid) position in Corbyn’s office directly from his job as... a political journalist, Wright misses out another important fact about this “formidable” figure and “powerful intellect”: Milne, together with two other members of Corbyn’s office – Steve Howell (Milne’s deputy from February 2017) and Andrew Murray (seconded from Unite as an “adviser” in 2017) – was a leading member of Straight Left, an ultra-Stalinist faction that existed inside both the British Communist Party

and the Labour Party in the 1970s through to the 1990’s As well as supporting (retrospectively) the invasion of Czechoslovakia, rejecting criticism of the USSR and defending the reputation of Joseph Stalin, Straight Left also had a reputation for being less than enthusiastic about feminism, environmentalism and gay rights (it has been suggested that the name Straight Left may have been indicative of a certain attitude towards gay rights).

Oh, and there’s one other thing that Nick Wright fails to inform his readers; as well as Seumas Milne, Andrew Murray and Steve Howell, one other former member of Straight Left remains active in politics and in touch with his old friends and comrades: Nick Wright. □

## Left slate and drawbacks

The ballot for constituency rep, youth rep, disabled rep, and local government rep places on Labour’s National Executive opened on 19 October and closes on 12 November. Many members will have voted already.

We’ve supported the official left slate, because even a poor left slate getting weight on the Executive will widen democratic openings compared to having a strongly leadership-compliant Executive.

But we didn’t like the way the official “left slate” was put together – worsened by short deadlines imposed by the Labour leadership – or the slate itself. Instead of deciding first on a basic left platform, and then choosing candidates, the slate-making process

chose candidates and then pleaded with them for a statement (getting only a bland minimum).

It is with good cause that complaints are now becoming vocal about two candidates on the slate, Laura Pidcock and Ann Henderson, for failing to support trans rights.

Yasmine Dar, another candidate on the slate, has a discreditable record of support for the Iranian regime. Laura Pidcock is close to the *Morning Star*. As Sacha Marten explains on page 3, Lara McNeill, the left-slate candidate for youth rep, has a poor record as incumbent in that position.

The left should debate and decide a basic platform, and do slate-making on that basis. □



## Democracy in the labour movement

Local Labour Party ward and constituency Annual General Meetings are being held (via Zoom) in many areas in November.

CLPs [Constituency Labour Parties] mostly have a choice between doing those meetings in November, or doing them before end-July 2020 but after the May 2021 local elections (which in fact will be a combination of those polls due in May 2020 but postponed, and those due in May 2021 anyway). It may also be possible to fit in AGMs in February or March.

Many CLPs have been slow restarting since Labour’s National Executive licensed local decision-making meetings again, post-lockdown, on 15 July. In some, local officer teams have lost people through the pressures of lock-

down and demoralisation after the December 2019 general election.

To get Labour Parties operating again, and to start again calling the Labour leadership to account and putting pressure on the Tories, is a priority.

### Restarting Labour

*Solidarity* calls on socialists to attend their AGMs and stand for election for posts such as Youth Officer, Political Education Officer, Trade Union Liaison officer, and GC delegate. We also recommend wording you can draw on to propose motion on the pandemic, job cuts, and many other issues, found at [bit.ly/mo-pe](https://bit.ly/mo-pe).

Some CLPs have a custom of electing conference delegates at their AGM. It seems unlikely that many CLPs will elect conference delegates for September 2021 as early as November 2020, but watch out to see whether yours does. □



# Poland's fight for abortion rights



By Katy Dollar

Thousands of people have marched in cities across Poland in protests against a near-total ban on abortion. Poland already has some of the strictest abortion laws in the world.

There are fewer than 2,000 legal abortions a year in Poland, and the vast majority take place because of malformed fetuses, which would be illegal following the court ruling such abortions were unconstitutional. The new ruling restricts abortions to circumstances of rape, incest, or if there is a threat to the woman's life.

Women's groups estimate that as many as 200,000 procedures are performed illegally or abroad each year.

The demonstrations happened despite a government ban on public gatherings due to Covid-19. Poland's Roman Catholic episcopate and the governing rightwing Law and Justice

(PiS) party had been campaigning for further restrictions on reproductive freedoms. The court has been reformed by the PiS government and contains many right-wing judges loyal to the ruling party.

On Friday thousands of young protesters in Warsaw marched to the home of PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński, meeting violence from Poland's riot police. Elsewhere in Poland protesters gathered in main squares, outside PiS premises, or near churches. Slogans such as "women's hell" and "unlimited abortions" were daubed on church walls in Warsaw.

On Sunday 25 October protesters interrupted Mass at churches, dropping banners and staging occupations. Poland's far-right came out to block women from protesting at some churches.

Workers' Liberty people joined the lively solidarity demonstration called by Razem at the Polish Embassy in London on 24 October. Polish socialist Ana Oppenheim told *Solidarity*: "The protest was called very spontaneously, on Thursday night. When I arrived just after



5pm on Saturday, there was maybe a couple hundred people. By the time it got properly dark around 6.30, there were over a thousand of us.

"The protest was DIY, loud and angry – just like the actions happening across Poland where hundreds of thousands of people in cities and towns are demonstrating, blocking roads and interrupting church services. Pundits like to say the court ruling 'divided Poland', but in reality, the opposition to the ruling is overwhelming and crosses political, social, generational and geographic divides.

"I've been particularly happy to see the alliances of feminists and trade unionists, from farmers to miners, that are currently emerging – something we haven't seen a lot of in Poland in recent decades. Knowing that my friends are among those marching and organising back home makes me proud, and I know they're really happy to see that we're standing in solidarity with them in the UK, across Europe and beyond".

We must continue to stand in solidarity against the Polish right's attacks on reproductive freedoms. It is part of a global attack on abortion rights.

On 22 October the Trump administration signed an international anti-abortion pledge. The "Geneva Consensus Declaration" calls on states to promote "women's rights and health" – without access to abortion. The "core supporters" of the declaration are Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia and Uganda, and the 27 other signatories include Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya. □

## Belarus: solidarity and "imperialism"



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

A few days ago, following up on a suggestion I made to LabourStart's mailing list that people try out the secure messaging app Telegram, I received an interesting question. I had mentioned that pro-democracy protestors in Belarus and Hong Kong were using the app intensively.

The question I received was: "Is Telegram also being used in Bolivia?" When I replied that I didn't know, my correspondent replied: "It's just that it's used in two places where the imperialist states are very much involved against the government."

Leftists who see Belarus and Hong Kong as countries under some kind of progressive government facing an assault by "imperialist states" are – to quote Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca* – misinformed.

And it is our job to inform them of what is really going on in those places.

There can be no better ar-

gument against the notion that the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko is some kind of progressive than looking at the cases of Siarhei Charkasau, Anatol Bokun, Yury Korzun, and Pavel Puchenia. These four men are all trade union activists, mostly members of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU), and they have all been arbitrarily detained several times over the last two months.

As IndustriALL global union explained: "The union leaders, who are also strike committee members, are being targeted for their trade union activity. On 21 September, Anatol Bokun took peaceful action in support of his co-worker Aleh Kudziolka, who refused to leave his underground workplace in a protest against rigged presidential elections and the extreme violence of riot police. He was detained the same day and remains in jail.

"Anatol was one of 22 workers detained by the police, but he was the only one sentenced, to 25 days of jail for alleged public disorder. Anatol was due for release on 16 October, but he has

been detained again and taken to an undisclosed detention centre in Soligorsk.

"Similarly, Siarhei Charkasau, who is the vice chair of BITU, was detained along with Yury Korzun and Pavel Puchenia while having a picnic in a public park in Soligorsk on 3 October. They remained in detention for 15 days. On 16 October, the day they were supposed to be released, they were detained again and moved to a police detention centre in Soligorsk.

"While in detention, Anatol Bokun, Siarhei Charkasau, Yury Korzun, and Pavel Puchenia were asked to lie: if they signed a document and recorded a video for the state-run Belarusian Television channel admitting guilt and remorse for their part in the strike action, they would be granted freedom. The four union leaders refused to budge. As a consequence, they have been unlawfully detained for 15 more days."

Are these the actions of a progressive government? Of course not. And no progressive, or trade unionist, or socialist should find themselves on the side of a

repressive regime that jails trade union leaders.

IndustriALL summed up what is really going on today in Belarus in these words: "The level of violence against peaceful demonstrations following the recent presidential elections in August is extreme. By the beginning of September, the UN Human Rights office had documented at least 450 cases of torture and ill-treatment of people deprived of their liberty. There has not yet been any criminal investigation into cases of death or torture."

IndustriALL and BITU have launched an online campaign demanding that these activists be freed at once and that the repression stop now.

It's a campaign that every trade unionist and socialist should support without hesitation – and indeed, with enthusiasm. It has absolutely nothing to do with "imperialist states" and everything to do with working class solidarity. Please show your support at [labourstart.org/go/4579](http://labourstart.org/go/4579) □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of Labourstart, writing here in a personal capacity.



### Activist Agenda

The Free Osime Brown campaign has now passed 300,000 signatures on its petition to stop Osime's deportation. It won a first victory when Osime was released from jail to his family's home rather than deported to Jamaica straight off, but the deportation order as such still stands, and the campaign is awaiting legal updates on that.

It asks supporters to write to their MPs and to seek support in their unions. The rail union RMT is already supporting Osime.

Free Our Unions is discussing with activists in Welwyn Hatfield Constituency Labour Party about campaigning activity against the Tories' plans for new laws to restrict transport workers' strikes. It's Transport Secretary Grant Shapps' constituency, so Welwyn Hatfield Labour activists are well placed to help raise the profile of the issue.

Neurodivergent Labour has its AGM (online) at the end of November. Workers' Liberty people have put in motions on trans rights, on the justice system, and on Labour Party democracy and access.

Safe and Equal is pursuing its drive to ensure full sick pay for all workers in hospitals – including "bank" and contracted-out workers – and to get invitations to speak at trade union branches and Labour Parties. □

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



# Not yet general strike, but bigger protests

By Pete Radcliff

On 13 October Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya made an ultimatum on behalf of the oppositional Coordinating Council. If Lukashenko didn't resign, she would call for a peaceful nationwide rejection of his rule and a general strike from 25 October.

The strike call gave a boost to the protests against Lukashenko. The weekly Sunday demonstration in Minsk on 25 October was larger than it had been for over a month, probably close to 100,000.

It was met at the intersection of Orlovskaya and Novovilenskaya in Minsk with the most brutal attack yet from Lukashenko's security. Stun grenades were used. Gunshots were heard and serious injuries were suffered.

But students are increasingly politically active. On Monday 26 October they organised walk-outs from Belarus State University and other universities, challenging the directors and administrators in heated debate.

The strike call seems not to have pulled out the majority of workers at

the major factories.

Militant strikers did managed to march past security through many factories, appealing for workers to join them. Some factories, like the tractor factory MTZ and automobile factory MAZ, had the hated state security OMON helping managers try to block the strikers.

At MTZ, OMON had paddy wagons waiting alongside to carry away those they arrested. But that did not stop workers getting into the factory.

The threat of dismissal as well as imprisonment always hangs over the head of Belarus strikers. At the Naftan oil refinery, workers told the Tut news agency that the manager had said anyone joining the strike would be immediately sacked.

Elsewhere the regime has extensively replaced indefinite employment contracts with short-term ones.

Tikhonovskaya's people had done consultations with many of the strikers. In her rallying call to workers she stressed restoring pension rights, ending a freeze on wages, and ending corrupt and bullying management methods.



Strikes require strong organisation in the workplace. For an unofficial general strike in the face of huge repression, workers need not only anger at brutality and injustice but also confidence that they will win and have the organisation to do so.

After fake elections and phoney state unions, they need to know a democracy, a union, a political leadership they can trust.

Tikhonovskaya's Coordinating Council includes one worker with a militant

reputation, Sergei Dylevsky. Some associated with the Council but jailed, like Tikhonovskaya's husband Sergei Tikhonovsky, have a background in radical journalism.

Lukashenko's persecution of them has enhanced their reputation, but pro-regime forces still throw scorn on them as celebrities, intellectuals (or even, in the case of Victor Babariko, a banker) whose interests are not the workers'.

The workers need their own democratic and independent unions. They also need their own programme for a future Belarus where workers are in control.

In a country as oppressive as Belarus, workers will be organised in ways that cannot be known or shared on media. It appears at the moment that the organisation is not yet strong enough to achieve a full general strike. But these things can change quickly.

The leaders of the independent union at the Belaruskali potash mine have been jailed again.

Sign and spread this e-petition for their release: [bit.ly/lb-be](https://bit.ly/lb-be) □

## Pro-Lukashenko effort is complete failure

By Dale Street

Plans for a pro-Lukashenko mass rally of "250,000 to 300,000" in the Belarussian capital Minsk on Sunday 25 October ended up as a fiasco.

Nominally, the rally had been called by the "official" Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB). But the FPB – which claims a membership of some four million in a country with a population of less than ten million – functions organisationally and politically as an extension of the government.

Since the rigged elections of early August it has backed Lukashenko and denounced his opponents at every turn. FPB leader Mikhail Orda says:

"The most important values of Belarussians have always been peace and tranquillity. Certain foreign forces want to take this right away from us. They promise 'mountains of gold' but in reality they want to deprive us of work, wages, pensions and other social guarantees. These people will rejoice if enterprises have no orders and workers no work."

In the middle of last week the FPB announced that it had lodged an application to stage a "super-meeting" in Minsk

in support of Lukashenko. "Everyone who is not indifferent to the fate of our country" was invited to attend the rally, the purpose of which was "to show who is the master in this country."

According to Orda: "People are very tired of what is going on. People understand what they can lose. This led to the idea of giving them the opportunity to demonstrate where they stand. I will say even more: To show who is the master in our country. Not someone from abroad, but us – we are the masters of our soil."

"We' are not just the trade unions. It is all our social organisations: youth, the (pro-government) Union of Women, Belaya Rus' [White Rus' – pro-government 'social' organisation] and members of the armed forces."

According to Lukashenko, the "super-meeting" had been called by the FPB in response to popular demand:

"The drive simply came from people. People have got tired... People want peace and quiet. That's a good thing. We understood this without a war. People understood what they have to lose, they became

rebellious: we want to go (to Minsk), to demonstrate, to show that we are many."

No sooner had the "super-meeting" been announced than the press began carrying reports of the pressure being exerted on workers by employers and "their" trade union to attend it. According to the news agency TUT.BY:

"We continue to receive hundreds of reports from state employees and from employees of organisations and enterprises about how they have been made to take an interest in a trip to Minsk, including bonus payments (added on, or withdrawn), time off in lieu, and threats of dismissal or non-renewal of contracts."

By 23 October the "super-meeting" had been cancelled. Although supposedly called by the FPB, it was Lukashenko himself who announced its cancellation.

In a rambling speech Lukashenko gave a hodgepodge of reasons for its cancellation: problems of crowd control, city centre traffic paralysis, security risks, Covid-19, the stage was too small...

But in the *Salidarnasts* newspaper political analyst Andrey

Yegorov gave a very different analysis of the reasons for its cancellation:

"Firstly, it turned out to be quite complicated to convince people to go. Some people started demanding written instructions. Secondly, it was not simple from a logistical point of view – bringing that many people to Minsk from all over Belarus, and getting them home again."

"Thirdly, I think that the authorities were afraid that this meeting could be used by protestors for their own goals

and could end up being used against the authorities. Some will remember the official meeting in support of Ceausescu which finished so lamentably for him."

The "Ceausescu meeting" was a rally organised by the Romanian dictator in late December of 1989, intended to show the popular support he claimed to enjoy. But the rally had to be abandoned after his speech was drowned out by jeers and booing. Five days later Ceausescu was executed by firing squad. □



### Our audio!

Listen, download or subscribe to Workers' Liberty audio recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **Playlists include:**

- *Solidarity* Newspaper
- Pamphlets, publications beyond *Solidarity*
- Public meetings
- Fighting racism: pamphlets and more
- *Solidarność*: The workers' movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-81
- Environmental pamphlet and meetings

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# Nigeria: police killings spark protests

*Ejike Ikezuagu and Princess Dandison were organisers of the End SARS UK march in London on 24 October. They spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity.*

Since it was created in 1992 SARS [the Special Anti-Robbery Squad police unit] has targeted young people. In Nigeria the youth face a very bad situation; people leave education but there are no jobs. Instead of helping them, the government treats them as yahoos or criminals. When SARS see young people with a car or nice clothes or even a nice hairstyle, they will question them, demand to know their occupation and often find an excuse to kidnap, torture and in some cases kill them. Nothing ever happens – the kidnapers and killers are not prosecuted.

Now young people are saying enough is enough.

This is about more than just the police. People are angry because they are fighting to survive, but just barely getting by. The political class in Nigeria provides nothing for people – no jobs, no welfare, no healthcare, not even guaranteed electricity.

On 20 October police and soldiers attacked protesters at the Lekki tollgate in Lagos. The protesters were peaceful, unarmed, not even violating the curfew, but at least twelve were killed and many more injured. The authorities tried to deny this, but a video went viral. The attempt to scare people did not work. Since then the protests have spread, including solidarity protests in other countries.

## What demands are being raised?

We need real action to deal with the police – they say they have disbanded SARS, but we see the same people out on the streets attacking protesters. We want the president to resign.

Nigeria makes many millions of dollars from oil daily. The money is going into private purses. We need rich people to pay taxes so the government can provide healthcare, welfare and education, create infrastructure and services and employ people, particularly young people, as well as providing support for private businesses. But this will only happen with a different government.

## What kind of government?

We want a government that improves people's lives, in every respect, socially and economically, and invests in the youth. Which obeys the rule of law, and says no one is above the law. We want a government which says what it will do and does what it says, instead of deceiving people. A government which listens and is not deaf. We must have the right to express ourselves in life and to protest injustices without being repressed and killed.

We need real federalism in Nigeria, instead of everything being centralised



in the capital. This is very important.

We want a government which involves the youth, to provide fresh ideas. All the existing political parties are part of the problem. There needs to be a new force which represents the youth.

## How does the movement relate to different communities and religions?

Previously the killings were mainly in the south east of the country. Now people see everyone is vulnerable, even in Lagos, and protests are taking place everywhere in the country.

Moreover this youth movement is crossing tribal and religious divisions. People say, why are we talking about

these divisions when we don't have jobs or water to drink. The elite are trying to manipulate divisions, but we don't think they will succeed, because the youth movement is determined.

## Is it just young people supporting the protests?

No, many different groups are supporting. But the youth are the people on the streets, who can sleep outside and get up and keep protesting. It is the youth who are the most daring.

## Have there been any strikes or workers' actions as part of this struggle?

In Nigeria we have many strikes for

the same reason as these protests, that people's rights are not respected and sometimes even wages are not paid. It's the same issue of bad government and not providing for the people. But perhaps workers' groups are not confident to strike specifically as part of this movement, because they would fear repression and reprisals. That does not mean they are not supporting the movement more quietly and organising their members.

## Where have there been solidarity protests?

In London we got hundreds at two days' notice. There were also protests in Southampton and Manchester, and other countries including the US, France and Germany. Many countries where Nigerians live. People have a very direct motivation to protest. In many cases we are sustaining our families and friends through the money we send back – sustaining our loved ones when the government will not.

## Do people take inspiration from other protests against police violence, like Black Lives Matter and in Hong Kong?

What is happening in Nigeria is unique, and in some respects more intense – but this is not to take anything a way from struggles in Hong Kong, Tunisia and elsewhere. We are aware of these struggles and of course we support them. Black Lives Matter is very important – Nigerians have direct experience of what racism in the US means. So our struggle is unique but there is inspiration too. Our lives matter. □

## “Nigeria is being run for the elite”

*Vanessa and Danny, demonstrators on the 24 October London protest against Nigeria's president Buhari, talked to Martin Thomas from Solidarity.*

The demonstration was organised by social media. The main changes are: Buhari criminal, Buhari murderer, Buhari bad boy.

The whole government has to go. We need new people to run Nigeria on a new basis, to end corruption, to build infrastructure, to create jobs for young people.

60% of the population in Nigeria is under 25, but the country is being ruled by over-65s. Buhari was a military dictator [in 1983-5], so he can't be the right person to run the country.

**We're socialists, so the way we see it, the big problem is that the government and the economy are run by the rich, and the answer is for**

## the workers to own and control the economy collectively and democratically.

Yes. Buhari is the Minister for Petroleum, too, so he controls the wealth from oil. Nigeria's legislature is the highest paid in the world. The country is being run for the elite, not for the people. We're being taken back to feudalism.

We are one nation. People in Europe should stop referring to us as “tribes”. We can overcome the divisions within Nigeria. Devolve power to the states, have democracy.

Where the elite's money dumped? In the tax havens controlled by countries like Britain. The Nigerian people should not suffer guilt by association with the elite.

Nigeria has dealt well with Covid. People in West Africa have experience dealing with Ebola. Nigerian people



should be allowed to deal with our issues, our problems.

Nigerians in Britain can help, with solidarity to help effect change. □



# Black Culture and resistance

By Janine Booth

One hundred years ago, an arts movement was forming in a mainly-black district of New York City. Later known as the Harlem Renaissance, it was primarily cultural but also inescapably political. Literature, poetry, jazz, theatre, sculpture and more articulated the lives and demands of African-Americans no longer willing to be grateful that they were no longer enslaved.

*O black and unknown bards of long ago.*

*How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?*

*How, in your darkness, did you come to know*

*The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?*

*Who first from midst his bonds lifted his eyes?*

*Who first from out the still watch, lone and long.*

*Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise*

*Within his dark-kept soul, burst into song?*

James Weldon Johnson

## Heading for Harlem

After the USA abolished slavery in 1865, white supremacism reasserted itself, particularly in southern states. The Ku Klux Klan formed, and "Jim Crow" laws (named after a caricature Negro) applied a "separate but equal" philosophy which delivered separation but not equality. White racist violence rampaged, with lynchings peaking in 1892.

In the early twentieth century, northern states saw an industrial surge. The push of southern racism and the pull of northern jobs propelled more than one-and-a-half million black Americans into the first "Great Migration" between 1916 and 1930.

They moved to Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and to New York City, whose black population rose from 140,000 in 1910 to over 650,000 in 1940, their numbers boosted by immigration from the Caribbean. Many headed for Harlem, the part of Manhattan between Central Park and the Bronx, partly facilitated by black entrepreneur Philip Payton Junior, who acquired tenement blocks and rented homes to the new arrivals.

Formerly a white neighbourhood, by 1920 Harlem was the hub of a busy black community asserting its own culture and identity.

## The New Negro

As the century turned, black America's dominant leader was Booker T Washington. A formidable figure, Washing-

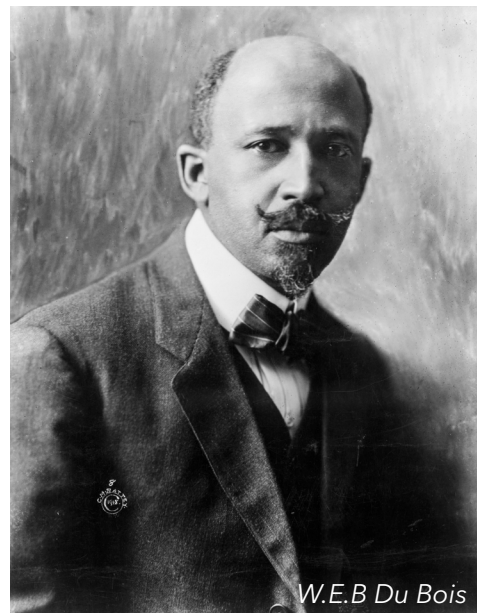
ton carried out great works to improve black people's life chances. But he argued that blacks had to be educated before claiming equality, accepted Jim Crow laws and postponed demanding the vote. In 1900, Washington published *A New Negro for a New Century*, but twenty years later, "New Negro" had become the name of an assertive black identity counterposed to Washington's conservatism.

The submissive "Old Negro" approach was challenged by, amongst others, W.E.B. Du Bois, a black academic from a poor background and member of the Socialist Party of America. *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois' 1903 collection of essays, fiction and memoir, would inspire many Harlem Renaissance artists. In 1910, Du Bois moved to New York City to edit *The Crisis*, journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), formed the previous year.

Du Bois hoped that artistic achievement would prove black people's equal place in society. *The Crisis* ran a competition for black writers and introduced America to Langston Hughes, publishing his totemic poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. Ultimately, Du Bois was too culturally conservative to keep up with the movement he inspired, but his role in its creation was crucial.

As the war ended, black aspirations to equality came up against a new wave of racist violence, in East St Louis in 1917, and across the USA in 1919's "Red Summer". Another totemic poem, Claude McKay's sonnet *If We Must Die*, urged black Americans to die fighting rather than submit.

McKay visited Soviet Russia, reading poetry at Red Army camps and speaking at the Communist International Congress on the fifth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution. Writing about his visit in *The Crisis*, McKay praised the Bolsheviks for their prompt solidarity greetings to all the world's oppressed



W.E.B Du Bois

peoples, and Lenin for addressing "the question of the American Negroes" and "the urgent necessity of propaganda and organizational work among the Negroes of the South". McKay was a contributor to and editor of *The Liberator*, the radical socialist magazine run by Crystal and Max Eastman which became a Communist Party publication in 1922. He argued strongly both for cultural coverage, and for the communist movement to engage seriously with black liberation.

In August 1920, the editors of *The Messenger*, the self-styled "only radical Negro magazine in America", asked rhetorically, "The New Negro – What Is He?" It answered that he demands universal suffrage, "the full product of his toil", and "absolute and unequivocal social equality". The New Negro is radical, rejects both Republican and Democratic parties, and joins a labor union and a working-class political party. Founded by A Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen with the help of the Socialist Party, *The Messenger* played a key role in building what was then known as the "Negro Renaissance".

By the 1960s, "Negro" would be rejected as a racist word, associated with the conservatism that the New Negro movement and the Negro Renaissance defined themselves against in the 1920s.

## Unearthing Black history and culture

In 1925, writer and philosopher Alain Locke published *The New Negro*, an anthology of essays, poems and short stories, but with little material arguing for socialist perspectives.

Arthur Schonburg contributed an essay, *The Negro Digs Up His Past*. He had collected a trove of books, manuscripts, photographs and memorabilia about African culture and history, and in 1926 sold them to the New York Public Library, which employed him to curate this precious resource. The story goes that one of Schonburg's school teachers had told him that black people had no history, prompting him to a life's work proving this wrong.

*What is Africa to me:*

*Copper sun or scarlet sea,*

*Jungle star or jungle track,*

*Strong bronzed men, or regal black*

*Women from whose loins I sprang*

*When the birds of Eden sang?*

*One three centuries removed*

*From the scenes his fathers loved,*

*Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,*

*What is Africa to me?*

Countee Cullen, *Heritage*



Zora Neale Hurston

Several high-profile Renaissance artists integrated African culture into their work. Sargent Claude Johnson made carvings, ceramics, paintings, masks and murals influenced by African themes and using African styles. Augusta Savage and Meta Vaux Warick Fuller centred African styles in their sculpture.

Pan-Africanists such as Du Bois promoted Africa's liberation from colonialism as essential to black liberation, while fighting for full civil rights in the USA. But Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, who based his Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem, argued that this would never happen and that therefore black people should instead return to Africa.

Garvey was a compelling speaker who attracted many followers, and regularly led parades of thousands through Harlem, waving from a motor car while dressed in the uniform of an imperial viceroy. Claude McKay believed that Garvey's skill at propaganda was his "greatest contribution to the Negro movement" and hoped that "men of broader understanding and sounder ideas" would emulate it.

Other black socialists also disapproved of Garvey's political message, rejecting racial separatism in favour of class-based, integrationist anti-racism. Du Bois described Garvey as "the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race in America and in the world". Randolph and Owen ran a "Garvey Must Go" campaign.

## Jazz, gangsters, and monied whites

In 1921, the musical revue "Shuffle Along" ran for over five hundred shows on Broadway. Featuring future stars Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson, it introduced white audiences to black music and theatre, and brought jazz to Broadway.



# ce: the Harlem Renaissance

Jazz had travelled with the Great Migration, from New Orleans north to Chicago and other cities. It arrived in New York in the decade before the First World War, when the New York Herald already had its racist hackles raised by its predecessor, ragtime, describing it as “symbolic of the primitive morality and perceptible moral limitations of the Negro type”.

After the war, jazz clubs proliferated in Harlem. Jazz legends Joe “King” Oliver and Louis Armstrong moved north. In 1927, Duke Ellington began the run at the Cotton Club that would launch his career.

But Harlem’s Cotton Club also represented the enduring racism that still constrained and debased black culture. Black people were admitted only as performers or waiters – or, occasionally, celebrity guests. After Langston Hughes visited, he described it as “a Jim Crow club for gangsters and monied whites”.

Proprietor Owney Madden used the club to sell illegal liquor and to bring to a white audience “authentic black entertainment” that was too often trivial and stereotyped. The club decorated its interior with a plantation theme, promoted Ellington’s jazz orchestra as “jungle music”, and Hughes described white clients watching black entertainers as zoo visitors watch animals.

Many well-off white people came to Harlem to partake of its burgeoning black culture. Some came to listen to jazz and to learn dance moves. Many were genuine in their interest and support. Some put their money into the Renaissance as well.

White patron Charlotte Osgood Mason funded writer Zora Neale Hurston to travel across the southern states collecting folk tales, sermons, songs, children’s games and other nuggets of Negro culture, and also financed Hughes, Locke and others. But she has been criticised since for trying to control the artists she funded.

In his 1926 essay, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, Hughes recognised the pressure on black artists from white patrons (and from well-heeled black people) and urged black artists to be true to themselves. It was poor, working-class, young blacks who were building the cultural autonomy that Hughes advocated and which epitomised the Harlem Renaissance.

## Telling life through art

Hughes’ essay asserted that “We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame”, and James Weldon Johnson spoke of the “young, gifted and black” artists. Weldon Johnson compiled the highly sig-

nificant *Book of American Negro Poetry* in 1922 and was the Executive Secretary of the NAACP.

Illustrator Aaron Douglas urged black artists to “bare our arms and plunge them deep through laughter, through pain, through sorrow, through hope, through disappointment, into the very depths of the souls of our people and drag forth material crude, rough, neglected. Then let’s sing it, dance it, write it, paint it”.

Some did so using classic forms and language, some used Negro vernacular or tradition. Jean Toomer’s landmark work, *Cane* (1923), combined modern styles with folk forms. Inspired by Toomer’s visit to Georgia, Cane mixes imagery, free verse and stream-of-consciousness writing to portray urban alienation and the deprivation of blacks living in beautiful southern landscapes.

Langston Hughes developed a “Blues poetry” that bore both the painful lyrical content and the compelling rhythm of the blues. Photographer James van der Zee chronicled the development of the new black identity, recording scenes of Harlem life and portraits of both celebrated locals and ordinary folk.

## Sex and sexuality

Novelist Wallace Thurman lit a flame under political and cultural conservatism with *Fire!!*, “a Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists”. It published *Smoke*, *Lilies and Jade*, a monologue written by Richard Bruce Nugent, whose protagonist has two lovers, a man and a woman. Nugent’s work was not overtly political, but it was overtly pleasure-seeking and overtly gay. In an era when homosexuality was illegal, this was political in itself, both rebelling against mainstream “morality” and challenging the Harlem Renaissance to accept that pride in your identity encompassed issues beyond race.

Singer Ma Rainey’s *Prove It On Me* implied a sexual relationship with a



Langston Hughes

woman while defying anyone to actually prove it. Together with others including Ida Cox and (the unrelated) Clara, Bessie and Mamie Smith, they sang songs of the highs, lows and labours of working-class black women’s lives.

Jessie Fauset, Literary Editor of *The Crisis*, wrote confident, assertive, black women characters, who were not the servant-girls or “mammies” of popular stereotype. When the publisher of her novel, *There is Confusion* (1925), asked James Weldon Johnson to host a dinner to mark its launch, he agreed on condition that the event be broadened to include many more black writers. Over a hundred black artists and white publishers attended the resulting Civic Club dinner, a landmark event of the Renaissance movement.

## Beyond Harlem

Despite the name “Harlem Renaissance”, the movement was not confined to this Manhattan district. Its artists were active in various US cities, and many travelled abroad. A similar movement blossomed in Paris. Just as the US had its Negro Renaissance and its New Negro, so France had its mainly-musical “Paris Noir” and its more academic “Négritude”.

In the 1920s, France’s empire was at its peak, and black artists in its colonies were developing a similar cultural assertion to their American counterparts’. Many black artists, intellectuals and leaders moved from the colonies to Paris. Moreover, two hundred thousand African-American soldiers served in France in the 1914-18. Between them, they built a movement.

Some black American artists met with success in Europe that the stricter racism of the USA had denied them. Musical performer Josephine Baker became hugely popular for her shows in Paris, but on returning to New York City, was turned away from a hotel on the grounds of her colour.

## The legacy of the Renaissance

Baker was one of many Renaissance artists to become a civil rights activist, and was a speaker at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963. The Renaissance and the New Negro movement were midwives to future struggles and were major steps forward in collective black self-assertion. They explored and expressed the politics of oppression and liberation, sometimes explicitly, sometimes less so. The movement contained different political perspectives, and the battle between integrationist socialism and nationalist separatism played out on its terrain.

During the course of the 1920s, the



Augusta Savage

Harlem Renaissance shifted from the radical politics of its early days towards a more cultural romanticism. The 1929 Wall Street crash dealt it a heavy blow, leaving many blacks too poor to produce art and many whites no longer able to afford to patronise it. Six years later, a bloody race riot in Harlem killed the movement, and Harlem became the neglected and impoverished district that it is known as today.

The Harlem Renaissance was a historic decade of expression by black, mainly working-class people through many forms of art. It reveals a lot about the relationship between economics, politics, oppression and struggle. Its legacy is still felt, and recent studies continue to reconsider its significance and its politics. □

• Sources and further reading: cited works; Arna Bontemps, *American Negro Poetry*; Cheryl A Watt, *The Harlem Renaissance*; Charles River Editors, *The Harlem Renaissance*.

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# How the major parties spoil the election

By Angela Walker (candidate for Vice President on the Hawkins/Walker Green Party US ticket)

Republicans spoil elections by suppressing the Democratic vote and the Black vote. They orchestrate voter roll purges, most notably in the 2000 election in Florida, and restrict the number of polling places in Black and Brown communities. The GOP encourages voter intimidation at polling places, which seems to be higher this year.

Democrats spoil elections by trying to suppress the Green vote, kicking us off the ballot, instead of embracing the proven non-partisan solution to spoiled elections. The solution is replacing the Electoral College with a national popular vote using ranked choice voting.

Both parties actively participate in gerrymandering which leads to more manipulation by monied interests, districts being drawn around racial lines and lower voter turnout because of the creation of safe seats where the real battle is over the nomination and not the election. Both parties benefit from voter suppression. Campaign financing is paid by billionaires and corporations in support of both major parties so that the super wealthy control our elections.

Let's get one thing straight. The GOP's active suppression of the Black vote and the Electoral College's anointing candidates who actually lost the popular vote spoils elections. Campaign financing and gerrymandering spoil elections. The election process in this country is a rotted mess that only benefits corporations, the wealthy and the corporate duopoly. It's a spoiled system whether the Green Party runs candidates or not – and that's the real story.

One of our campaign's main objectives is to bring voters out to the polls who would otherwise stay home and

not vote. This is necessary for democracy, and voters demand to have more choices. CNBC reported that the majority of Americans find both Joe Biden and Donald Trump mentally unfit for President.

Our supporters tell us they would rather stay home than be forced to vote for Biden or Trump. Don't just take our word; this has always been the case. In 2016, both pre-election and exit poll data not only proved this fact, but it also proved the Green Party did not spoil the presidential election for the Democrats.

The 2016 exit poll shows 61% of Stein [Green] voters would have stayed home if she were not on the ballot. Plug that into WI, MI, and PA and Trump still wins if Stein is not on the ballot.

The majority of the electorate wants a viable third party, and both major parties have consistently low favourability ratings.

The Democrats sell an artificial narrative, where every Green voter is owned by the Democratic Party. Under this flawed framework, they assume that there cannot be a separate, independent voting block outside of the duopoly. This flawed logic has been employed heavily since the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.

Despite the knowledge that Gore won Florida had there been a full recount, establishment Democrats refuse to admit that the 2000 election was stolen, rather they push the myth of siphoned votes, conveniently ignoring that hundreds of thousands of registered Democrats in Florida voted for Bush.

Instead of actively opposing the Electoral College, which has cost Democrats two presidencies in the past 20 years, the Democratic Party has decided to conjure the spoiler boogeyman every four years.

"The least-worst choices are getting



worse every four years, and the insiders only exacerbate the problem by trying to defang the third-party competition," stated Ralph Nader in 2016. "So long as there's no robust challenge to the duopoly, there's no reason for insiders to improve. Pragmatism is just another name for electoral extortion."

Minor parties have historically advanced the issues and changed the dialogue. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, minor parties led the way in the abolition of slavery, the women's suffrage movements and protections for farmers, workers and consumers. These parties did not spoil elections, they introduced many reforms that eventually entered the mainstream.

For real democracy to exist, there needs to be a plurality of voices, opportunity for fair debate among those voices, and equal access for citizens to choose which arguments, policies and platforms best represent their interests. As [Lee] Drutman outlines in his case for "breaking the two-party doom loop":

"The United States is divided into red and blue not because Americans want only two choices. In poll after poll, majorities want more than two political parties. Few Americans enjoy the high-stakes partisan combat... And even if Americans agree on wanting a third party, few are willing to gamble on an alternative for fear of wasting their vote.

"All else equal, modest multiparty democracies (with three to seven parties) perform better than two-party democracies. Such a party system regularises cross-partisan compromise and coalition building. Since parties need to work together to govern, more viewpoints are likely to be considered. The resulting policies are more likely to be broadly inclusive, and broadly legitimate, making voters happier with the outcomes".

Over the past couple decades, the Green Party has not only elected hundreds of local officeholders, it has led the way on the Green New Deal, Medicare For All, Ranked Choice Voting, Peace Initiatives, and so many other policies and reforms. □

• From [howiehawkins.us](http://howiehawkins.us)

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# Backing Biden will not stop Trumpism

By Charlie Post and Ashley Smith

Much of the United States Left is in the midst of an oddly-timed embrace of lesser evilism. They are calling for socialists to support Biden at the very moment Trump's campaign seems in crisis and headed for defeat.

Nevertheless, key figures on the US Left, including long-time supporters of independent politics, are pushing the new socialist movement not just to vote for Biden, but to actively campaign for him. To be clear, our argument is not about what comrades do during the time it takes to cast a ballot. What we oppose is the new socialist Left, especially the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), spending its time, money, and energy, campaigning for Biden.

We also oppose social movements and unions working for a candidate that stands against all our demands, from defunding the police, to Medicare for All, and the Green New Deal. We should not front for "the lesser of two rapists," who promises to restore the norms of the Obama administration – wars, austerity, privatisation, hostility to unions, mass deportations, and continued violence against people of colour.

In election after election, each "the most important of our lifetime," the Left has repeatedly surrendered its political independence to campaign for one or another Democrat to stop a clearly more right-wing Republican.

We have stopped organising mass struggle, ceased educating activists about the need for political independence, and moderated our demands to promote a capitalist party. Once in power, that same party reneges on its promises of reform, launching new attacks on the working class and oppressed.

## Subordinated

Even worse, once we have subordinated ourselves to the Democrats, we have left a political vacuum for the Republicans, who are not scared to fight for their politics. They take advantage of disappointment with Democrats to reelect Republicans, moving the government further to the right.

Falling into this disastrous cycle today would be catastrophic, as the Trumpite Republican Party, especially its far-right base, is more radical, more nationalist, and far more dangerous than ever before.

In Germany, the Social Democratic Party sacrificed its class independence in order to support General Paul Von Hindenburg in the 1932 election. The Social Democrats backed Hindenburg to stop Hitler from winning the presidency, only to see Hindenburg turn around and appoint Hitler Chancellor.

Lesser evilism paved the way to the

greatest defeat for working people in history. The working class parties – the Social Democratic and the Communist parties – could have formed a united front, electorally and in the streets, to challenge both Hindenburg and Hitler.

In other words, if they had rejected lesser evilism they might have stopped both the lesser and greater evil.

In Spain, the Communist Party abandoned class independence and the fight for revolution to support a popular front with bourgeois parties, in order to defend the republic against Franco's military uprising. Then, in order to keep the peace with their capitalist allies, the popular front government rejected demands for land reform, workers control of production, and Moroccan independence.

These policies demoralised the forces that had defeated Franco's troops in the first months of the civil war, paving the way for Franco's victory, and bloody repression of the working class and peasantry.

## Goldwater

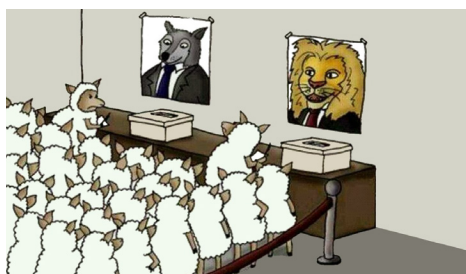
In 1964, Johnson portrayed Goldwater as an irresponsible war-monger, ready to escalate the war in Vietnam – which Johnson himself did with a vengeance after his election. His ally, Daley, the Democratic mayor in Chicago, had no problem unleashing a police riot against anti-war demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

On the presidential campaign trail, Bill Clinton promised to block the North American Free Trade Act, which garnered him the endorsement of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial organisations. Once in office, Clinton signed NAFTA, undermining unions and working conditions in both the U.S. and Mexico.

Barack Obama promised progressive immigration reform during his first presidential campaign, winning him the support of immigrant rights activists who had just organised nationwide strikes and demonstrations on "the day without an immigrant." As president, Obama became the "Deporter-in-chief," expelling more immigrants than any other president in US history.

Independent mass struggles are decisive for winning reforms regardless of who is in office. They are also the main vehicle to defeat the Right. Supporting the Democrats as a lesser evil, however, has compromised those struggles in the past and will do so again today, creating space for the growth of the far right.

The Democrats and their policies have been the petri dish for the growth of the Trumpite Right. For the past three decades, the Democrats worked with the Republicans to push through the neoliberal restructuring of capitalism, generating class and social inequalities



not seen since the Robber Baron era.

Obama's response to the Great Recession made those conditions worse; he bailed out banks and corporations, and imposed austerity on workers and the poor, leading to an epidemic of diseases of despair like opioid addiction. The neoliberalism of the Democrats alienated workers, oppressed people, and downwardly mobile sections of the middle class – opening the door not only for the socialist Left, but also the nationalist far right.

Trump bolted through that door; combining opposition to the establishment with racism, xenophobia, and misogyny; offering reactionary solutions to real problems. He galvanised mostly the middle class, but also a section of desperate workers, to ride to victory in the slaveholders' Electoral College.

The left will not defeat Trump or Trumpism by supporting Biden and the Democratic Party. The Right will grow no matter what the outcome of the election. If Trump wins, which looks increasingly unlikely, he will embolden the Right as he has done throughout his term.

If Biden wins, he will not stop the Right. Despite Bernie Sanders' claims, Biden is not promising progressive reforms that would rip up the roots of the Right. Instead, he intends to create a government of national unity that restores the neoliberal consensus and rehabilitates U.S. imperialism to project its power throughout the world, especially against China.

Those policies will enflame grievances that Trump – or even more reactionary figures – will exploit, to build right wing electoral campaigns and armed fascist gangs. Already, the Republican Right are plotting subterfuge to paralyse an incoming Biden administration.

## Danger

The main danger in such a situation is that the Left will not only give Biden a honeymoon, but defend him against Republican attacks, further marginalising itself as an alternative to the two capitalist parties. That will leave the Right as the only opposition to a neoliberal regime.

The tragic dynamic of this long election cycle underscores the importance of opposing lesser evilism.

The Left began with unrealistic expectations that Sanders could win the nomination and push the Democrats in

a progressive direction.

Predictably, the capitalist establishment united to defeat Sanders more easily than it did in 2016, and held him to his pledge to campaign for the Democratic nominee. Most of the Left have followed him to support Biden.

It is particularly tragic to see DSA leaders issue a statement calling for members to campaign against Trump (i.e. for Biden), in violation of the "Bernie or Bust" resolution passed at our last convention. While their organising for Biden will have no impact on the election, it will encourage a new generation of socialists to adopt the self-defeating politics of lesser evilism.

They and others on the Left justify their decision on the basis that Trump is a fascist who poses a unique danger to democracy. They argue in this "exceptional case" that the Left should abandon its opposition to the Democrats to defeat a potential autocrat in the White House.

## Mussolini

Trump may aspire to be a Mussolini and rule without the usual limits of capitalist democracy. However, most Republican elected officials, the state bureaucracy, Pentagon, CIA, FBI, as well as the majority of the capitalist class, do not support the imposition of a dictatorship.

The real fascist danger is in the streets. While the far right and fascist militias are a growing threat – as the plot by a Michigan militia plot to kidnap the state governor proves – fortunately, they are still internally divided and relatively small in number.

After an all-out national mobilisation to Portland, Oregon, the Proud Boys managed to assemble only 200 people. We can defeat their ilk not by relying on Biden's deployment of the FBI – which has always targeted the Left – but by building mass mobilisations to confront them and drive them off the streets.

In order for the new socialist Left to survive, grow, and build a real alternative to the two parties of capital, we need to break with the disastrous legacy of lesser evilism. We encourage socialists not to waste their time campaigning for Biden and his party, no matter what they do at the voting booth, or on their ballot.

We must prioritise building class and social struggles, beginning by defending the right to vote and the election outcome by taking to the streets – something Democrats will oppose, urging reliance on the courts and Congress, instead. And we need to prepare now to confront the continued capitalist offensive that a Biden administration will lead in the coming months and years. □

• Abridged, with thanks, from the online magazine [Tempest](https://www.tempestmagazine.com/).



# Back Hawkins, not Biden

Workers' Liberty's National Committee on 24 October debated the 3 November US election. This is the motion it passed.

The political crisis that will probably happen in the aftermath of the US Presidential election will be caused by Trump refusing to accept defeat. That crisis may, if it takes an extreme form, push Trump to begin co-ordinate a violent right-wing street response.

Our role is to back US socialists, the labour movement and the oppressed, to rally in defence of democratic rights.

Trump is not a fascist. His aim is to stay President. Being a vile, sexist, narcissistic, right-wing populist is not enough to label him a fascist.

A movement around Trump, in the aftermath of the election, could develop in a clearly fascist direction but that does not justify designating him a fascist now. It is a misunderstanding of what he represents now.

Trump has no street movement under

his control, although his Presidency has created conditions for the growth of the racist right and far right and various types of militia groups.

There is no pressing, desperate reason for us to advocate a Biden vote. The pressing matter is supporting a mobilisation to defend democracy from the election loser's power-grab.

We will not advocate a Biden vote. Biden is a wretched representative of a mainstream bourgeois party, the Democrats, which has traditionally been a net that has enmeshed US radicals.

A Biden vote would confuse our message for the need for independent working class political organisation and voice in the US. Biden will almost certainly introduce anti-working class and anti-migrant legislation. Biden may well pave the way for a new Trump, or someone worse than Trump.

Voting for Biden may well open up a small audience to us by removing a barrier. But given our tiny weight the main reaction will be, amongst small



numbers who might listen to us, "We're glad to have you onboard". Chiming in with the "Vote Biden" clamour makes it less likely, overall, that our key message about the need for independent working-class politics is heard.

We oppose US socialists having an activist orientation to the Democrats. The Democratic Party is not "reformable" via an intervention from US labour or the socialist left. It is not a US Labour Party. It is an electoral machine, primarily. There is little space for activists. There are no mechanisms to hold

elected Democrats accountable.

On balance we favour a vote for the Green candidate, the socialist and trade unionist, Howie Hawkins. It is unfortunate that the Hawkins campaign is not bigger, broader, better and more likely to organise and educate a new layer of American socialists. That is a measure of the state of the US left. But at least Hawkins' propaganda and policies are good. That means something. □

• The other motion, and an amendment, at [bit.ly/us201024](https://bit.ly/us201024)



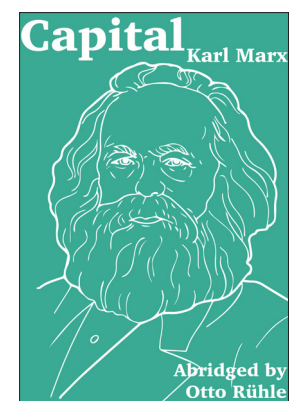
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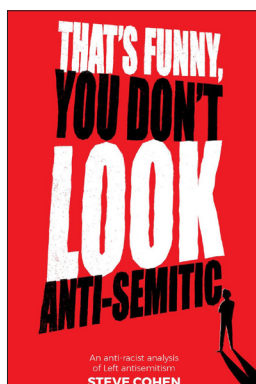


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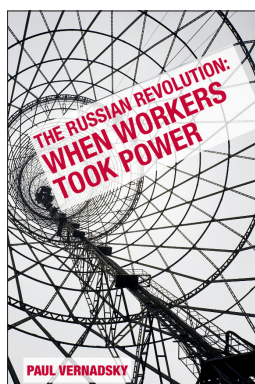


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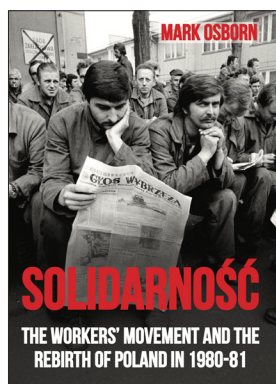
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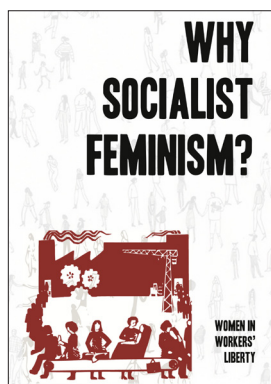
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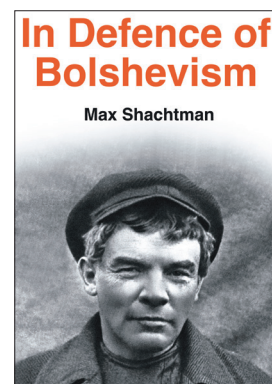
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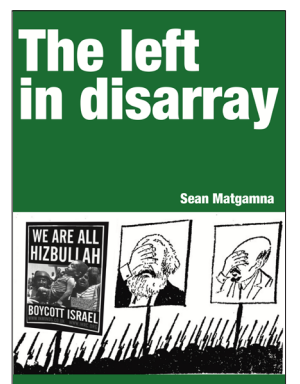
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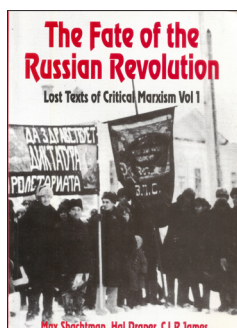
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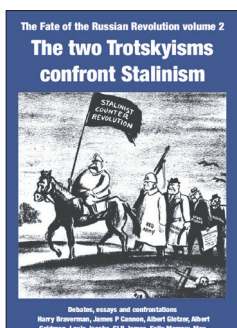
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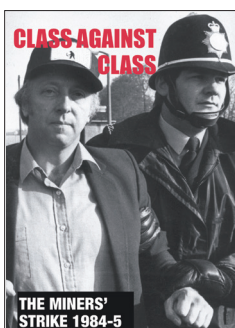
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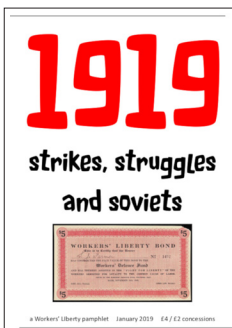
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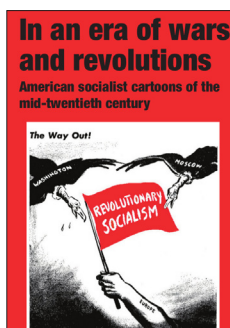
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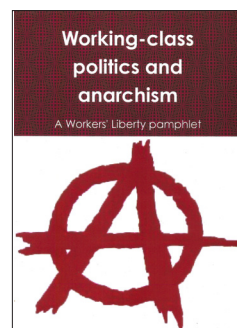
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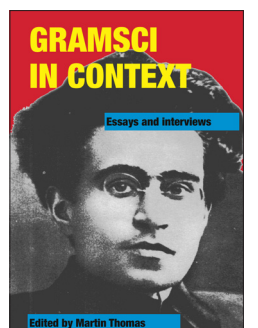
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# A policy based in realities



## Debate

By Martin Thomas

Donald Trump is “setting the stage for an authoritarian Second Term”, putting people in place, putting down markers for street violence and for the rigging or flouting of elections.

Branko Marketic gives some recent detail in an article for [Jacobin](#). In our debate in *Solidarity*, I think everyone has agreed that Trump and his base are at least “pre-fascist”, or “proto-fascist”, or “could develop in a fascist direction” after the 3 November election.

That makes Joe Biden, a standard neo-liberal, a lesser evil.

The obvious response in a vote between a lesser evil and a greater is to vote for the lesser.

### Exception

For socialists the big “exception” is this: if a vote for a third option can substantially rally an independent working-class party to combat both bourgeois evils, then that third choice is likely to be better in any but the shortest short-term. Bourgeois lesser evils often bring slower and more roundabout routes towards the greater evil.

Or if the difference between the lesser evil and the greater is thin, then even a token protest vote or abstention may be better, to focus the idea that we need to fight both.

In this case the difference isn’t thin, there is no independent working-class party, and the obvious response is better.

In the USA, support for broadly-defined socialist ideas, anti-racist activism, and even strikes on some dimensions have risen in recent years in the USA (though overall union density continues to decrease, to 10.3% on the latest figures).

Whether we like or not, the most solid chunk of that ferment has been gathered together, in one way or another, in the Sanders and Black Lives Matter movements and in the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), which added 10,000 new members in the first months of the pandemic to reach 66,000 members (from 5,000 in 2015).

Those leftists will mostly be urging people to vote rather than fearfully stay home, to vote Biden to stop Trump, and to stay mobilised against a Trump coup and for left-wing causes after 3 November.

I do not want to paint this ferment as more than it is. It is not an independent working-class party, and can’t become one in the next days or months. It is overwhelmingly reformist, not revolutionary. It is heavily based among

young high-formal-education city people. Many of the kitsch-left ideas as have messed up the Corbyn surge are influential in it. But, on the whole, the “Sanders surge” has been bigger and better than the Corbyn surge.

What should those people do now?

- Back Howie Hawkins, the socialist standing as the Green candidate

- Or combine a vote for Biden with an effort to organise themselves, reach out, recruit, push socialist policies, defend democratic rights against a “Trump coup” stealing the election, pursue radical reform of the decrepit US political system which even back in 1949 Max Shachtman described as “of all the bourgeois democracies, the most reactionary and the least responsive to the will of the masses” (*In Defence of Bolshevism*, p.141)

- Or, if the principle is “only vote for independent workers’ parties”, sit on their hands on 3 November?

The second option some US socialists have called “Defeat Trump, Battle Biden”. It starts from where political forces of the working class are now in the USA, and could haul them forward a step.

### Paint up

It does not require them to paint up Biden as Eric Lee does (*Solidarity* 569). It requires them only to say what the opponents of a Biden vote in this Workers’ Liberty debate *already* say: that we hope Biden wins.

With that second option, every word, every clause, is based on reality and not on private speculations. It is the politics of “tell the truth, no matter how bitter it may be”.

I used to think, though uneasily, that the Hawkins vote might still be better. Howie Hawkins is a respect-worthy socialist. On closer examination, backing Hawkins looks to me like an appeal to workers to turn away from the urgent issues towards a speculative political side-way.

I understand that some comrades want to back Hawkins *despite* his Green Party ticket. But in his recent interviews in *Solidarity* Howie explains that his plan for developing an independent working-class party in the USA is to build up the Green vote – a councillor here, a mayor there, a state rep somewhere else – and then “when 10 percent of the people start voting for the Green Party, then the unions will start looking at us!”

His recent statements give as a chief reason for voting for him that it will preserve the Greens’ ballot-line access for future elections.

Attention to Green Parties by small socialist groups should not be dismissed out of hand as “petty bourgeois”. But:

- The evidence across the world, in-

cluding from countries which have had stronger and more active Green Parties than the USA, is that Green Parties cannot be transitional forms towards independent working-class socialist parties.

- At a time when the popularity of socialist ideas in the USA has been rising, Green Party membership has been falling since 2004, and Green Party votes for the House of Reps halved between 2008 and 2018.

- Hawkins insists that Trump is in substance “not more right-wing than some previous Republicans” – only “his invective” is worse – and talks up a Biden victory as almost certain.

**“You have to tilt towards claiming Trump can’t win and isn’t *that* bad.”**

To take the Greens’ ballot-line access – or the *by-product* protest-vote value of a campaign whose own aim is Greens-building – as the *decisive* criterion, you *have* to tilt towards claiming Trump can’t win and isn’t *that* bad anyway. The prior scheme in your head distorts your presentation of reality, rather than you allowing reality to shape your message.

Of course I hope the polls predict right, and Trump’s coup talk proves empty bluster. The resistance from the growing socialistic and anti-racist ferment can be a big barrier.

As long as it isn’t lulled by arguments like those from Hawkins...

The policy of the DSA and the Sanders movement isn’t good, but it can be much better developed to get a message that *does* ring true.

The DSA is tied by a “Bernie or Bust” August 2019 convention decision not to back a Biden vote straight out. So it *says*: “A second Trump term would be catastrophic for our class” (draw your own conclusion, no?) and “we have to build our socialist movement, so that we can continue the struggle against austerity; the struggle to defund the police; the struggle to win a Green New Deal; the struggle to win Medicare for All”.

That message would ring more true and solid if developed to an explicit vote-Biden line (coupled with criticism of Biden), more explicit preparation against a Trump coup, and policies for democratic reform.

The chief Sanders organisation, [Our Revolution](#), says: “Organise a powerful grassroots movement inside the halls of power and outside in the streets to win transformative change after the election!”

Hawkins’ claim that Bernie Sanders

has dropped Medicare for All (*Solidarity* 569) is not true. On [23 October](#), for example, Sanders explained that Biden has a 100 day plan, and he, Sanders, has a *different* 100 day plan to fight for, with Medicare for All as item #1.

Marxists working within the movement could build on such stances to develop a sharper, clearer, more critical version.

Many of the objections to voting Biden are similar to arguments against voting Labour in Britain, for example in 1979, when Thatcher won. What if Labour under Callaghan had won? It would have continued the big social cuts it had already started. It would have brought in privatisation and curbs on unions as the Labor leaders in Australia, Callaghan’s political close kin, did when they took office from 1983. By demoralising people, it would have boosted Thatcherism’s plebeian base.

All that would have happened unless we, the left, had been able to turn things over within the labour movement. We worked to develop a socialist voice within the Labour vote in 1979 because that was the best way to build a force to turn things over. No such force could have been built by people who had first “sat out” the 1979 poll.

### Party discipline

Labour is a “bourgeois workers’ party”, and the Democrats are a straight bourgeois party. There is little “party discipline”, but senior Democrats advise their new Congress members that they must spend four hours every day phoning to get donations for their next election campaign. Of course, mostly they’ll be phoning and seeking favour from rich people.

The difference is important. But today, whatever about yesterday or tomorrow, there is enough truth in the “building a party within a party”, “dirty break” idea current in the Sanders movement to make a basis for a “vote and fight” tactic.

And for exactly the same reasons that there has been enough truth in that idea for Marxists to get involved (critically, as ever) in the Sanders campaign and the DSA. Not all Marxists agreed that was right. But if you did agree it was right, then “Dump Trump, Battle Biden” is *less* of a “turn to the Democrats”.

An argument that it’s OK to get involved in Democratic primaries to back left candidates, and to back those left candidates in general elections, but it’s not OK to take 3 November as a “referendum on Trump”, is incoherent. □

- More of this argument online: “Fascism and Trump: theory and history”, [bit.ly/fa-tr](#), and “Marxists and the Democrats”, [bit.ly/de-ma](#)



## “” 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)

# Control and the pollutants



## Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

There is talk among the operatives that the Environment Agency will be setting new emissions limits across the UK. Our daily limit for sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), which causes smog and lung irritation, is already lower than most power stations because we're based in a city – but not by much. SO<sub>2</sub> emissions may be reduced across the board, regardless of plant location.

Another monitored pollutant is Nitrogen Oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>), which irritates the lungs, affects soil chemistry and reacts to create ozone, a more powerful pollutant. The plant controls NO<sub>x</sub> emissions by spraying urea into the furnace with long probes. The urea breaks down NO<sub>x</sub> into nitrogen and oxygen, with a by-product of ammonia. The Environment Agency is considering placing an emissions limit on ammonia, which damages ecosystems, irritates the eyes and lungs and smells strongly of piss. Our plant has a problem, as our control measure for one pollutant, NO<sub>x</sub>, will be creating more of a different pollutant, ammonia.

The control room has run some tests over the last month, reducing the emis-

sions limits and compelling the system to pump in more lime and urea to control the gases. Sometimes our waste ash has been so thick with ammonia the buyers refuse to collect it, but we've found that NO<sub>x</sub> can be reduced up to a point without an ammonia spike. The question will be what reductions the Environment Agency will order.

Another problem we have is with dust spikes in the air filtration system. Our maintenance team have been up at the top of the plant all week, lifting lids on cells of tubular bags that hang vertically over rows of hoppers. The bags are caked with a lime and carbon mixture that absorbs pollutants and particulates. The gas is supposed to flow through these bags and exit the chimney clean, however dust is getting onto the clean side and setting off alarms.

To get to the bags we have to break the air seal on the cells using a small crane and lots of crow-bars. Once the lid is off we shine strong torches into each bag looking for tears or build-ups of dust. We unbolt the air lines that criss-cross the bags and then prise damaged bags out – it's an 8-meter long wire frame wrapped around with a long yellow canvas sock. B shoves a long screwdriver through the frame and then uses the crane to tug it up while we dislodge it with bars; once

loose, we pull the length of it over our heads and shake white powder over everything. G and M diligently vacuum everything as we go, so that no leaks are missed.

B tells me – "The key is not to drop anything into these hoppers. We've dropped bags into these before and it's a nightmare getting them out."

As we're closing up, G drops a bag into the hopper, and everyone laughs. It takes some time for the bag to fall through the hopper and onto a screw-conveyor beneath it. J puts the conveyor into manual, and we open the doors, dumping a heap of lime onto the floor. We can see the bag wrapped tightly around the screw; I lever it with a bar from one end, stepping out the way of falling lime, and M and G pull from the other while J nudges the conveyor forward in increments.

"Come on J!" G shouts, "Keeping it coming!" At the end it's like a tug-of-war, with all three of us staggering backwards when the bag comes free. We put the lids back on the conveyor, put it back in automatic, and go to change our overalls. □

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

## Almost at our target

With donations of £5 from Hugh and £400 from Bruce we are at £9,849, only a few pounds short of our target of £10,000 by 22 November, and with four weeks to go. Our fundraising has allowed us to take on another office worker, who has been working on mailings, book cataloguing, and a new book list, we have built in more resilience to our IT infrastructure in the past week, and we've bought a new work table for the office.

Nottingham too is now in tier 3 restrictions. Even though there were three street protests in central London last Saturday, 24 October, it is likely that such street activity will drop off. So, even despite it getting dark earlier, we are upping our own street stalls. Being a publicly accessible socialist presence during the pandemic is important.

We understand some readers will be staying at home more.

We urge them to consider getting a new subscription to *Solidarity* now, starting or increasing existing standing orders, and phoning round friends and workmates to get them to subscribe. □

• [workersliberty.org/sub](http://workersliberty.org/sub) and [workersliberty.org/donate](http://workersliberty.org/donate)



## Anti-racism in the 1950s



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

While black workers were fighting against the "colour bar" and about a year after the Notting Hill riots, Roy Barker directed *Flame in the Streets* (1961). Shop Steward Jacko Palmer (John Mills) argues for the rights of Gabriel Gomez (Earl Cameron) a black worker in his factory, but then has

to confront his own prejudices when daughter Kathie (Sylvia Simms) falls in love with a black man, Peter Lincoln (Johnny Sekka).

Despite its occasional clunky dialogue, it is a hard-hitting and powerful film. Earl Cameron was one of the prominent early black actors in British film and TV and died only this year. The theatre in Hamilton, Bermuda is named after him. The historian David Olusaga wrote: "Not just a brilliant actor but a link to a deeper history". □



# Sick pay for outsourced workers



**John Moloney,  
PCS AGS**

The “Dying for Sick Pay” campaign, demanding full sickness and isolation pay for all workers, is continuing. We’ve been applying political pressure, and have written to the government demanding that the right of all workers, regardless of contractual status, to full sick pay is written into agreements across the civil service on a permanent basis. MPs who work with the union have also raised this issue in Parliament.

Crucially we’re also contacting every outsourced worker member to discuss the campaign with them and encourage them to get active in the union.

Our reps working in Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) job centres have decided to suspend a plan to ballot around 800 members across several workplaces in Scotland, the north east, and the north west, after DWP bosses made further concessions over face-to-face working and workplace safety.

The DWP has agreed to strengthen workplace safety provision, and tightened up an agreement giving the individual worker control over whether claimants are seen face to face. That’s an important step, as it means no worker can be directly compelled to see a claimant in person.

The reps felt these concessions were sufficient to hold off on balloting for now, whilst negotiations continued. The suspension will also allow consultation with members on the further concessions achieved. The union intends to give DWP only a few days to make further progress. If this is not achieved then it is intended to ballot so as to allow action in early December.

The union is demanding the employers provide face masks for any worker working in the office rather than from home, for use in communal areas and where they are in close proximity to work mates.

Some civil service departments in some parts of the country, such as HMRC in Scotland, have agreed to this, but others, such as the DWP have refused. □

• John Moloney is the Assistant General Secretary for the PCS union, writing here in a personal capacity



## Tube cuts: prepare for action!

### From Tubeworker

Talks between TfL [Transport for London] and the government about a further funding bailout are ongoing, with discussions being extended past the 17 October deadline for the expiry of the previous package.

Tory attack lines blame Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan for “bankrupting” TfL. This is a blatant lie. TfL’s funding crisis stems directly from the Tory policy of abolishing its central government subsidy, meaning it became heavily reliant on fare revenue.

It seems Mayor Khan resisted some of the measures the government wanted to impose as a condition of any further funding, including extending the congestion charge zone. Will he continue to stand firm if the Tories start demanding cuts and restructures on LU?

We should demand that he does, but we can’t rely on him. We need to prepare to take action to resist any proposed cuts that come our way. A

*Financial Times* report said the Department for Transport was insisting on “workplace reform” as part of any further funding package, and Tory London Assembly Member Keith Prince has already suggested TfL cut staff nominee passes and our pensions.

The Tories want to bludgeon Tube workers, as one of the best unionised workforces in the country, with relatively good terms and conditions. That’s why the government insisted on including exploring the possibilities for driverless trains in the terms of reference for the review of TfL’s finances it commissioned KPMG to lead.

Even senior LU bosses know driverless trains would require substantial infrastructural upgrades to several lines, meaning any potential “saving” would be postponed until after years of huge financial outlay. The Tories’ obsession with driverless trains is an ideological

artefact aimed at attacking organised labour.


Aslef did the right thing by balloting pre-emptively. They now have a mandate for action which means they can name strikes at 14 days’ notice. Other unions on LU need to secure a similar mandate. Organising and winning an industrial action ballot in current conditions won’t be easy, and there are understandable anxieties about striking during a pandemic.


But ultimately, withdrawing our labour is our most effective means of asserting our demands and we can’t be afraid of using it. Our campaign needs to oppose any and all cuts as a bottom line, but also needs to be “counter-offensive”: we need to assert our own vision for publicly funded, democratically run public transport in London. □

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### What we demand in the crisis

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

• See full text at [bit.ly/what-d](https://bit.ly/what-d)  
• Animation of full demands: [bit.ly/demand-video](https://bit.ly/demand-video)





# Biggest student rent strike for years



## Work or full pay for all!

By Sacha Ismail

The government has scaled back the weakening of its job support schemes – without significant labour movement pressure. If the labour movement fights, we can win more.

The original, pre-October furlough and self-employment schemes were stingy enough, and they are still being cut. But the latest changes for after 31 October (increasing the state contribution to employers to keep jobs from 22 to 49%, and reducing the number of hours workers must work; doubling the payment to self-employed people from 20 to 40% of normal income) are real concessions.

Neither trade unions nor the Labour Party have clearly or vocally demanded even maintenance of the pre-October schemes. Labour spokespeople have criticised the Tories, but their only proposal has been the vague one for “more targeted support”. TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady actively endorsed the revised job support scheme which Rishi Sunak has now improved.

The Tories have given a little bit more because they fear economic chaos and social breakdown (or too much of them, at least). Their footing is not sure. If they are put under meaningful pressure, they can be forced to give a lot more.

The labour movement as a duty to step up and exert that pressure. Even with the latest announcements, millions will be unemployed by the new year. Conditions for those who remain in work will worsen. Young, women and BME workers are already and will continue to be hit the hardest.

Socialists in the trade unions and Labour Party

should raise clear demands to guarantee everyone a job or adequate support, and fight for the whole movement to take them up. Like:

- Instead of cutting back job support, reinstate the pre-October furlough and self-employed schemes, and plug their holes to cover everyone.
- Boost benefits. The government still intends to reverse the meagre £1,000 a year increase to Universal Credit. As a bare minimum, that must be stopped, along with reassertion of punitive “conditionality”. The TUC’s proposal to increase UC to £260 a week is right – it needs fighting for.

• Create good – socially useful, relatively well-paid and secure – jobs in the public sector. Given the scale of the crisis, and the hundreds of thousands of public-sector jobs cut in the last decade, we need to demand millions of new jobs.

We need comprehensive public ownership and provision in social care and in the health service to create the expanded services that are necessary. We need a fully public test-and-trace system, and a council house-building program. We need emergency funding to halt and reverse cuts in local government, universities and colleges, arts and culture and other sectors.

- Raise the minimum wage to £15 an hour. Ban zero hours contracts.

The labour movement needs an urgent discussion about its demands. And it urgently needs to start making demands.

Linked to clear and insistently repeated demands, political noise and pressure can force the Tories to concede more, weakening them in the process. Linked to a push to support and encourage workers’ struggles, it can be more powerful still. □

By AWL students

At the start of this week (26 October) around 1300 students at Bristol University withheld their rent for uni accommodation, amounting to around £2 million. This is the biggest student rent strike for many years.

Bristol students, who pay up to £8,000 a year, were promised the “full university experience” only to be locked down for weeks without adequate support.

The Bristol strike is more advanced than others that are being planned around the UK. Strikers are demanding the right to end accommodation contracts early and a 30% rebate if they chose to stay.

At Durham University 7.5% of students have been infected (the worst rate in the UK). As face-to-face teaching is very limited, most has come from students mixing in college accommodation. A lot of the colleges had to be put in lockdown, and the university was completely unprepared for that. The university had to draft in staff to feed students (inadequately).

The rate of infection is now falling but, as elsewhere, infections will probably go up again later unless new measures, including the right for students to go home and get out of rent contracts, are put in place.

Other forms of local action by staff and students

are now taking place.

Northumbria students have launched an online petition demanding “the right to move”, joining staff campaigning for online teaching.

Socially distanced protests were held last week at Birmingham Uni (calling for tuition fee rebates as well as demands on rent) and also in Sheffield.

### Uni cuts

Action is building around the cuts that many unis face. Students at Roehampton University have sent up a campaign to “save Arts and Humanities”, which have been threatened with £3.2 million cuts (@RoeSSAH).

These local campaigns need to be pulled together in a much stronger national co-ordination by both the higher education unions and the National Union of Students. The UCU’s [University and College Union] national petition campaign is good on demands – immediate online learning, the right for students to give up accommodation, funding for mental health support and secure long-term finance for HE – but it is just a petition campaign.

Minimally UCU, other unions and NUS should be building high profile days of action before Christmas and aiming to win these demands so next term is not more of the same chaos and misery. □





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## “WE’LL STRIKE TO STOP TRUMP COUP”

*David Van Deusen is president of Vermont's state AFL-CIO union federation. He spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity about how the labour movement should resist a Trump coup.*

There's a real possibility that Trump will lose this [3 November presidential] election, outright, but manipulate the process and use his powers as President to refuse to go. It's no joke.

There are various ways it could happen – there could be an attempt to discount or destroy certain ballots. If say Trump loses Pennsylvania, they have a Republican legislature which could choose to send pro-Trump delegates to the electoral college. He may have support from within the Department of Homeland Security, in addition to the non-AFL-CIO police unions supporting his candidacy, and extreme right-wing groups.

I don't know how quickly things would unfold. The US election system means there's various benchmark dates. Early December is when the electoral college meets. It may be a slow roll into crisis or it may happen rapidly.

Vermont AFL-CIO is the first state labour council to come out for a general strike if Trump attempts a coup. We'll be tak-

ing that position to our state convention on 21 November, and asking for authorisation to call strikes if it comes to it. We want a mandate from the rank-and-file as we head into uncertain waters. I'm confident we'll get it.

We're not going to let this country flip into dictatorship without using every weapon to stop it, and the strongest weapon we have is withholding our labour.

In our leadership we have a range of views, from people who are excited to elect Biden to probably more who think he's not likely to go anywhere like far enough.

No one is arguing for anything less than defeating Trump, but our focus is to defend democracy. There's no disagreement about organising action to resist a coup. Once we've secured that we need to fight for a labour-oriented Green-New-Deal-type recovery program, and that will be a fight whoever wins.

Of course some of our members hold right-wing views, but I don't think pro-Trump views will be a major obstacle to mobilisation in Vermont. I'd be surprised if he gets 30% here, and among union members it will be much less.

The hardest thing will be the unfamiliarity of strike action as a political tool. But even in 2016

when Trump was installed we had 20,000 protest in our capital Montpelier, population less than 8,000. If there's a coup I would expect much larger numbers, and if we call a general strike larger still.

Political strikes are illegal under federal law. But coups are illegal too! If the right seeks to disregard the constitution and remain in power despite the will of the people, all bets are off. We will do what we have to do.

If we have to go above and beyond normal legal procedures, opposing a coup and defending democracy is more important than whether we have an "unfair labour practice" charge filed against us.

Beyond Vermont, some significant local union bodies have passed resolutions calling for a general strike, including the labour councils in Troy and Rochester in New York state and in Seattle. Those plus Vermont is not a general strike, but it's a start. I think the discussion will spread and if it becomes clear the Trump administration intends to reverse or negate the outcome, it will spread exponentially. □

• Full interview at [bit.ly/dvdinterview](https://bit.ly/dvdinterview)

• For more on discussions in the US labour movement see this article [bit.ly/labnotescoup](https://bit.ly/labnotescoup)