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US Right still strong after 3 Nov election

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Socialist politics can undercut Trumpism



Editorial

“The Democratic establishment cannot comprehend what will happen after Biden is elected. We are not going back to business as usual. There is too much pain out there, too much inequality, too much injustice. If we cannot begin to address the crises facing this country, then the future will be very, very dismal indeed. The people are giving us an opportunity now; if we blow it by not being bold and aggressive, the next Trump who comes along will be even worse than this one” – Senator Bernie Sanders.

The thousands of people who poured onto the streets of US cities on news of Donald Trump’s electoral defeat were right to celebrate.

The vast majority of demonstrators will have voted for the Democratic candidate, longstanding establishment neoliberal Joe Biden. Workers’ Liberty agreed with those on the US left who campaigned for the Green Party candidate, socialist and trade unionist Howie Hawkins. But we understand why most left-wingers voted for Biden, in order to defeat Trump.

The extreme-right populist movement cohered around Trump remains very much alive. So do the conditions of social and democratic decay which gave birth to Trumpism. After a long string of scandals and purges of top officials for not being compliant enough, Trump still got more votes than in 2016.

Insurgent labour and socialist movements can change these conditions and confront and push back Trumpism. There is a growing left-wing ferment in the US, coming out of the Sanders campaign, the Black Lives Matter movement, and workers’ struggles, which can develop that direction.

During the election that ferment was visible and had an impact. There was the enthusiastic push to oust Trump, with increased turnout from young, black and Latinx voters. More left-wing candidates, some calling themselves socialists, won election to Congress and local offices. State referendums agreed left-wing proposals (on police accountability, taxing the rich to fund services, restraining police and court action on drugs...) Trump won Florida, but Florida also voted in a referendum to raise the state minimum wage from \$8.56 an hour to \$10 now and \$15 by 2026.

The US population as a whole has not moved to the right. But Trump has been able to give the right-wing elements in the thinking of large sections of the population more political traction.

The Democratic leaders worked to narrow the focus to Trump’s excesses, with an implied desire to return to the pre-2016 status quo. Faced by aggressive Republican

agitation against “socialism”, they ran scared of any clear message about changing society. They rejected more radical proposals (such as Medicare for All) and said little about less radical ones they supported on paper (a limited public healthcare option).

US socialists and left-wingers argue that this vacuum of positive vision and policies limited the possibilities for mobilising a mass movement or eroding Trumpism’s appeal.

While Trump lost, he increased both his vote total and his percentage share. He consolidated his support among white people (men, especially, in households on over \$100,000 a year but with little formal education) in smaller towns, and startlingly made some inroads among black and Hispanic voters.

The Republicans have probably maintained control of the Senate. That control enables them to veto Biden’s choices for Cabinet appointments, and to block even the mild reform legislation he may push. The Republicans will continue to dominate state legislatures, allowing them to redraw electoral boundaries in their favour after this year’s census. They still have all the right-wing judges Trump put into place.

The social and political disarray which gave birth to Trumpism will continue. Biden voters will see him as “doing nothing”, partly because he had little drive to reform anyway, and partly because the Republicans are so well placed to block even the mildest measures. The idea of backing a Trump-like candidate, just to get “strong government”, will be boosted even among many who dislike much about Trump.

Some form of Trumpism will surely survive as a very big movement, proclaiming the Biden government fundamentally illegitimate in a hyped-up re-run of the agitation which argued Obama couldn’t really be president because (allegedly) he was born outside the USA. “In opposition” its extreme-right character may deepen further. Most likely it will continue to reshape the Republican Party, and very possibly it could return to power.

Yet the US left, in the broadest sense, has got stronger in the last decade or so. That stronger left, refusing to accept the limits set or accepted by Biden, and working to revive and build up working-class organisation, can shift what is possible.

Determined workers’ action can win concessions and changes even under right-wing governments, as the US’s explosive schoolworkers’ strikes in 2018-2019, many of them in Republican-ruled states, showed. The conditions for struggle will be better now than they were before the election. Discussions among US labour movement activists about resisting a possible Trump coup revealed substantial layers increasingly up for a fight.

As part of solidarity, we should learn from comrades in the US, whose struggles are, despite their difficulties, in many ways more advanced than ours. □

Trump's defeat: excerpts from the US left

The working class needs a party

While breathless... expectations of a blue wave totally flopped, there was a red wave – our kind of red! So far, 28 out of our 37 nationally-endorsed campaigns have won; we have “squads” in [15] state legislatures... and we won 8 out of 9 major ballot initiatives.

We're still just a political organisation [i.e. not a party], but contrast that with a Democratic Party that fails to listen to working class people and fails to invest in building grassroots power. It has become a failure – or perhaps was never designed to empower us in the first place...

So how does the working class build enough real power in such a rigged system to eventually have our own party? We're figuring it out together! We know it starts with putting boots on the ground to demand democracy, but it goes so much deeper than that... Our chapters in every state of the country will be out asking our co-workers and neighbours how we resist both fascism and neoliberalism and build a better world. (bit.ly/dsa-ms)

*Maria Svart,
National Director of the Democratic Socialists of
America*

Fundamental discussion needed

For the second straight election, US voters have actually repudiated Donald Trump's repulsive, racist and nativist message...

Third-party campaigns appear to have been pretty much overwhelmed by the polarisation of the two main capitalist parties. The Green Party campaign... is showing a 0.23% vote, but we'll need more time to see where Green results may be significant in local or state races...

The socialist left, essentially a spectator in electoral terms, needs to be with the movements fighting the battles that most matter – around racial justice, police brutality and prison abolition; on the sadistic treatment of asylum seekers, family separations and terror raids in immigrant communities; on the climate catastrophe; on defending reproductive rights and Queer communities from what Trump's Supreme Court might inflict.

A fundamental discussion is needed about what independent political action means today and how to move it forward. Solidarity hopes to help advance that discussion among activists looking for a way to break out of the crippling two-party political trap. (bit.ly/solresp)

*David Finkel,
of the US socialist group Solidarity*

The working class divided

Biden has had the support of weighty sectors of the capitalist class, like tech and entertainment, as well as pharmaceuticals and real estate. Many professional or-

ganisations of doctors, lawyers, and others endorsed him. Like all Democrats he has had the support the AFL-CIO and all of the major labour unions with few exceptions, as well as most Black and Latino, women's and LGBT organisations. Trump, of course, still had much support from other sectors such as casinos and gambling, oil and gas, contractors and manufacturers and his own networks of professionals.

The election, as was to be expected, showed the country divided geographically along traditional lines, with the coasts going for Biden and the Midwest and South for Trump... Almost everywhere, the Democrats won the cities and the Republicans the rural areas. 90% of Black people and 65% of Latinos voted for Biden... Biden won more women's votes, especially suburban women. The working class is completely divided, Trump winning 55% of men without a college degree while Biden won 43%. The majority of white workers support Trump, the overwhelming majority of Black and Latino workers back Biden. (bit.ly/dlbnewpol)

*Dan La Botz,
on the New Politics website*

A referendum on Trump

We are happy to see Trump go. Good riddance! This election was a referendum on Trump. Biden was Not-Trump, nothing more. Biden has no solutions for the climate, poverty, racism, and nuclear war.

The Hawkins/Walker campaign thanks our supporters for their donations and campaign work in a difficult year for the Green Party and independent socialists. The media blanked us out. After the Democratic establishment closed ranks to defeat Bernie Sanders, most progressive leaders lined up behind Biden without making any policy demands on him. The Biden administration is now free to ignore them.

We will continue to fight for a Green New Deal, an Economic Bill of Rights including Medicare for All, and a reprioritisation of federal spending from militarism to caring for the people and the planet. We will continue organising toward a major party of the green and socialist left and supporting the election of thousands to local office and, on that foundation, to state legislatures and Congress as we go into the 2020s.

We are running out of time on the climate, declining working-class life expectancies, and the new nuclear arms race. Real solutions can't wait. (bit.ly/howie-a)

*Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker,
Green Party candidates for president and vice-president* □

• Also worth reading: “In the streets for the next four years”, by Eric Blanc, on Jacobin bit.ly/inthestreets4

Behind-the-scenes battle over Biden?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

It is no secret that there are disagreements amongst supporters of *Solidarity* and *Workers Liberty* about the US Presidential election and a Biden vote. It's no secret because we've had the debate out in the open, in this paper and on the *Workers' Liberty* website.

All the signs are that something similar has been going on at the *Morning Star* (and presumably, also within the Communist Party of Britain). With one big difference: it's all behind closed doors, signified only by the dramatically differing tone and content of various articles and editorials in the *Morning Star*. (All dates are from the print edition):

- *MS* editorial, 24-25 Oct: "On abortion, green jobs, healthcare and racism, Biden edges past Trump."

- Zoltan Zigedy, 28 Oct: lengthy article that doesn't advocate any vote or even mention Biden but denounces liberals with "their loyalty to globalism and elite rule ... Witness their Black Lives Matter signs in their nearly all-white, segregated neighbourhoods. They are for symbols and gestures, but not at the cost of redistribution of their incomes ... for them Trump is the scourge blocking the return to Obama-like civil management of national affairs. They are the dominant force in Democratic Party politics."

- Peter "Frosty" Frost, 30 Oct: "I am sure like me you have everything crossed for a hopeful result ... Biden is of course, though a million miles better than Trump, no socialist candidate."

- *MS* editorial, 3 Nov: "For anti-imperialists, it should be clear that Trump must be defeated ... A Biden presidency would, like a Keir Starmer premiership, seek to shore up a broken liberal capitalist model. Given the experience of bids to do that under Barack Obama or Emmanuel Macron, it seems unlikely they can succeed."

- Interview (3 Nov) with C J Atkins of the Communist Party of the USA on their "Vote Against Fascism" campaign, which they describe as part of the "anti-Trump coalition". Nowhere did Atkins actually state that the CPUSA advocated a Biden vote – though in fact it did, and almost uncritically.

- *MS* editorial, 6 Nov (first comment after the early results): "How much evidence is needed before the collapse of centrism is evident to the centrists? ... There are echoes here of the well-funded but futile bids to rebuild the 'centre ground' in Britain between 2016 and 19 ... the People's Vote and associated pro-EU campaigns ... For the rise in 'populism', as the liberal centre tends to define both the rhetorically anti-system hard right and the actual anti-system radical left, was not solved by Macron's narrow win and would not be by Biden's".

- *MS* editorial Nov 7-8: "But the celebrations [at Biden's victory] should end there. In the US, as in Britain and much of Europe, the left is faced with serious questions about

how we take on and defeat the race-baiting populist right ... No recent election provides any grounds to suppose that the liberal centre is regaining mastery. Indeed, in Britain, France and the US, its response to an aggressive right is to triangulate with it... Nor is there any suggestion that a better deal is on the cards under a Biden or a Starmer."

- Article by Kevin Ovenden (of Counterfire), *MS* 7-8 Nov (taking no position on the vote): "Right-wing populism is not fading way on account of exposure through holding office. Nor are capsized political systems of the neoliberal era automatically righting themselves. The centrist forces in alliance with the right have had success in throwing back the radical left electorally. See what happened to Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders. But even against Trump and with unprecedented bipartisan backing the Democrats have managed only narrowly to avoid losing."

What the hell is going on?

Now, there's no harm in a left paper carrying a variety of views, and not everything I've quoted above is rubbish. The point is, the *Morning Star* has not acknowledged that there are clear differences between its contributors, or carried explicit debate. Many of its readers must wonder what the hell is going on. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Friday 13 November, 6:30-7.30pm: Young Labour Internationalists (YLI) – PiS Off: The Fight for LGBT+ and Women's Rights in Poland

Sunday 15 November, 6.30-8pm: After the US election, which way for the left?

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

Friday 20 November, 6:30-7.30pm: YLI – Azerbaijan and Armenia at War (TBC)

Saturday 21 November, 11am-12.30pm: Assessment, class and inequality- abolishing GCSEs and beyond

Monday 23 November, 6-7pm: AWL students – Solidarity with the Uyghurs!

Friday 27 November, 6:30-7.30pm: YLI – UN Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence

Monday 30 November, 6-7pm: AWL students – Why socialist feminism?

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

All online

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and our calendars visit workersliberty.org/meetings □

Trumpism: down but not out

By **Barrie Hardy**

We can allow ourselves a moment of conditional satisfaction, if not rejoicing. The American electorate has decided to cancel series two of the Trump Presidency, and not just on the grounds of good taste. The raging pandemic, mass unemployment, and racial injustice were major reasons for his ouster in addition to his misogyny, racism, corruption and numerous other displays of narcissistic malevolence.

Unfortunately Trump's defeat has not been as resounding as many hoped. Seventy million Americans voted for a sociopath knowing full well what he was like. Biden achieved a record breaking popular vote, close to five million more than his rival, but Trump recorded the highest score of any Republican candidate ever and demonstrated that he could build significantly on his base amongst a largely white population of voters. His camp hope he can make a comeback in four years' time, either personally or via one of his designated successors.

Race and ethnicity have been more of a deciding factor in American politics than social class. The demographic time bomb still continues to tick against the Republican Party, as the US population becomes more diverse and better educated. Angry white men will increasingly become a minority, which is why in Republican controlled states voter suppression efforts will be redoubled.

Trump increased his vote in rural America and continues to enjoy considerable support among the "left-behind" working class in the rust-belt states, although he did nothing to improve their employment prospects. His main appeal is to older white Americans wanting a return to an imaginary "golden age" – essentially one of white supremacy.

Inroads were also made into the Latino vote in Florida, where the mere suggestion that Biden was a "socialist" was enough to move some towards Trump. Some increase in his vote share among black males was put down to naive comments from some influential rap artists.

It should go without saying that Trump is not a normal bourgeois politician. He's trashed many of the democratic conventions and restraints on presidential power with comparative ease. His policies have benefited the big corporations and super rich despite the belief among his mass following that he stands up for the common people.

A further term for Trump would have placed civil, women's and workers' rights under increased threat, not to mention public health and the environment.

Additionally there are his attacks on science. Some of Trump's highest recorded vote shares came in counties which suffered the worst deaths from Covid 19. When they passed around the Kool-aid in Jonestown, at least the deluded followers of that cult didn't know it was poisoned. With the Trump cult, his followers seem willingly to embrace the risk of being infected by a deadly virus.

Security fences have gone up around the White House and there is no signs yet that Trump is willing to leave the building when his time is up. Fascist elements among the faithful might even try some kind of Mussolini-style march on the capital in the more modern form of a heavily armed motorcade. We've even had talk from Bannon about putting "traitors'" heads on pikes.

Danger of violence

Trump's delegitimising of the electoral process serves to ramp up the danger of violence, and political assassinations could well be attempted given the current climate.

The left in America must demand that Trump and his gang be vigorously prosecuted for the numerous crimes they have certainly committed. Trump will use his remaining weeks in office to minimise the legal dangers he faces when he leaves it. Expect more pardons for his cronies. However, he will face more than a score of sexual assault charges which he cannot duck out of easily on becoming citizen Trump. We can add to that the numerous cases being investigated in New York regarding bank fraud and money laundering.

Federal cases like obstruction of justice should also be pursued. Just because he's an ex-President shouldn't make him immune from the law. Biden must not be allowed to let him off the hook for fear of antagonising his base and the Murdoch media.

Socialists also need to champion demands to end the obvious democratic deficit. The electoral college should be abolished and renewed efforts made to end voter suppression and gerrymandering. Calls for proportional representation are also needed to help socialist candidates get out of the two party straitjacket and build an independent electoral presence.

Trump has established a road map for a future right-wing authoritarian regime in America. Whether or not that prospect has been only postponed will depend on the ability of the left to build mass movements for democratic rights and social justice on the streets and in communities. Ending the dominance of the two rich men's parties should be the goal. □

“Green” goes beyo



Environment

By Todd Hamer

The [founding document](#) of the AWL is a polemic against the passivity of the Militant tendency: “The patient is suffering from sleeping sickness and blurred eyesight. But Doctor Militant is obsessed with a patient who suffers from hysteria and an extra sensitivity to the light. The prescription? Sleeping pills and dark glasses!”

I was reminded of that image when reading Zack Muddle’s [article](#) in *Solidarity* 567 “Overdoing doom saps activism”. Commenting on my book [review](#) in *Solidarity* 565 he suggests (on the basis of a review of another work by Wallace-Wells with the same name) that *The Uninhabitable Earth* is “alarmist, imprecise/unclear and misleading”. The scientific criticism of the earlier 2017 article prompted *New York Magazine* to issue four minor corrections and publish a fully annotated [version](#) of the article. In a later [face-to-face debate](#), Wallace-Wells’ most high profile and vociferous critic, world-renowned climate scientist Michael Mann, described the article as “excellent journalism”. Following the minor corrections, Mann was satisfied that Wallace-Wells’ science was sound. He would have preferred greater explanation of the different types of uncertainty about climate predictions: a fairly nuanced area of disagreement. To my knowledge neither Mann nor any other climate scientist has raised any concerns about the book.

Despite that, Zack’s purpose is to make a point similar to Mann’s early polemics: foregrounding the worst case scenarios is an irresponsible way of communicating climate science. It is an important debate about how to communicate climate science with three overlapping themes:

- Credibility – talk of worst-case scenarios creates a problem of credibility because often these scenarios are, by definition, based on uncertainty.
- “Scientific reticence” – some, such as NASA scientist James Hansen, have [argued](#) there are systemic biases that lead mainstream climate science to underestimate risk.
- Consequentialism – the worst case scenarios instil fear which in turn instils paralysis so its politically counter-productive.

For now I will focus on Zack’s main consequentialist argument. Michael Mann also made this the central criticism of the Wallace-Wells’ article. Mann [based his position](#) on research that showed “fear” of climate change is a poor motivator for support for green policy initiatives. What Mann fails to mention is that the same [research](#) finds the best emotion for engaging people in green policy initiatives is “worry”.

The authors explain that fear is a more intense emotion than worry, “typically experienced in response to a perceived immediate threat and primes the body for immediate action, including the fight or flight reflex.” Read in this light, Mann appears to be making the absurd claim that reading Wallace-Wells’ article could trigger an adrenaline-fuelled physiological panic response whereas his measured approach provokes a more productive low-level worry. The paper goes on to a banal conclusion that best combination of emotions for generating political engagement are worry and hope.

Both emotions concern our assessment of the future, how we perceive risks and potential opportunities. They are not mutually exclusive; you can experience worry and hope simultaneously. Deciding what is “most likely” within climate science is to a large extent a political, rather than a scientific assessment as it depends in large part on how much carbon is emitted. Mann’s criticism of Wallace-Wells boils down to the fact the original article did not clearly demarcate the uncertainty derived from not knowing how much carbon we will emit from the uncertainty contained within the science due to the limitations of climate modelling. This latter uncertainty is a key reason why Hansen and others have argued the case for scientific reticence: scientists are unsure how exactly ice sheets melt or when we will reach certain tipping points so they are reticent to speak about them. But Wallace-Wells’ worst case scenarios rest largely on the political uncertainty and a realistic appraisal that the political climate makes those worst-case scenarios much more probable.

Record

Based on the past record, there is no indication that the current political order is going to stop emitting carbon or start sucking it out of the air. There are substantial political reasons to think that it will not: competition between nation states, private ownership and control of land and other means of production, the wealth and political clout of the fossil fuel industry, the dependency of so much infrastructure on fossil fuels etc.

Michael Mann is a very courageous man who has been at the forefront of defending climate science against deniers. He has received death threats and taken on powerful interests in court. Interestingly, he has argued strongly for discussing the “fat tail of climate risk”: precisely what Wallace-Wells has done with this book.

But it seems to me that Mann, like many climate scientists, is politically utopian: he believes in a magical political fix in the same way that many bourgeois politicians believe in a magical technological fix. His approach also strikes me as being similar to the stereotypical right wing trade union bureaucrat: painting false illusions in the reasonableness of the capitalist class and over-stressing the importance of messaging and the art of persuasion. Mann hopes his precision messaging will mobilise world

and curbing carbon



leaders. Zack's approach is a left-wing version of the same mistake. Zack's wishes to avoid discussion of worst case scenarios because he believes it will provoke despair among workers who might otherwise be mobilised into action.

At root it is an argument about optics. But feelings of despair and impotence do not come from knowledge about the worst-case scenarios. They come from a lack of effective political strategy. If your strategy has to manage the messaging so tightly that it fades out the worst-case scenarios, then it is probably an inadequate strategy. Hope surely lies in a political strategy that is robust enough that it can succeed regardless of occasional flaws in presentation.

Reality

The reality is that the left, including the AWL, has not even begun to explore what the most likely climate-change scenarios might mean for the future shape of politics and working-class struggle, let alone developing political strategies to respond to a warming world. To give one example, a recent editorial of *Solidarity* argued that the recovery from coronavirus should involve "green jobs" that "curb carbon emissions".

It seems to me that the equation of "green" with "reducing carbon emissions" is an old habit that radically underestimates the new reality. Turning productive life to adapt to a warming world is now a much bigger task than merely curbing emissions and has been for some time. Ten years ago Mike Davis [wrote](#) "worldwide adaptation to climate change, which presumes trillions of dollars of investment in urban and rural infrastructures of poor and medium income countries, as well as the assisted migration of tens of millions of people from Africa and Asia, would necessarily command a revolution of almost mythic magnitude in the redistribution of income and power."

This is surely what is meant by climate change as "hyperobject". It is not impossible to understand, but a future that necessarily requires a "revolution of almost mythic magnitude" is nevertheless hard to grasp, to think about and face squarely. Its hard to break down the complexity into some tasks for political activists to engage in today that might open up the possibility of that future. It is hard even to keep up with the shifting curve of probabilities,

where every day the most hopeful scenarios are foreclosed as possibilities and the most extreme catastrophes become more likely.

In his book *1905*, Trotsky says: "Russian Marxism can be truly proud of the fact it was alone in pointing out how things were likely to develop, and predicted the general forms of that development at a time when Russian liberalism was living on a diet of the most utopian of 'realisms' and Russia's revolutionary populists nourished themselves on fantasies and a belief in miracles." Precisely because climate change will dominate the future and so radically change life on Earth, we have the potential to "predict the general forms of development" with some clarity. Because we understand history as a process of class struggle and have assimilated the lessons of past workers' struggle, we have the potential to see the social consequences and political dynamics of the coming period with more clarity than the climate scientists or our political opponents.

But that work has barely begun. Hope will come from developing a political strategy, rather than utopian dreams of a political or technological fix that will happen independently of our efforts, generated from unknown unknowns.

I remain convinced that study of *The Uninhabitable Earth* will aid that effort, but if Zack's comments have dampened your enthusiasm then Michael Mann has a new book out in January. Heterodox Trotskyists should read one or the other, or both, and set our minds to tackling the issue that will completely dominate the future. □

• Zack Muddle has written a further article in this debate, in *Solidarity* 570, bit.ly/z-calib, following on from the article in *Solidarity* 567 (bit.ly/z-doom) cited here by Todd Hamer.

Our audio!

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Lukashenko's base narrows

By Pete Radcliff

Workers' strikes expressing open defiance of Belarus's dictator-president Lukashenko continue to grow, though only incrementally, in Belaruskali, Grodno Azot and the Belaz car works in Zhodino.

Medical staff, who as in Hong Kong have been partly radicalised by the injuries they have seen inflicted by security staff on protestors, have taken to street protests.

Workers are being sacked in many areas for defiance or for "Italian strikes" ("working to rule"). The numbers involved in such protests are difficult to quantify, but many oppositionists claim the action is seriously affecting industrial output.

The marches on 8 November led to the arrest of between 400 and 1000 people across the country. Increasingly the security forces concentrate on trying to stop protest marches through early mass arrests of anyone suspected to be intending to protest. So many cops have been pulled into Minsk from elsewhere that some protestors refer to them as "the invaders" – a term also reflecting the suspicion that Russian personnel are amongst them.

The everyday brutality and repression will be having its

toll on Lukashenko's ever shrinking popularity. And the activist base of the opposition has grown dramatically, particularly among students and staff at universities.

The figureheads of the opposition who are at liberty abroad, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Pavel Latushka, a former junior minister in Lukashenko's government, are garnering support from European heads of state. Those heads of state have little influence on Lukashenko, and their support for the opposition may even harden Putin's support for Lukashenko. However not only Lukashenko but also Putin will be feeling the pressure.

Putin is still looking for a "safe" alternative to Lukashenko. Lukashenko has run such a repressive regime that few such figures exist.

If Putin can find one, they will need to extend the hold over the economy of those oligarchs close to Putin, dampen the protests in Belarus and not raise the democratic hopes of Russians over the border. Not an easy job.

Neither Putin nor the EU will give the people or the workers of Belarus what they need: workers' control and an end to "the kakistocracy" (as some students describe the regime: one run by the worst people). □

Khirbet Humsah: A village destroyed

By Mohan Sen

B'Tselem, the Israeli campaign for human rights in the Occupied Palestinian territories, reports: "On 3 November 2020, with the eyes of the world on the US elections, Israel demolished an entire Palestinian community in the Jordan Valley. A convoy of bulldozers drove up to the tiny shepherds' community of Khirbet Humsah and razed it to the ground." You can see a video of the demolished village at bit.ly/khdemol

Israeli forces left 74 people, 41 of them children, without shelter in the wind and rain. They demolished residential tents and sheds, livestock enclosures, storage sheds, kitchens, portable toilets, water containers, livestock pens and troughs for the animals, and solar panels. They also destroyed 30 tons of animal feed and took a vehicle and two tractors.

One Khirbet Humsah resident pointed out:

"The Israeli military came with jeeps and bulldozers. They ordered us to empty our homes. They gave us only



ten minutes. Obviously that isn't enough to empty even a single tent... They demolished it all with our things inside."

Another said:

"They demolished an entire community... What are we going to do?"

The village is (was) in area C, the Israeli-controlled part of the West Bank, where more and more demolitions are taking place as Israeli prime minister Netanyahu edges towards his announced aim of annexation. Israel suspended plans to formally annex much of the West Bank in September, as part of the deal for official relations with the United Arab Emirates, but only suspended them. House demolitions have continued throughout the pandemic.

The Trump regime greenlighted escalated Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. We must campaign for pressure on Israel to reverse its policy and accept Palestinian self-determination (a democratic "two states" settlement), as well as providing compensation for those whose homes it has destroyed. □

6699 Anti-racist resources

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

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources □

To win the future, change the movement

By Sacha Ismail

The Socialist Campaign Group of left-wing Labour MPs, which relaunched itself at the start of 2020, has published a pamphlet, *Winning the Future*, on “Socialist Responses to the Coronavirus Crisis”.

At a time when drive and radicalism are desperately needed, but Labour’s left is depressed and in retreat, the attempt to rally and raise ambitions is welcome. The pamphlet’s focus on developing and fighting for left-wing policies hopefully indicates a shift from previous Labour left reticence there. Its call for discussion of its proposals throughout the labour movement is encouraging.

After an introduction by SCG Secretary Richard Burgon, *Winning the Future* comprises 18 articles, each by an SCG-supporting MP.

There is lots of value in most of them. They assert important socialist – or at least left-wing social democratic – values and demands against the blandly technocratic politics of the Starmer leadership. Some of them nod towards going further than reforming capitalism.

With the current average of debate and radicalism in the Labour Party, the SCG’s proposals undoubtedly raise the level. However, they have major weaknesses, and the pamphlet suggests little in the way of a strategy to win them.

Winning the Future rightly foregrounds the jobs and climate crises, with demands for public ownership, social provision and workers’ rights. But there are very big gaps.

Despite its subtitle, the pamphlet says little about demands for the pandemic. It calls for increased NHS funding and reversing privatisation, and briefly mentions isolation pay. It airily advocates “Zero Covid” like New Zealand, without addressing the fact that New Zealand is two remote islands with rigidly closed borders and has not kept infections to zero (though it has kept them low).

It is weak on the right to strike. Articles by John McDonnell and Claudia Webbe call to repeal the 2016 Trade Union Act, but are vague on all the other restrictions (and say nothing about ways to defy the law). This has huge implications for everything from workplace safety in the pandemic to action on wider issues like racism and climate change – and in fact our movement’s ability to win all its demands.

There is plenty about public ownership, but the demands are not always clear or radical. Paula Barker’s article on social care has been given the title “For public ownership...”, but the text does not actually make this pivotal demand. Lloyd Russell-Moyle rightly emphasises the question of who controls and runs publicly-owned industry, but also seems to equivocate on full public ownership of water and energy.

The pamphlet contains virtually nothing about the

banking and financial system – certainly no call for public ownership and democratic control. Without that, the effectiveness and viability of the rest of the program is doubtful. Bell Ribeiro-Addy and Diane Abbott make important demands on migrants’ rights: but both present Labour’s policy under Corbyn as better than it was. Abbot calls for all detention centres to be closed, without addressing why the party she led did not advocate this. Ribeiro-Addy blurs back and forth between what she wants and what Corbyn’s Labour actually proposed.

The pamphlet does not call to defend and extend free movement.

Major flaws

All these are not small gaps but important structural flaws.

There’s an issue about how this was written, and whether it will be effective fixing ideas in people’s heads, or providing a clear focus for debate. The demands are not presented distinctly, but often “lost” in pretty meandering text. Compressing it from 90 pages would have made it punchier and increased its impact.

The weakest section is the final three articles, on “Building the movements to win change”. How to build our movements is not straightforward, but *Winning the Future* doesn’t really engage with the challenges.

Jon Trickett begins by declaring that winning the next election “ought to be our sole preoccupation”. *Sole?* And while he does not state it openly, Trickett strongly implies that the party has been insufficiently enthusiastic about Brexit.

Ian Lavery discusses the miners’ strike and the working-class organisation, ideas and capacities it helped develop. He says almost nothing about working-class struggles today. He talks about “community organising”, but does not explain how Labour’s “community organising unit” has actually helped people “build power and win”.

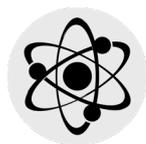
Beth Winter presents Wales’ Labour government as a model. She doesn’t suggest there has been any significant revival of the labour movement in Wales.

Winning the Future also says little about fighting to change Labour. There are references to the 2019 manifesto – but none at all to policy passed by Labour conference, or to the fight for party democracy. The authors might respond that the pamphlet is supposed to be outward-looking. But it does, rightly, also look inward, to the party. The absence of proposals to organise to change it is thus all the more striking.

The SCG should print *Winning the Future* as a physical pamphlet. Labour Party and labour movement activists should read and discuss it. □

• Download the pamphlet here bit.ly/scgpamphlet

Thoughts on the vaccine news



Science

By Andi Brookes

There's a tiny spark of optimism in the gloom of this November lockdown. On Monday Pfizer and BioNTech announced, to everyone's surprise, interim analysis showing their vaccine candidate for Covid-19 may have up to 90% efficacy in preventing symptomatic cases of Covid-19 in participants who received two doses three weeks apart.

That was based on analysis of 94 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in a trial expected to enrol 44,000 people across the globe.

Experts were cautioning that initial Covid-19 vaccine efficacy could be much lower. The US Food and Drug Association had set its bar for approval at 50% efficacy.

Frustratingly there is little accompanying detail, with the headline data announced by press release, rather than in a peer-reviewed journal, which means less scrutiny than an announcement of this magnitude perhaps needs. The primary goal of the trial, preventing symptomatic Covid-19 infections, will be analysed when cases in the trial reach 164, and it's unlikely we'll see a full data release announced before December, never mind widespread vaccination.

Christmas 2020 is still looking like a quiet one for everyone, and there are still a lot of unanswered questions for a vaccine that could be administered to billions of people:

- Does the vaccine protect against infection with the virus, or just render most infections asymptomatic?
- If it doesn't prevent infections, does it prevent people from being contagious to unvaccinated people?
- Does the vaccine prevent severe cases which result in hospitalisation and death?
- How well does the vaccine work in different populations such as the elderly, the chronically ill, or those with an underlying condition?
- What is the safety profile over the entire trial population?

Even a full peer-reviewed dataset doesn't end the need for caution. Logistical questions of distribution and administration – people need to receive two doses three weeks apart – will be difficult to set up, even in countries with developed healthcare systems.

The idea that we could have a full global vaccination programme set up by Christmas (as suggested by a member of the UK's Vaccine Taskforce, Prof. John Bell) is laughable, particularly if the British government attempts to outsource this to Serco or another private company. In such a scenario there's a very real risk that the perpetual incompetence seen with Test and Trace would mean the vaccination program undermined and worse outcomes, such as continuing uncontrolled outbreaks and increasing vaccine hesitancy. Ensuring an effective route to deliver

the vaccine to whole populations (phased by vulnerability and age) is arguably as important as having an effective vaccine in the first instance.

Vaccine roll-outs in the UK should be planned and executed by local public health teams with the support of a national supply and distribution chain, and guarantee that whole populations can access these without any barriers. Anti-migrant policies already prevent some of the most vulnerable in society from accessing basic healthcare, even during non-pandemic times. Preventing anyone from receiving a vaccine stalls the control of the virus and puts everyone at risk from future outbreaks.

Fundamentally, any policies that restrict humans from accessing such basic health services are morally wrong, but even judged solely on the grounds that these are damaging to public health, those anti-migrant policies should be abolished.

Globally, what with distribution difficulties and access, some countries simply might not be able to use this vaccine. This vaccine needs to be kept extremely cold, making it hard to use in areas of the world where health facilities are not set up to store vaccines at minus 20 degrees Celsius. In addition, countries in the Global South are already struggling to guarantee access to vaccines that are readily snapped up by countries such as the UK and US, although the global Covax initiative is working towards manufacturing capacity for two billion plus doses. Those can then be distributed to countries left out of initial orders.

Other vaccines that are more stable at warmer temperatures are also in late-stage development (though these are lagging behind the Pfizer one) and may be better suited to deployment to more remote areas of the globe.

Socialists should be arguing for democratisation of manufacturing facilities for both drugs and vaccines, requisitioning them from private companies. Guarantees of free access to vaccines and healthcare regardless of income, location and immigration.

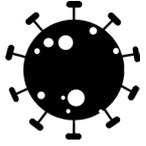
With the rise of online anti-vax conspiracies, we should also be talking to our colleagues, friends and family who might be hesitant about the vaccine, so that we can proactively debunk conspiracy theories and improve its uptake. The labour movement is far from immune to the virus of conspiracy theories, so we also need to take these arguments to union and Labour branches.

We should be critical of the motives of pharma companies – nobody should be making a profit out of sickness and death – but creating a safe and effective vaccine for Covid-19 is an overriding social benefit that we must support the wide scale implementation of.

Done right, this hopefully means winter 2021 will look very different to winter 2020. □



Back to lockdown. Then forward to...?



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

We're now in a new era of lockdowns. This article reviews the progress of some of them and looks back to discussions around the first wave of lockdowns.

Ireland's lockdown, running from 21 Oct to 2 Dec, with non-essential shops shut (as well as cafés, pubs, etc.), but schools open, has brought a 66% reduction in new case rates from peak.

Northern Ireland's lockdown, 16 Oct to 13 Nov, which included closing schools to 2 Nov, has produced a 40-odd% reduction in new cases from the peak.

Wales's, from 23 Oct to 9 Nov, has brought new infections only, at best, marginally lower. Schools were closed for years 9 and above until 2 Nov.

France's new lockdown, 30 Oct to 27 Nov, generally stricter but with schools open, has produced no deceleration of cases yet. Nor yet has Germany's, 2 to 30 Nov, with shops also open and limited household-visiting allowed.

The Netherlands', from 14 Oct and tightened from 4 Nov, similar to Germany's, has seen cases go down about one-third from a peak on 31 Oct.

Israel's second lockdown, from 18 Sep, with schools reopened from 1 Nov, in stages, and non-essential shops due to reopen from 15 Nov, has seen a reduction in new case rates from the peak in late September of 90%, but bottoming out from about the third week in October.

Melbourne, in Australia, from early August to early November, had a tight lockdown. Schools were reopened in stages from 12 Oct. Large steps towards reopening have come from 8 Nov after new cases were reduced to zero on most days since 25 October.

That was about a resurgence much smaller than in Europe (new cases per million for Australia at peak, 20; for Victoria, 100; for UK currently, 300).

Another marker for comparison is Greater Buenos Aires, in Argentina. It had a lockdown continuously since spring until 6 Nov, but new cases kept going up until 22 Oct.

Lockdown is the oldest and clumsiest form of infectious-disease control, dating back at least to medieval quarantines and used in the "Spanish Flu" pandemic of 1918-20. It has costs, which, like the pandemic itself, hit the worst-off hardest, and often countries which have "done well" in the pandemic so far have done it without general lockdowns: South Korea, Taiwan, Japan...

Being a remote island which closes borders helps (as in New Zealand and Australia), and so do a prior pandemic-awareness in the population (from SARS and such), an

accepted high level of state surveillance of individuals, and a better system of elderly care.

Where infections have already risen high, well-organised lockdowns have capacity to buy time. They take a while to grip, so the idea of a brisk two-week effort "breaking the circuit" was always fantasy. And they don't stop cases rising again after they finish. But their slowing of the curve may be vital.

Buying time

That is how we saw it back in March. We deferred to the scientists' view that time had to be bought by lockdown to stop the NHS being swamped, and argued for the labour movement to fight for social measures (isolation pay, workers' control in workplaces, requisitioning to boost the NHS and its supply chain...) We were slow to pick up on the centrality of bringing care homes into the public sector with staff on regular public-sector pay and conditions. We weren't as clear as we could have been that the pandemic was not a short "crisis" to be fixed by a few weeks or months of restrictions. Even a good vaccine, even soon, is unlikely to fix it. We will need sustainable counter-measures at least for many months, and probably much longer.

This is not a "second wave" of the virus, in the way that the "Spanish Flu" had three successive waves with distinct mutations of the virus. It is the same wave as earlier, only resurgent.

From April European governments tried to find what restrictions could be eased while still reducing infections. Until June-July that went well. Whether a workable regime, with public provision for self-isolation, attention to care homes, etc. could have been reached, we don't know. We'll soon have to try to find out again, and battle to get the social underpinnings for it.

With, and probably because of, the decisions to reopen tourist industries, cafés, pubs, etc. in the summer, and a correlated rise in private socialising, the infection curve started rising again, slowly at first, then fast.

Governments failed to use the virus lull in summer to establish sustainable curbs against a resurgence in winter which was always probable.

Britain's Tories have made a special mess of test-and-trace: we want a public-health effort in place of their web of profiteering contractors. But, on international evidence, even the best test-and-trace effort cannot quell infections on its own. It can only be part of a broader range of measures.

To get sustainable virus curbs we must get the labour movement to continue to organise as an "essential service", and to win the social underpinnings for those curbs. □

• What we said in March: bit.ly/540-pan

How myths of “Jewish domin

By Daniel Randall

Left antisemitism is a phenomenon that has, in my view, two principal historic strands, which now overlap and intertwine.

One, the primitive form, is the so-called “socialism of fools”, originating in the 19th century, that railed against Jewish bankers and conflated Jews with capital and finance. The second, more contemporary, strand developed over the second half of the 20th century, manifested in policies and perspectives which argue that Israel is an almost uniquely reactionary and illegitimate state, and that Jewish nationalism, Zionism, is an almost uniquely reactionary and illegitimate form of nationalism.

Antisemitism seeks to develop an explanatory worldview, based on the notion that the world is controlled by a secret cabal of powerful Jews. The late Moishe Postone described it as a “reactionary critique of capitalist modernity”, with a “pseudo-emancipatory dimension”. It is therefore particularly dangerous for any movement seeking to develop a genuinely radical critique of capitalism and oppression.

There was an antisemitic element to the writing of several prominent mid-19th-century left wingers. These people thought of themselves as, and in many cases, genuinely were, in the context of their time, radicals and progressives, but they saw antisemitism as a compatible part of their left-wing worldview – precisely because of that trope of Jewish power, of the conflation of Jews with capital.

Since the 2008 financial crash, the resurgence of conspiracy-theorist narratives, fuelled by social media and prevalent in movements such as Occupy, has given new life to these ideas in broadly left-wing spaces. It’s vital that the left draws a distinction between this conspiracy-theorist thinking and the class-based and rational opposition to capitalism the left should promote.

Contemporary

Contemporary left antisemitism, however, has a different, or at least additional, set of ideological roots, in a particular attitude towards Israel and Zionism which sees Israel as the quintessential expression of imperialism; Zionism as wholly synonymous with racism and even fascism; and exerting an inflated, perhaps even controlling, influence on world affairs; and the conflict in the Middle East as resolvable only by the state of Israel being somehow done away with, rather than reformed in some way, however radical.

The Israeli state’s treatment of the Palestinians must be opposed. Opposition to national oppression should be fundamental for the left, which necessarily implies full-throated support for the Palestinian people’s right to self determination.

But Israel is not in a special category in terms of being an oppressive power; sadly, many states oppress other national groups. It is only for Israel that much of the far left routinely implies that the solution is to dismantle not



merely Israel’s policies or system of government, or even its constitutional basis, but its very *existence*.

The way the far left sometimes talks and writes about Israel expresses this exceptionalisation. The Israeli state is sometimes referred to as “the Zionist state” and the Israeli Jewish national people as a whole are sometimes collectively referred to as “the Zionists”, fusing a national people with a nationalist ideology. The left does not refer to Turkey as “the Kemalist state”, or Turkish people as “the Kemalists.” Israel is a “Zionist state” in the same sense that Britain is a “British nationalist state”. We rightly critique British nationalism, but if we’re talking about the British nation, we just say “Britain”.

It is not antisemitic to imagine a future in which there is a unitary, binational settlement encompassing the whole territory of historic Palestine, or beyond. Fundamentally that is a debate to be settled by democratic accommodation amongst the people of the region. Personally I think democratic confederation and a unitary state are inconceivable without a transitional settlement based on two independent states. It’s not antisemitic to discuss that; it’s being discussed by Israeli and Palestinian leftists very vigorously all the time. But what is logically antisemitic is the claim that the Israeli-Jewish national community – undeniably a nation by any operable definition of the concept – should have no national rights at all. This applies a discriminatory double-standard to the world’s only majority-Jewish national group, whose origins as a distinct national community are inextricably bound up with, and are largely a product of, historic anti-Jewish oppression

"Zionism" have infected the left



and attempted genocide. To give you a flavour of how these politics have manifested on the far left, we can look to episodes such as the one in 1983, in which the Workers' Revolutionary Party, then a prominent group on the far left, claimed to expose a "Zionist connection" running through 10 Downing Street, the Whitehouse, the BBC, and Socialist Organiser, another socialist group which had criticised the WRP as uncritical of and apparently funded by Libya, Iraq, etc., and which was the predecessor organisation of Workers' Liberty.

Arguments

Although these arguments are often presented less explicitly and sometimes less shrilly today, these conspiracy-theorist attitudes to Zionism and Israel, which deny the legitimacy not merely of Israeli policy or constitution, but of the entire Israeli-Jewish national group, are still evident across sections of the far left.

These arguments are an inheritance from Stalinism, even though many of their contemporary adherents would see themselves as anti-Stalinists. Stalinism made a sharp anti-Zionist turn shortly after the foundation of Israel. In the Doctors' Plot of 1951, a group of mainly Jewish doctors were publicly accused of being involved in a "Zionist" plot to assassinate Stalin. The following year saw the Slansky trial, in which a prominent Jewish leader of the Czech Communist Party was accused of "Zionism", and subsequently tried and executed.

This marked the beginning of a decades-long period of industrial-scale production of antisemitic propaganda in the Stalinist states, usually taking the form of invective

against "Zionism", via literally tens of thousands of newspaper articles, books, and cartoons.

For example: "The capitalists of England, the USA, France, Germany, and other countries, amongst them millionaires and multi-millionaires of Jewish origin, who had their eyes on the wealth of the Near East, helped the creation of the Zionist idea. From the very outset it was linked with the project of the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish state as a Jewish fortress, a barrier against Asia."

This is from a book called *The Collapse of Zionist Theories*, first published in English in 1980. We see some common motifs; Zionism as purely a project of capitalist colonial expansion, and the creation of Israel as a racist project driven by "millionaires". This narrative falls back on many of the same conspiracy-theorist ideas we saw in primitive left antisemitism.

The experiences of persecution and genocide which turned Zionism from a minority current into a mass movement are harsh realities which continue to resonate in Jewish identity. And Jewish identity, like any ethnic, cultural, or national identity, is complex and sometimes contradictory. Some level of identification and affinity, however critical, with Israel, seen as, in Isaac Deutscher's useful phrase, the "lifeboat" and "raft" for post-Holocaust Jewish refugees, makes up an aspect of that identity for many, probably most, Jews.

Stalinist

The Stalinist form of conspiracy-theorist anti-Zionism cannot begin to engage with these complexities. It necessarily implies hostility to 93% of Jews in Britain, according to studies, and probably a similar proportion of Jews around the world, and not merely to their political views, but to the very fabric of what, for them, comprises their Jewish identity. All of this is why statements like "it's not antisemitic to oppose Zionism" or "it's not antisemitic to criticise Israel" often obscure more than they clarify. Of course it's not antisemitic to oppose Zionism or to criticise Israel; but some criticisms of Israel and Zionism *can be* antisemitic.

In debate around this issue in the Labour Party, many of the proposed solutions – tighter disciplinary measures, more expulsions, and so on – seek technical-bureaucratic fixes for political problems. A culture of knee-jerk expulsion will make the problem worse, not better. We need a political-educational campaign to confront these ideas.

The ultimate aim should be to replace the political common sense that the left inherits from Stalinism with a different one – based on consistent democracy, an assertion of the equal rights of all peoples and national groups, and rational analyses of history and contemporary society that reject conspiracy theories. □

• This is an edited transcript from a Workers' Liberty meeting, 13 September 2020. Full talk at bit.ly/left-as-talk

- More from Workers' Liberty on left antisemitism at workersliberty.org/left-antisemitism
- More on Moishe Postone at bit.ly/mp-obit

Poland: too early to celebrate



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Poland's right wing Law and Justice party (PiS) government has delayed implementation of the court ruling that would outlaw almost all abortion, after a wave of protests and direct action.

Michał Dworczyk, the head of the prime minister's office, told Polish media: "There is a discussion going on, and it would be good to take some time for dialogue and for finding a new position in this situation, which is difficult and stirs high emotions".

This is not the first time Polish activists have had to defend Poland's limited abortion rights. In 2016, when the government attempted to push similar anti-abortion legislation through parliament, it was forced to back down by the women's strike movement. Back four years later the PiS government tried another route through the courts, having already packed the constitutional judiciary with right wing judges.

The anti-choice ruling of the constitutional court has sparked the largest protests in Poland since the Solidarność movement in 1989, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets, defying both coronavirus and government bans on protests. Polish Women's Strike have



made demands which go beyond defending existing abortion rights, covering women's and LGBTQ+ rights, the separation of church and state, healthcare provision, education, and full judicial independence

It is important the movement does not demobilise. Ana Oppenheim, a Polish socialist feminist activist who recently returned there from Britain, warns against complacency:

"At the moment, the government doesn't seem to be in a hurry to publish the ruling or make it law, hoping to kick the can down the road until the protests fizzle out. This shows that the uprising has scared the ruling party. But it's too early to celebrate. We need to stay alert and get ready to be back in the streets when the topic inevitably returns."

Women's Strike should use the momentum of the protest movement and the government's hesitation to push on for more of their demands. □



Activist agenda

Unable to get *Solidarity* out at street stalls, street protests, and in-person meetings because of lockdown, we're phoning round with a special offer: pay £2, and we'll mail you six issues. If you don't get a phone call, take up the offer online at workersliberty.org/sub

Workers at virus testing sites run by contractors G4S are on zero-hours contracts and do not get isolation pay. Safe and Equal plans a campaign to press G4S on the issue.

Following a victory on restoring isolation pay for London Underground cleaners, Safe and Equal is working with supporters in the transport unions on a new push for isolation pay for all. Transport workers want to know that the passengers they work with haven't been forced

to travel to work by lack of isolation pay.

Safe and Equal is also pushing on with its Freedom of Information requests to hospitals about they give isolation pay to all workers on site, including agency and "bank" and contracted-out workers. Guy's and St Thomas's hospital has responded, but without a reply about contracted-out workers. The campaign is following up the issue.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement held a Zoom meeting for Young Labour members last week, with Nadia Whittome MP and Benny Hunter, and plans to build on that for migrant solidarity campaigning in the coming months. LCFM is also working on the campaign against Osime Brown's deportation.

Neurodivergent Labour has set its AGM for 28 Nov, 11am to 4pm, by Zoom. □

• Campaign info and suggested wording for labour movement motions at workersliberty.org/agenda

Progress depends on sticking in there



Letters

Eric Lee (*Solidarity* 570) reports that he quit the Labour Party when he saw antisemitism there in recent years, and has only now rejoined. He identifies the argument against Jewish members quitting Labour as one that, despite mistakes, Labour “has consistently fought against all forms of racism” and for “genuine equality and respect”.

That argument would make it naive to join Labour in the first place. In the very first years of the Labour Party, high-profile Labour figures, including on the left, denounced the Boer war as generated by “Jewish financiers”. They supported the anti-Jewish-immigration law of 1905, the Aliens Act.

Steve Cohen, in his 1984 [book](#) *That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Antisemitic*, records that: “From 1892, the TUC was formally committed to a resolution excluding Jews... The issue of immigration control was included in a list of questions to be asked of all Parliamentary candidates... the TUC sent a delegation to the Home Secretary demanding control”.

That progress was eventually made against that antisemitism (rife among Liberals, too) depended on the left-wingers, including Jewish leftists, who stayed in the movement and fought against it.

Then again, a recent [article](#) in *Solidarity* recounted how many trade-unionists supported “colour bars” on the rail for example. That was turned round by activists, including black activists, who stuck in there and fought.

In September a [report](#) commissioned by the GMB union found the union to be “institutionally sexist”, with misogyny rife. GMB women activists are fighting to reform the union, rather than quitting.

We are in the labour movement not because of an il-



Trousersmakers' Union banner in Yiddish and English

lusion that it is enlightened, democratic, and socialist by automatic guarantee. We are there because the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves, and that can happen only if activists both educate ourselves and stick at it, in the movement, to raise the culture. □

Colin Foster, London

Langston Hughes set to music



Letters

Given the interest shown in American poet, novelist, and social activist Langston Hughes in *Solidarity* recently, readers might be interested in listening to the album *Vari-Colored Songs* by Layla McCalla. The album is a tribute to Langston Hughes, and Layla puts seven of his poems to music on it. The rest of the tracks are largely traditional material heavily influenced by music from Haiti.

Layla is a native New Yorker singer and multi-instrumentalist whose parents migrated to NYC from Haiti. Langston Hughes spent several months in Haiti in the 1930's and was to go on to write the libretto for *Troubled Island*, an opera about the Haitian Revolution. He would also do readings of his work at the legendary Village Vanguard accompanied by the equally legendary jazz virtuoso Charlie Mingus.

Barrie Hardy, Liverpool

• Recent articles: bit.ly/harlem-r and bit.ly/ke-langston

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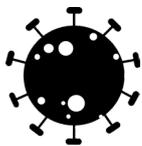
• What is left antisemitism, and how can it be confronted? With Daniel Randall

Plus playlists including

- Black Lives Matter, videos around the movement and related topics
- Socialist commentary on the Covid-19 crisis
- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series, still being added to
- An introduction to Marx's Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas □

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Pandemics and th



Covid-19

By Camila Bassi

With SARS-Cov-2 after H5N1 (or avian influenza), SARS, MERS, swine flu, Ebola, and Zika, we are living in an age of pandemics.

A widening circuit of agricultural production, consumption and exchange is pushing deeper into forests and back out into cities. Host species that historically would have been confined to deep forests are now transported to peri-urban regions with high concentrations of human bodies. Traversing a globally integrated air traffic network, pathogens previously not on the global stage are being brought to it.

The context of Ebola and other diseases emerging in and from West Africa is that it is currently the fastest urbanising area in the world. The population of West Africa has traditionally relied on fish protein. Since the 1980s, European, Russian and Japanese factory fleets have trawled and significantly reduced that biomass.

Multinational logging companies have increased their operations; to keep their costs down, they hire professional hunters to kill mammals in their path. With fish becoming too expensive for West African city dwellers, the population has turned to the consumption of bushmeat (originally eaten in the logging camps) as the major source of protein. In sum, this widening commerce of bushmeat hunting alongside the destruction of rainforest have generated new viral exposures and pathways to humans of previously isolated pathogens.

Without radical change to how we organise and run our world, our future will be locked into this trajectory of escalating pandemics.

HIV/AIDS

HIV-1 and HIV-2 originate from the Simian Immune-deficiency Viruses (SIV) of chimpanzees and sooty mangabeys in Central and West Africa, with the probable leap, from one chimpanzee to one human hunter of bushmeat (through a cut or wound), no later than 1908.

At that moment, what had been epidemiological dead ends were no longer so.

While official Belgian colonial rule of the Congo ran from 1908 to 1960, the groundwork for colonial expansion had begun in the late nineteenth century. Given the need of capital to self-expand and thus the impetus for greater mobility of both capital and labour, the 1892 steamship service from Léopoldville (later renamed Kinshasa) to Stanleyville (later Kisangani) and 1898 Matadi-Kinshasa railway (linking the port of Matadi to Léopoldville) provided geographical connectivity and concentration of

populations previously separated.

A rapidly urbanising Léopoldville became the capital of the Belgian Congo in 1923, with domestic flight services and by 1936 a direct international flight route to Brussels. Further geographical connectivity and concentration of capital and labour came under French colonial administration, notably, the construction of the Congo-Ocean railroad in the 1920s, which – cutting through forest – brought labourers into rural territories home to the Simian Immune-deficiency Viruses.

Once built, this railroad provided a constant flow of Africans and Europeans between Brazzaville (the new capital of the French colonial federation) through Léopoldville to Pointe-Noire at the coast. Road construction through the Congo Basin by timber companies pushed bushmeat hunters deeper into the forest and encouraged the growth of prostitution near the labour camps. One way or another, through new viral pathways that were new transport pathways driven by capital accumulation, by the 1920s, Léopoldville was home to HIV.

Sex and medical technology – specifically, the reuse of ineffectively sterilised hypodermic needles and reusable syringes in public and humanitarian health campaigns in Africa, and blood banks and transfusion services – were the key amplifiers of HIV.

By the 1920s Léopoldville had a large male labour force, with economic migrants discouraged by the Belgian colonial administration from bringing their families with them. Men outnumbered women four to one and prostitution was widespread.

The virus likely amplified through a campaign by the Congolese Red Cross which established a clinic in 1929 in Léopoldville to treat sexually transmitted diseases; this campaign ran throughout in the 1930s and 1940s and peaked, in terms of the number of administered injections, in 1953. Another possible amplification was during the 1930s though the vaccination campaigns along the railways against yaws and sleeping sickness, and against malaria in southern Cameroon.

HIV-1 group M subtype B travelled around 1966 from Léopoldville to Haiti and, in or around 1969, from Haiti to the United States. Congo's independence in 1960, marred by civil war, had led to an influx of refugees into Kinshasa and an expansion of prostitution. With the exodus of a Belgian expatriate skilled middle class, there were campaigns to bring in skilled labour from elsewhere. Overseen by the WHO and UNESCO, recruits came from Haiti in the early 1960s.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s a state ideological campaign known as Zairianisation or Authenticité – to rid the Democratic Republic of Congo (later renamed Zaire) of Western influences – had driven many of this labour force back to Haiti. It would have taken just one of these returnees to have carried HIV with them.

e drives of capital

In January 1972, the *New York Times* broke a story of the commodification and export of Haitian human blood plasma and a political economy involving both US based capital and the Haitian government. An American-owned company was buying blood plasma from impoverished Haitians who need the money and exporting 5,000 to 6,000 litres of it every month to the United States.

“Capital is dead labour”, which, Marx tells us, “vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks”. Via either one infected person or one infected container of blood plasma, around 1969, HIV travelled from Haiti to the United States; from there, it later travelled to Canada, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Estonia, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Australia, and back into Africa.

The first recognised cases of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome were officially reported in 1981 in the US. Since then, worldwide, 76 million people have been infected with HIV and 33 million people have died.

Popular narratives that either politically stigmatise or reclaim the association of HIV/AIDS with queer sexuality are only one part of the historical story, of how the virus amplified once it arrived in the United States. In the wider historical narrative I have relayed, capital is a leading actor. Marx observed in the *Grundrisse*:

“Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport – the annihilation of space by time – becomes an extraordinary necessity for it.”

Because capital abides no geographical limits, former epidemiological dead ends were no longer so, and new viral pathways were generated.

SARS

In the period since 1979, known as opening and reform, the Chinese Communist Party has overseen the entry of foreign capital into the country. Through the 1980s, especially the 1990s, and into the early millennium, China has experienced a staggering pace and degree of economic growth and urbanisation.

Guangdong, a coastal province in southern China, has been at the centre of this rapid capitalist transformation. Home to the earliest Special Economic Zones, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shantou, and to the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone, Guangdong is now the largest provincial economy and population in China. Guangzhou (its capital) and Shenzhen have become global megacities and the country’s top two cities for GDP output.

This has driven two ecological effects: the development of industrial-scale poultry farms to supply Guangdong’s huge labour force, growing from an estimated 700 million chickens in 1997 to, by 2008, one billion so-called high



quality broiler chickens annually; and the orientation of smaller livestock producers and rice farmers to fattening domestic chickens and ducks to sell in “wet markets” that exist on the edges of Guangdong’s urban areas.

Wet markets are markets that, along with fruit and vegetables, stock live animals for slaughter as fresh meat and fish. They have intensified microbial traffic between humans and animals. And a pattern garden plots next to dormitories and factories has brought urban population and livestock together in more intimate contact.

Wild animal trade within the Pearl River Delta is less to

continued page 18

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Pandemics and the drives of capital

from page 17

do with limited resources, need, or ancient traditions, and more attributable to the capitalist boom and related rise in conspicuous consumption. The contemporary Era of Wild Flavour, most prevalent in southern China, draws from earlier traditions and goes beyond them; Wild Flavour (yewei) is regarded as a way of gaining “face”, prosperity, and good luck.

To supply Guangdong’s wet markets to meet the demand of a burgeoning affluent class frequenting the Wild Flavour restaurants of the province’s cities, there has been an increase in the volume of wild animal trade, with greater cross-border commerce (both legal and illegal) from other South East Asia countries (Vietnam and Laos, for example) into southern China and a rise in captive bred animals on unregulated small farms.

Meanwhile, super-urbanising animal populations by factory farming is artificially creating the optimal conditions for the emergence of newly infectious diseases, speeding up the evolution of new strains, and guaranteeing the advent of pandemics.

An evolutionary pressure cooker of capitalist agriculture and urbanisation provides medium through which ever-more-devastating plagues are born, transformed, induced to zoonotic leaps, and then aggressively vectored through the human population.

The exceptional coming together of multiple species, which would not have otherwise crossed paths in nature yet are now stacked up together in crowded conditions in dense urban environments, creates zoological bedlam.

It should be of no surprise then that a wet market of Guangzhou was the source of the zoonotic leap of SARS in 2002, and a wet market in Wuhan, Hubei province in south central China, the source of the spillover of SARS-Cov-2 in 2019.

The natural reservoirs of both SARS Coronaviruses are likely bats. SARS had a higher mortality rate, but SARS-Cov-2 has a higher viral load prior to the onset of symptoms, which makes the effort to contain its spread much more difficult.

Conclusions

In narrating two stories about HIV/AIDS and SARS, I want to warn against geographically limiting one’s attention to Africa and Asia when thinking about pandemic threat. Instead, a focus on the intersection of the local and the global is key: local conditions of existence and capitalist political economy shape viral evolution, thus have meaning in explaining and predicting emergent infectious diseases, but the local intimately intersects with the global networks and processes of capitalist political economy.

The 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic originated from a pig farm in the United States. And the mass vaccination of poultry by globalised agribusiness is generating, in reaction, more evolutionary virulent strains of influenza. So a myopic focus on Africa and Asia takes our attention away from the fact that richer countries “routinely outsource their biodiversity threats to other nations”, or, as another

author puts it, “capitalism never solves its crisis problems, it moves them around geographically”.

At all scales, states and capitals are involved in the covering up and downplaying of emergent infectious diseases because pathogens are enmeshed in the current “political economy of the business of food”.

“Richer countries routinely outsource their biodiversity threats.”

There is a conceptual error that can be found in much work exploring ecological crises (both on pandemics and on climate change). The concept of “the Anthropocene”, for example, effectively presents humanity as a single homogeneous bloc, outside of historical forms of society with distinct socio-economic relations. That re-naturalises ecological crisis as an outcome of human disposition.

Marxist ecology applies a crucial insight and steer to the relationship between human socio-economic relations and nature, by understanding that capitalism, in Marx’s words, “produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself”.

The problem is capitalism, and the solution is a global system change that has at its centre a “socialised humanity” that “govern[s] the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control, instead of being dominated by it as a blind power” (Marx, again).

If we are to find ourselves out of a current trajectory of escalating pandemics, we need a socialist politics that is radical and visionary:

“The view of nature attained under the domination of private property and money is a real contempt for, and practical debasement of, nature. [...] It is in this sense that [in a 1524 pamphlet] Thomas Münzer declares it intolerable ‘that all creatures have been turned into property, the fishes in the water, the birds in the air, the plants on the earth; the creatures, too, must become free!’” (Marx) □

• Abridged from bit.ly/p-g-c, where a full list of references can be found.

In Defence of Featured book Bolshevism

Max Shachtman



Max Shachtman’s *Under the Banner of Marxism*, the bulk of this book, should be considered one of the classic Marxist polemics. It defends the Bolsheviks, their revolution, their work to build a revolutionary socialist movement, and the continued relevance of their approach. 311 pages, £12.

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Students organise towards January

By AWL students

As lockdown began, the Minister of State for Universities Michelle Donelan reassured students, contrary to other advice coming from the government (!), that Unis should carry on with in-person teaching.

Meanwhile many students have voted with their feet, opting to return to parental homes to study online. Can students win what they need to rescue their academic year from university management incompetence?

On Tuesday 17 November, as part of a week of action, the National Union of Students (NUS) plans a series of online "Town Hall" meetings with local MPs, to publicise their [#studentsdeservebetter](#) demands (no further details yet).

Some local campaigns have been much more visible and energetic. Bristol students continue their rent strike, pursuing demands for a right to move out of halls, 30% rent rebate for those who stay in halls, adequate food for those isolating, access to outdoor space, and increased mental health support.

It is expected further student rent strikes will take place around the UK in January when further installments of rent fall due.

Local disputes by higher education workers would encourage student action, and vice versa, but while there has been a lot of push back against Uni managements, and some formal disputes have begun, we are unlikely to see much action before Christmas. The IWGB union have begun a dispute against the suspension of a security officer, Kingsley, at Greenwich University.

Meanwhile, according to [Unis Resist Border Controls](#), hundreds of Tier 4 international students are being chucked off their courses because they cannot pay tuition fees.

The focus now shifts to next term. Two large migrations of students away and then back to university risk making the Covid situation worse. Both NUS and the Higher Education unions need to step up their action: for an industrial campaign of ballots on workload and health and safety to force the safer option of online where possible in January; for a stronger co-ordination of campaigns, including rent strikes, for demands such as those being pursued by Bristol strikers. □

- bit.ly/bris-rent; bit.ly/ur-bc; @IWGBUoL

Rolls Royce workers strike for jobs

By Ollie Moore

Workers at a Rolls Royce plant in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, began a three-week program of strikes on Friday 6 November, in a bid to resist the loss of 350 jobs.

Rolls Royce, which intends to cut 9,000 jobs throughout the UK, plans to outsource the work of the Barnoldswick site to Singapore.

The industrial action is rolling through the three-week period and will see workers in different roles and departments strike at different times, but with covid-distanced picket lines throughout. The strike ends on 27 November.

A statement from the Unite union said: "It is simply unacceptable that Rolls-Royce is seeking to offshore the jobs of workers in the UK, while at the same time that it is going cap in hand to the UK government for £1 billion in financial support".

Unite regional officer Ross Quinn added: "Our members are taking industrial action as a last resort and have given Rolls-Royce every opportunity to alter its plans by ensuring the viability of Barnoldswick and confirming there will be no compulsory redundancies". □

Strike vote pushes care bosses to talk

By Mohan Sen

Workers in the United Voices of the World union at the Sage Nursing Home in North London are demanding £12ph, parity with NHS annual leave and sick pay, pay for unsociable hours, and recognition of UVW.

Following a 100% vote for strikes, energetic campaigning by UVW, and strong support from local labour movement activists and the wider community, the Sage bosses have just agreed to negotiate.

A victory here would have major consequences for the entire social care sector. It would strengthen other care workers' ability to organise, and – with the right arguments and campaigning – add momentum to calls to take the sector into public ownership.

The Sage workers are all migrants and from an ethnic minority. This is yet another example of migrant workers taking the lead in effective working-class struggle. □

- Sign UVW's petition (as of 10 Nov, signed by over 68,000 people): bit.ly/uvwpetition
- Check out and share the workers' campaign page uvwunion.org.uk/sage-nursing-home. It includes links and materials to sign up for the campaign, donate to the strike fund, put a motion in your organisation and invite a speaker, or to send Sage management a letter.

Schools and the second lockdown

By Patrick Murphy

Throughout the Covid pandemic, but particularly since the wider reopening of schools in June, there has been debate about the role of schools in spreading the virus and the right balance between the need to provide children with education and the most effective suppression of Covid.

The key issue for us as socialists is for as many schools to be open as safely and sustainably as possible. The fact is that, for as long as society is affected by the Covid pandemic and there is no widely available vaccine, schools will not function normally and are likely to be subject to persistent closures whether partial or total.

It makes little sense to centre our policy on a counterposition between the need for open schools and the need to control and suppress the virus. They are inextricably linked.

Where this dialogue boils down to schools being open or closed, it largely misses the point. Safe and sustainable school provision for all children will only be possible if the virus is contained. We agree with those who have been arguing that society-wide measures to achieve this aim are necessary (masks, lockdowns, social distancing, test and trace etc). We have agreed with the calls from Sage and Labour for a new lockdown and that the Tory government has been irresponsible to ignore these calls.

We share the criticism that they have persistently failed to act in time and that their approach has cost tens of thousands of lives. Our policy on schools is part of this overall approach, advocating that society takes the collective measures necessary to suppress the virus, protect communities, save lives and prioritise the vulnerable.

School closures whilst these measures are implemented may be necessary. In the case of the current four-week lockdown the NEU and those Labour leaders and representatives who have supported them are right to argue that schools should move to attendance by vulnerable and key-worker children only and remote learning for others.

The decision to make that call was not made lightly by a union leadership that resolutely resisted demands from many of its own members to oppose full reopening in September. It was made in response to the evidence. Positive Covid cases amongst school-age children have ballooned since the September reopening. They increased by nine times among primary pupils and a staggering 50 times for secondary-age pupils.

To underline the point, there was a reduction in these figures after the October half term when schools closed.

SAGE scientists have said that even a one-week-on, one-week-off plan in secondary schools would reduce transmission as much as closing down the hospitality industry.

As the infection rate increased, pupil attendance in schools fell. In the most affected areas it plummeted. In Knowsley in the last week before half-term 40% of pupils weren't in school. The Department for Education response to this was to change the Covid response guidelines to make it less likely that pupils would be required to isolate. The result, inevitably, was an increase in the infection rate.

Such a chaotic unplanned approach to managing the virus is not sustainable. At a time when the NHS is likely to be under more pressure than in any other part of the year, it makes no sense to ignore the role schools could play in reducing transmission, even if only for a period.

However, any inclusion of schools in the lockdown must be used to ensure that test and trace is fully operative for all school workers and that rotas are prepared to enable reduced but sustainable school opening after the end of that period. It is neither desirable or necessary for schools to permanently close to most pupils for as long as it takes to suppress the virus but, where there are outbreaks in schools, closures (partial or total depending on the circumstances) will be necessary. Even in the event of local or national closures schools should remain open to vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Whether the government can be made to adopt the NEU position or not, we support school workers who campaign and organise collective action to win specific safety measures in their workplaces such as reduced days and rotas, for school workers to be tested regularly and quickly and a generous and wide acceptance of shielding for high-risk and very-high-risk staff and students. This indicates the necessity for taking on large numbers of school workers, rapidly and opening more school buildings quickly. □

• *This article reflects the majority view of the Workers' Liberty school workers' fraction. Other Workers' Liberty activists inside and outside the fraction disagree and will explain their views in future issues.*

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The Alliance for Workers' Liberty fights for socialist revolution, for the labour movement to militantly assert working-class interests.

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RMT: democracy needed

From Off The Rails

Mick Cash, General Secretary of the RMT rail union, has announced his retirement, only a year into his second term. The announcement was made during a chaotic Annual General Meeting, conducted online. Many delegates and union activists had criticised various aspects of AGM proceedings, including a decision by the union's National Executive to curtail its length once the national lockdown had been announced, and a decision not to allow motions relating to any event later than June 2020, the date at which the AGM was initially scheduled to take place.

The trigger for Cash's retirement was the AGM's decision to overturn the decision of the National Executive (backed by Cash) to issue a disciplinary sanction to Assistant General Secretary Steve Hedley for writing on Facebook in June that he would "throw a party" if Boris Johnson died of Covid.

Whatever one's views on the rights or wrongs of Hedley's comments, or Cash's response to them, for Cash to retire because an AGM voted against his decision is the action of a bureaucrat who can not accept decisions that do not go the way he wants, and who wants power centralised in his own hands.

The wider background to Cash's retirement is an ongoing conflict inside RMT, whereby Cash and a core of officers loyal to him have attempted to assert themselves as the leadership of the union, with Cash going as far as to outright refuse to fulfil his constitutional duty to carry out the instructions of the lay National Executive Committee. The NEC has been an inconsistent and faltering voice for democracy in the union over the past few years, often failing to adequately challenge the GS and hold him to account. It has become somewhat more assertive recently, and both Cash and the RMT's other Assistant General Secretary, Mick Lynch, have accused the NEC of "bullying and harassing" them.

Bullying is a real problem in RMT. As we wrote previously, in response to the dismissal, later overturned, of a union organiser who had been off work with mental health problems:

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

The NEC has now agreed to commission an independent investigation. It must be rigorous, open to all members to give evidence, and its recommendations acted on. Cash himself has been outspoken about the impact of recent events on his mental health, impacts for which he deserves support. But a distinction must be drawn between bullying and legitimate criticism and democratic dissent.

In the election to replace Cash, Lynch and Hedley are

both likely to be candidates, as are former National Presidents John Leach and Sean Hoyle. Workers' Liberty supporters in RMT have long-standing criticisms of Hedley's politics and record – see bit.ly/rmt-2015 and bit.ly/rmt-2019. We hope the election can be used as an opportunity not to discuss what kind of individual "leader" we need, but how we as workers can organise to develop our own collective strength and power, something urgently needed given the struggles now facing us.

As we wrote previously:

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

Cash's statement to members announcing his retirement suggested a bureaucratic, service-provision-based conception of trade unionism. The statement said: "From now until my successor is elected, the membership must have the confidence that we are fully behind them and will continue with the exceptional level of service only we provide."

The model of trade unionism suggested here is one in which "the union", run by its officers and staff, is external to "the membership", such that it can be "fully behind them", providing them with an "exceptional level of service." Against that model, we need to fight for a combative, assertive vision of what trade unionism can be, in which the union is not understood as an external service-provider but a weapon fully in the hands of its members, which they can use to win struggles at work.

Workers' Liberty supporters are involved in the Campaign for a Fighting, Democratic Union, a network bringing together RMT activists to discuss rank-and-file organisation in the union. □

Second hand books

Workers' Liberty is selling one hundred second hand books, on politics and many other topics. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the full list, pricing, and to order them. **Featured this week:**

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- Virginia Wolf – Alexandra Harris
- American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy – Andrew Bacavich
- Ministry of Utmost Happiness – Arundhati Roy

“I don't like to be any trouble”



Diary of a Tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

“Sorry, I'm not sure what I have done here”
“What's happened? How can I help?”

“Well... has it changed? I am sure it hasn't done this before, but I think the card is stuck”

“Stuck? Inside the gate? Ah. Did you put it through like a ticket?”

“Yes, well I think so. But has it changed? What should I have done?”

I try to smile kindly, but with a mask on, I am not sure that comes across. “Let's try and get it out for you and then we'll check it still works”.

“Thanks. Sorry. Is it a pain to sort out? I just need to tell my Mum to wait”. She gestures over to a much older woman, in a long coat, staring back blankly. She reminds me of my grandad, with that blank stare and slightly open mouth. “Mum, just wait. He's going to help me, but just wait”.

She doesn't respond. “Sorry about this. I haven't really taken her out for a long time. I haven't really been out a long time. But I can't leave her cooped up. She has dementia, but she likes to see the market.”

I smile again. But again the mask. “Well, let's get this sorted”, I say, as I bash around with the gate. I hate taking the gates apart, particularly these ones, the old hydraulic gates. You drop something, you'll know about it when it falls on your finger. Half the time you sort out one problem and it just causes another fault.

I can see the Oyster card stuck in the bands that pass a ticket over the rollers and then move it vertically for you to collect. “Oysters aren't meant to bend too much, but we can probably get this one through for you”.

“Thank you” she says. “But this is new, isn't it? You used to just put the ticket through this bit?” “That's right, but Oyster or other cards you can just tap on there. Really the gate shouldn't let you put it through, but they don't always do what we'd like”.

“Oh I am sorry, I haven't been out much, and Mum hasn't been out of the home, and I just thought it's better, isn't it, to get some air, to see people, or she will forget.”

“I understand. Don't worry, but just next time when you come through, use the card just like she would use her Freedom Pass”. “Thank you. I don't like to be any trouble”.

“It's why I'm here. Enjoy going out while we still can. Who knows where we'll be by November?” Lockdown came in about six days later. □

• “Jay Dawkey” is a Tube worker.

A week and a bit to go

We have had a very good response to the comrade in Trafford who has offered to double anything we raise over £10,000 by 22 November. With just under a fortnight to go, we have, thanks to Stuart, Dan, Ed, Ruth, Stan, Ali, Janine, Zack, and Martin (at-last-refunded fare for a long flight cancelled by lockdown) raised an additional nice £2,069, taking our total to £12,523. Keep your donations coming in! workersliberty.org/donate

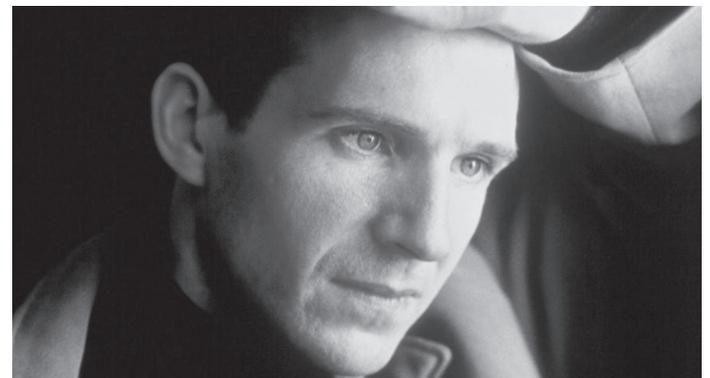
Sunshine: A film about antisemitism



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

There are many films about antisemitism. I am highlighting *Sunshine* (1999) by Hungarian director István Szabó. The story concerns three generations of the Sonnenscheins, a Budapest Jewish family – from the late 1890s to the collapse of “state socialism” in Hungary in 1990. The Sonnenscheins are assimilated and successful, their prosperity being based on a popular elixir bearing the family name (Sonnenschein translates as “Sunshine”). They change their name to the Hungarian Sors (“fate”) and convert to Christianity; yet antisemitism becomes ever more threatening. Even the second generation



Adám, who wins an Olympic medal and becomes a national hero, dies in a camp during World War 2. The film concludes when Iván (third generation) reclaims the family name and embraces the Jewishness his forebears had tried to put behind them. □

Workplace safety and lockdown



John Moloney, PCS AGS

By John Moloney

Our Group Executive Committee in the Department for Work and Pensions is continuing to discuss our dispute with the DWP over workplace safety. That dispute and the threat of industrial action has wrung concessions from the bosses, including a commitment that individual Job Centre workers will have the final say over where a claimant is seen face to face.

It now seems that the employer will make concessions over the other central issue in the dispute, the extension of Job Centre opening hours. Our reps and activists will discuss the proposals; the GEC will decide a way forward.

In the Department for Transport, our members working as driving instructors continue to discuss the possibility of action to resist a push to conduct driving tests in unsafe conditions. Although tests in England has now been suspended until 4 December, there may be a push to resume

them soon after, and it's unlikely conditions will really be safe enough to justify that within a month. In Wales, where the 23 Oct – 9 Nov lockdown is just ending, our members are organising to resist any push to resume tests. Discussions will take place about whether to progress to formal industrial action.

Members in the court service have faced a wave of Covid cases. Outsourced workers such as cleaners and security guards are amongst the most exposed, as the Ministry of Justice has sought to increase court capacity to deal with a backlog of cases. Outsourced workers in courts are mainly employed by an agency called OCS. Our members there have also recently rejected a bosses' pay offer, so there's a potential for parallel disputes over both pay and safety issues. We'd seek to work with the United Voices of the World union in that, who organise OCS workers at the Ministry of Justice head office. They recently agreed a formal recognition agreement with OCS there, the first non-TUC union to do so. □

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

GMB reform falling far short

By Ann Field

Warren Kenny, London Regional Secretary of the GMB union, will take over as the union's Acting General Secretary (AGS) on 16 November.

Tim Roache, re-elected General Secretary last November, resigned in April. A subsequent investigation into the GMB, conducted by Karon Monaghan QC, [found](#) that bullying, cronyism, misogyny, sexual harassment and untrammelled bureaucratic diktat were rife in the union.

Wales and South-West Regional Secretary John Phillips was appointed AGS in place of Roache. But Phillips is retiring next month. Hence the appointment of a new AGS, pending the outcome of the General Secretary election to be held next year.

Warren Kenny is the son of Paul Kenny, who was GMB General Secretary from 2005 to 2015. Some have suggested that the gameplan is for Kenny and his faction in the GMB bureaucracy to back Scottish Regional Secretary Gary Smith in next year's election, and then for Kenny jun-

ior to take over from Smith in the subsequent election.

Readers of [LabourList](#) will be aware that Smith will be standing against Rehana Azam, the GMB's Public Services National Officer.

This would not be a right-left contest, but mostly two factions of the bureaucracy competing for the spoils of office. It suggests a growing failure to push through the changes needed to democratise the GMB.

The GMB Central Executive Council has begun to assert itself since the publication of Monaghan's report. But nowhere near enough.

The undemocratic rule change pushed through the 2019 GMB conference, for example, which nearly doubled the number of branch nominations needed to get on the ballot paper in a General Secretary contest, will remain in force for next year's election.

That shuts down the possibility of a rank-and-file candidate standing – the purpose of the rule change – and reduces the election to a choice of two bureaucrats (or maybe three: Kathleen Walker-Shaw may stand again). □

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For a workers' government

AGAINST ANTISEMITISM: POLITICS, NOT GAGS

By Keith Road

The March 2019 [advice from Jennie Formby](#) that local Labour Parties and other Labour Party bodies cannot discuss individual suspensions is being severely tested in the wake of Jeremy Corbyn's suspension.

Some CLPs pressed on with those discussions under Formby as General Secretary, but the combination of the new General Secretary (who has reiterated Formby's instruction), the Starmer leadership, and the high-profile Corbyn suspension has changed all this into a different gear.

Solidarity agrees that Corbyn's suspension should be rescinded. The priority is a real political fight about the shameful fact that the Labour Party has been indicted for antisemitism in a legal finding that Labour dare not challenge in court. Corbyn's statement did show an "absolute blindspot", but the bureaucratic manoeuvre, on charges which have still not been specified, impedes the political fight.

It requires a primarily political rather than procedural battle. Labour has to face up to that fact. The left should lead the charge to deal with the politics of the issue.

Some on the Labour right evidently want to create a group of martyrs by pushing for ever more expulsions. Conversely, a section of the left has seen the problem of antisemitism essentially as being one of "optics" and public relations. Antisemitism should be confronted, but only enough to stop it from becoming an embarrassment.

But we have to face up to and confront the deep roots antisemitism has within the left. A layer of older activists,



Corbyn initially defended this antisemitic mural

active in the Labour or wider left in the 1980s and 1970s, rejoined under Corbyn, and often became some of the most active within local parties. They brought with them

addled and curdled versions of ideological legacies and spillovers from Stalinism.

As we said in an [article in 2019](#): "Across the world antisemitism has become 'anti-Zionism'. The left has inherited and developed the Stalinist 'anti-Zionist' antisemitism of the years 1949-53 (some of which can be traced to Stalinist ideas in the 1930s). Events and the passage of time have moved the ostensible left onto strange new ground."



In their younger days those people saw themselves as being positively for Palestinian rights and probably for something like a (single) "secular democratic state" in Israel-Palestine. Now the "secular, democratic" enthusiasm has faded, and what remains is the wish to do away with Israel. Back then they would surely have balked at uncritical sharing of Rothschild conspiracy theories or the questioning of established histories of the Holocaust. Social media have allowed the left antisemitism which they bring and which Corbyn fails to grasp to meld with older antisemitisms of hostility to Jews as Jews.

The singling out of Israel, the denial of Israeli national rights, the exaggeration of Israel's power, all now feed into a mixture where older and cruder antisemitic discourses. It is our job to disentangle, confront, explain, and educate rather than to evade or to allow discussion to continue to be gagged. □

• More on centre pages: "How myths of 'Jewish domination' have infected the left"