

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

» Fight new “investor protection” trade deals

» Build workers' unity across borders

» Defend and extend free movement



BREXIT IS A STEP BACKWARDS

Marcus Garvey and the socialists

Contradictions of a pioneer black nationalist

Pages 12-13

The EHRC, Corbyn, and Labour

Left must fight antisemitism as well as purges and drive to right

Pages 3, 19

“Not only one imperialism”

Belarusian left activist Pavel Katarzheuski speaks to *Solidarity*

Page 8

Labour retreats on school testing

Defend the policy to scrap primary tests and Ofsted!

Page 18

Brexit is a step backwards



Editorial

The Brexit transition period ends in less than six weeks, on 31 December. The EU has told its member states' ambassadors that a post-Brexit trade deal with the UK is close – but warned a No Deal Brexit is still possible “accidentally”, because of the timescale...

A No Deal exit, producing wrenching economic and social dislocation, would or will be terrible. But the *Guardian* hit the nail on the head when, on the same day as the EU briefing, it quoted economists saying that “the best deal the UK can secure would have counted as ‘one of the hardest of Brexits’ three or four years ago”.

During the 2016 referendum, Nigel Farage implied he would be happy with the UK leaving the EU but staying in the Single Market. Now an ultra-hard Brexit with a minimal trade deal has become the “soft” option, and the Brexit fanatics may well get their wish of No Deal.

We’ve got here because over the last year, since the general election, the Brexiteers have not let up the pressure, whereas much of the anti-Brexit movement has collapsed.

Keir Starmer’s Labour leadership has adopted an even more craven version of the “say nothing, then you’ll offend no one” strategy pursued on this issue by Jeremy Corbyn. Despite the upheaval of the pandemic and majority popular support for a delay to Brexit, Starmer has allowed and in effect helped the Tories push towards a hurried hard Brexit with minimal opposition or even scrutiny.

The broad, liberal anti-Brexit movement did criticise Corbyn – but has let Starmer get on with it and stayed silent. Left-wing Labour anti-Brexit MPs are largely quiet too. The unions have grown quieter and quieter, despite what the coming crash will mean for jobs and living standards.

Left-wing anti-Brexit activists have continued to organise, but with great difficulty, in an atmosphere of confusion and demoralisation.

The weak pressure on the Tories is demonstrated by Rishi Sunak feeling confident to make the nonsense argument that No Deal is nothing to fear because Covid is more of a threat to the economy. In fact the Governor of the Bank of England has just said the exact opposite. But in any case – what?!

We face vast economic destruction, transport chaos, shortages in medicine, food and technologies, and aggressive attempts to make the working class pay for the crisis – if there is a deal. The estimated hit to the economy from leaving the single market with a deal will be about 4%; without one, 6%.

The upheaval will be an opening for the Tories to escalate their assault on working-class rights and living standards and reshape the country’s economy in an even more neoliberal direction.

Shadow Justice Secretary David Lammy was absolutely right to call for an extension to the transition period, to delay Brexit. The whole labour movement should have called for this earlier in the year.

Labour must oppose Tory Brexit

There is talk that Starmer will have Labour MPs vote for the Tories’ deal, if they get one. That would certainly fit with his strategy of breaking silence periodically to advocate “getting Brexit done”. It would be a disgrace.

Socialists should rally as many labour movement activists and organisations as possible to demand Labour opposes a Tory deal, and demand delay.

We should find a way to hold the Labour and union leaderships to account for their failure to fight the Tories on Brexit (and generally).

We should prepare for battle against every facet of the Tory Brexit agenda, continuing long after 1 January – against deregulation and a race to the bottom, against regressive trade deals, in defence of migrants’ rights and free movement.

After having a real impact in 2018-19, the internationalist left in the Labour Party is subdued and dispersed. It needs rallying, remobilising and expanding. □

A big week for our fund

In a bumper last week, our supporters have come through guns blazing, bringing our total final fund amount to £19,420. Many thanks to Gemma, Ben, Tony, Pat, Les, Barry, Riki, Jean, Maria, Matt, Dave, Jon, Stan, Cath, Vicki, Duncan, Marcus, Nicole, Zack, Stephen and everyone else who donated over the course of the fundraising, up to £14,710 by the target date of 22 November. The amount which surpassed our original £10,000 target was then matched by a comrade in Trafford, bringing us up to the £19,420.

We rely on donations to fund our work. Book production, reprints, new equipment all come from our ability to fund-raise, plus our regular standing orders and commitments from our supporters.

Considering we have been unable to hold our annual summer school, usually a good focus for fund-raising, the amount raised is pretty good and will help greatly with more real world activity in 2021. We know some people are waiting until the end of the month to make after-the-closing-date donations, and we welcome those too. □

• Donate here: workersliberty.org/donate

After Corbyn reinstatement: now, a political offensive against antisemitism

By Martin Thomas

A panel of the Labour Party National Executive has (17 November 2020) reinstated Jeremy Corbyn after:

- he responded to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's legally-enforceable report (29 October 2020) finding the Labour Party culpable for antisemitism by saying that "the problem was dramatically overstated for political reasons" and conceding only that he could not claim "no antisemitism" in the Labour Party because of course there would be some "as there is throughout society"

- he was suspended from the Labour Party
- he rowed back, [saying](#) that "concerns about antisemitism are neither 'exaggerated' nor 'overstated'."

The panel also delivered a formal warning to Corbyn. Labour chief whip Nick Brown, and according to the *Guardian*, the panel too, have asked Corbyn to take down the 29 October Facebook post; and Brown has asked him to apologise.

Labour should now do what successive leaders, both Corbyn and Starmer, have repeatedly promised to do, but never done: launch a *political* and *educational* offensive against antisemitism in the party, with clear debates and local educational (not just "training") programmes as in [Sheffield Heeley CLP](#).

After the NEC panel decision Keir Starmer declined to restore the Labour whip in Parliament to Jeremy Corbyn, though he said "I will keep this situation under review". Since then it has been said that the suspension is for [three months](#). It looks like Starmer wants to extract a clearer rowing-back from Corbyn. It is a symbolic move, unlike the suspension which carried real weight, but not a helpful one. Local Labour Parties have been banned from debating the suspension, but are officially allowed to pass motions criticising the withdrawal of the whip: many have done.

A year and a half ago, *Solidarity* [interviewed](#) Dave Rich, head of policy for the Community Security Trust (CST, a Jewish community charity), and author of the book *The Left's Jewish Problem – Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and Anti-Semitism*.

He homed in on Labour leaders' "inability to recognise and understand antisemitism as it actually operates, unless it comes packaged as fascism" – the idea that if [your mother](#) joined the anti-fascist mobilisation at Cable Street in 1936, and you personally have opposed neo-Nazis and attacks on synagogues, then you can't be antisemitic however much you stereotype Israel and Jewish "lobbies" world-wide as the great hidden power behind right-wing politics.

"We're not just talking about changing processes", said Rich, "but changing a political culture, but there is still no recognition by the leadership of the Labour Party that they have any problem at all of an antisemitic political culture. All we hear is: it's just 0.1% of the membership,

and we'll discipline them and throw them out..."

He advised us: "Educate yourself about contemporary antisemitism, about the tropes and the imagery. There's plenty of material out there. When you're educated, bring that into your political arguments when these issues come up. Speak up. Make the arguments... There's absolutely no reason why campaigning for Palestinian rights should go along with antisemitism. There are lots of people who campaign for Palestinian rights without being antisemitic or encouraging antisemitism".

As the suspension-reinstatement row reverberates through Labour, we must challenge antisemitic narratives about Corbyn's suspension. Those attribute it to "the power of the Zionist lobby", when in fact his initial statement did indeed show an "absolute blindspot", as Angela Rayner said, and read as if written to "dare" Labour to suspend him.

And the antisemitic narratives about Corbyn's semi-retraction – "Corbyn capitulates to Zionist lobby". In fact he would have done better explicitly to retract and apologise for the initial statement's blurred claim that the antisemitism problem in Labour is only the inevitable spillover into any large organisation of prejudices widespread in society, and has been presented as more only out of opportunist right-wing malice.

And the further antisemitic narrative about the lifting of the suspension, that it represents the victory of the right-eous over "the Zionist lobby".

To object to suspension as a response to Corbyn's statement made sense even if you saw the "absolute blindspot" in it. To object to the ban (by Jennie Formby as general secretary in March 2019) on local Labour Parties even discussing such suspensions, and to the suspension of activists such as in Bristol West for discussing the suspension, is basic democracy. The Bristol suspensions should be lifted.

But many of the protests against the suspension said or implied that there was nothing wrong with Corbyn's initial statement. That shows the problem we still have to tackle.

Agitate, educate, organise! Debate the issues! □

Read about antisemitism

Books and pamphlets to help understand antisemitism and Israel-Palestine:

- That's Funny, You Don't Look Antisemitic: An Anti-racist Analysis of Left Antisemitism, by Steve Cohen (2020 edition) – £5
- Two Nations, Two States: Socialists and Israel-Palestine – £3.50
- Arabs, Jews and Socialism: Socialist Debate in the 80s and 90s on Israel and Palestine – £5.00
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it – £3
- Order online: workersliberty.org/pamphlets

Morning Star still dismisses antisemitism complaints as right-wing invention



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Back in 2018, a writer in *Solidarity* described Corbyn's response to allegations of antisemitism in Labour under his leadership:

"Corbyn agrees there is a problem. He responds under pressure, moves in the direction his critics are pointing to, but it is as if he cannot understand what the fuss is about ... everything is low-energy, insufficient, ineffectual, can be seen or portrayed as evasive, as lacking conviction ..."

That description sprang to mind when reading Corbyn's response to the EHRC report: instead of an apology for what happened (and didn't happen) on his watch, there was the claim that "the scale of the problem was ... dramatically overstated" by "opponents inside and outside the party" and the bizarre statement that while he did not "accept all of [the report's] findings" he nevertheless hoped the recommendations would be "swiftly implemented."

A large part of the explanation has to be the politics of the paper which Corbyn has long publicly endorsed and for which he used to write: the *Morning Star*.

This publication (like the Communist Party of Britain, which controls it) has consistently claimed that allegations of antisemitism within Labour have been overwhelmingly "manifestly untrue and malicious" and the work of "not only British and Israeli state actors but an unscrupulous assembly of reactionary forces of all kinds" (quotes from *Morning Star* writer Nick Wright, 22 October).

That approach continues:

- Editorial (30 Oct 30): "The ostensible reason for Corbyn's suspension rests on a sleight of hand by which anyone who dares to query contentious allegations is deemed guilty of the claims under dispute. So for making the widely shared observation that 'the scale of the problem [of anti-semitism in the Labour Party] was dramatically overstated for political reasons,' Corbyn is labelled 'part of the problem.'"

- MS editor Ben Chacko (31 Oct-1 Nov): "An honest response to the EHRC report would include an acceptance that many party members [ie those accused of antisemitism] have been treated appallingly ... on the basis of vague or anonymous accusations ... There are certainly grounds to see [the EHRC report] as disproportionate ..."

- Adam Lewinski (2 Nov): "Most disturbingly, the EHRC has established case law against what has been called the 'Livingstone Formulation' ... that unlawful harassment of Jewish people extends to 'suggesting that complaints of anti-semitism are fake or smears'"

- Nick Wright (5 Nov): "Starmer's declaration of war is grounded in a transparently nonsensical claim that Labour's anti-Semitism issue was not exaggerated ... it only

became apparent when the party elected a man committed to Palestinian national rights..."

- Editorial (18 Nov – after Corbyn's suspension was lifted): "Once a false impression has taken root, too little is done to counter it, so the tedious but necessary task of maintaining an accurate record falls to the left. Corbyn's clarification falls into this category. He never minimised the seriousness of anti-semitism."

- Editorial (19 Nov – after Starmer withheld the whip): "Starmer's attempt to excuse his behaviour with references to the supposed feelings of 'the Jewish community' should not go unchallenged: he has consistently ignored the many Jewish voices raised in solidarity with Corbyn..." ["Many Jewish voices" mainly being the unrepresentative Jewish Voice For Labour]

The 2018 *Solidarity* article concluded that "Corbyn really does not 'get it', or 'get' enough of it ... he has lived in a world in which what other people defined as antisemitism was commonplace among much of the ostensible left. Labour Party antisemitism is in large part an infection from the ostensible left. Corbyn and the people around him and much of the left have been desensitised to antisemitism because it has long been the norm on the ostensible left."

And the poisonous mouthpiece of that "ostensible left" is the *Morning Star*. □



Upcoming meetings

Friday 27 November, 6:30-7.30pm: Young Labour Internationalists (YLI) – UN Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence

Sunday 29 November, 6.30-8pm: The right's culture wars and the Polish fightback

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

Tuesday 1 December, 7:30-9pm: Shapurji Saklatvala: Labour's first 'BAME' MP

Saturday 5 December, 9.30-11am: The roots of antisemitism on the left

Sunday 6 December 12-2pm: Socialist feminist reading group – Burn it Down! (selected manifestos)

Monday 7 December, 6-7pm: AWL Students – Class struggle environmentalism

Thursday 10 December, 8-9.30pm: First session in a study group on Marx's "Grundrisse"

Sunday 13 December, 6.30-8pm: The politics of climate change – introducing "Climate Leviathan"

- Our meetings are open to all, held over zoom. For full and updated details, zoom links, our calendars of events, and more, visit workersliberty.org/meetings □

Betterment without emancipation?



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Marie Stopes International (MSI) has changed its name in recognition of the need to break association with the pro-eugenics views of Marie Stopes. The abortion and contraception provider will go by the name MSI Reproductive Choices. There had been debate in the organisation for some time about a name change, and they were spurred to action by the Black Lives Matters movement and subsequent discussions.

Marie Stopes was an author and prominent women's rights campaigner. She opened Britain's first clinic offering birth control advice to married women in 1921, in the face of fierce opposition. Her argument for contraception was in part that ability to space apart children would improve maternal and child health physically and mentally, with more food, care and space for each child and reducing the punishing physical effects of pregnancy and birth.

Increasingly through her life, her support for contraception was intermingled with eugenics. She called for new laws that allowed the "hopelessly rotten and racially diseased" to be sterilised, wrote fiercely against inter-racial marriage, and disowned her son for marrying a partially-sighted woman.



Activist agenda

Safe and Equal is stepping up its campaign for full isolation, especially for Test and Trace workers (see page 7) and for sub-contracted workers and bank staff in hospitals.

For care homes, the government, under pressure, has created an "infection control fund" which is supposed to finance full isolation pay for all care workers. But on the latest available count only 40% of care homes were actually doing full isolation pay. The big care-home chain HC-One conceded full isolation pay to the GMB union in May, but many care homes have no union.

Among domiciliary care workers, isolation pay is even scantier.

Cleaners on the Tube recently regained isolation pay after the contractor ABM moved back on its concession on the issue early in the year.

Channels for pressure on this issue include local Labour Parties, which can put pressure on councils contracting out care, unions within councils, like Unison, and unions among better-off workers in the same workplace, as on the Tube and in hospitals. □

• Link for Safe and Equal materials, other campaigns, and model motions: workersliberty.org/agenda

Pre-war eugenics was popular in bourgeois feminist, left, and liberal circles. Many of its leading advocates were found among the stars of the left.

"Left" eugenicists

The Fabians advocated eugenics. George Bernard Shaw stated "the only fundamental and possible socialism is the socialisation of the selective breeding of man", even suggesting, those who didn't meet the requirements be dealt with by means of a "lethal chamber". Positive eugenics meant encouraging those assumed to have greater intellectual ability, physical health and moral worth to have more children, while negative eugenics sought to urge, or even force, those deemed inferior to reproduce less often or not at all. Support for eugenics dropped after the Holocaust, when the horrors of the belief in genetic superiority were displayed with monstrous clarity.

Our support is not for controls on reproduction, but reproductive freedoms, the rights to dignity, information, and bodily autonomy and integrity. Our socialist future will require rational planning, but not top-down planning with state coercion taking hold in ever more areas of our lives as the Fabians envisioned. We should beware of politics that pushes betterment without emancipation. □



Studying the Grundrisse

Following Zoom study groups since the start of lockdown in March on *Capital*, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, and *Revolution Betrayed*, on 10 December Workers' Liberty will start a Zoom study group on the *Grundrisse*.

That is Marx's rough draft of his economic theories – of much of what was later rewritten and published as *Capital*, and more – written at high speed in 1857-8.

Because it's a rough draft, Marx lets his mind roam more freely, and pursues his lines of argument further into a speculative future, than in his finished works. The *Grundrisse* can give us pointers to understand the capitalism of microelectronics, globalisation, and privatisation – in which some of the inherent tendencies of capitalism are working themselves out further and more thoroughly than even seemed possible in Marx's day.

In the *Grundrisse*, we also read Marx writing more directly and freshly about some of his basic ideas than in his finished works, giving us a better idea of how he reached his conclusions.

There are also obscure digressions, dead-ends, and plain mistakes. We will study it not as holy writ, but critically. But we'll study it.

Thursdays 8pm-9:30pm. We'll take as our starting point the schedule and notes from a *Grundrisse* study group run by Workers' Liberty in Brisbane in 2006-7: grundrisse.blogspot.com. Sign up on Eventbrite, and find Zoomlink: bit.ly/g-riss

Four climate futures



Environment

By Zack Muddle

Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future by Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright is an interesting read, with much to criticise, but some interesting and important questions raised. As the title suggests, it attempts to theorise and sketch possible or likely political developments, globally, in the light of climate crises' impacts and attempts (failed or otherwise) at adaptation and mitigation. This is arguably a gap in much left-wing environmental discourse, and even though the authors don't fill the gap well, they at least attempt to.

The authors are influenced by, on the one hand, the climate justice movement, and, on the other, Eurocommunism, a 1970s-80s social-democratic or liberal strain of post-Stalinism; and their book is shaped by a dry academic lens.

Their relation to the climate justice movement makes them, I think, soft on its severe limitations. More fatally, they seem to see it as the starting point, and that, combined with their other political influences, paints the organised working class as a key environmental agent out of the picture. Their perspective has a large dose of what used to be called "Third-Worldism" (seeing progress as coming from a battle of poorer countries, all or most classes combined, against richer countries, all classes combined): indeed, one of their two non-capitalist futures is named after Mao Zedong.

Their preferred future, "Climate X", may seem libertarian, but they celebrate many aspects of Maoism, a "Third-Worldist" Stalinism, and see a "red thread running from Robespierre to Lenin to Mao." They distance themselves from Bolshevism by conflating it with authoritarianism and Maoism, so they jettison the valuable lessons from Bolshevism, but simultaneously they are influenced by some of their warped perception of a Lenin-Mao "red thread".

The poor record of Stalinism on the environment is ascribed to Leninism: "The Leninist tradition has much to offer, certainly, but there is a reason that so few Marxists prioritised the question of nature during the twentieth century." They make a strange argument as to why Gramsci was not a Leninist, based in large part on debates over idealism vs. materialism. Beyond brief and positive mentions, they don't engage with existing ecological Marxist literature.

Their vaguely-aspired-to "Climate X" seems to reflect a critique of "governmentality" derived from Michel Foucault and post-modernist authors; inspirations from predominantly indigenous groups and tendencies such as the Zapatistas; and the limited focus and strategy of the

"blockadier" movements that the authors have participated with.

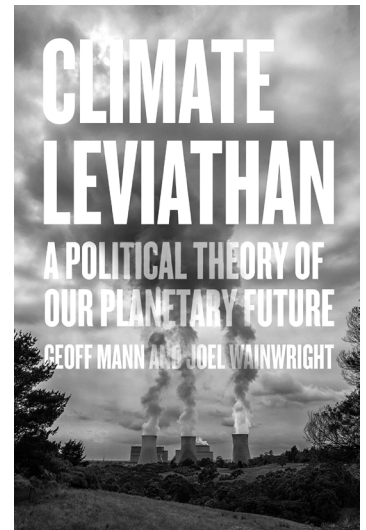
"Climate X" is one of four futures, or elements of futures, that they sketch. "Climate Leviathan" is where capitalism still exists but with a global "sovereign" or world-government which takes responsibility for climate mitigation and adaptation. "Climate Behemoth" is a reactionary capitalist opposition to this, based on nationalism or an assertion of national sovereignty against "planetary sovereignty", and with support "from the fraction of the capitalist class with ties to fossil fuels." The other two are "an anticapitalist, state-centred Climate Mao... and an anticapitalist, antisovereign Climate X".

Some of the interesting and important questions which I took from the book can, I think, be straightforwardly answered from a third-camp Trotskyist perspective, while others require further consideration. A mix of both:

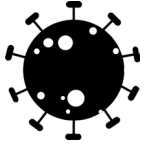
- What are the likely political and economic developments over the coming century, in response to climate change and pushes for adaptation and mitigation, particularly while capitalism survives? What are the roles of ideology and of economics in this? How can we intervene?
- How should we think about and critique pushes for "Green capitalism" which are often "Green Keynesianism", for example "Green New Deal" initiatives?
- How far can international treaties between competing capitalist nation states get in mitigating and adapting for environmental crises? Would a unified capitalist world state, with more centralised direct control, get further? Will there be a push towards a world capitalist state? How far will it succeed and what will the backlash resemble, and what ideologies will these dynamics generate? What role will crises, climate migration, climate wars, play in such dynamics?
- Should we oppose moves towards a capitalist planetary state? Or, more aptly, under what conditions should we oppose or not oppose such moves?
- How should we think about UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and the COPs (Conference of the Parties)?
- What role will the spectre or implementation of geo-engineering play in such political developments? □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/4-fut

• A Workers' Liberty Zoom meeting on 13 December, 6:30pm, will discuss the book further: bit.ly/13-dec-c



Test-trace workers don't get isolation pay



Covid-19

By Stuart Jordan

Speaking to the Coronavirus Lessons Learnt meeting in parliament on 10 November, the head of Test and Trace, Dido Harding, told MPs: "All the evidence shows that people are not complying with isolation not because they don't want to but because they find it very difficult."

"The need to keep earning and to be able to feed your family is a fundamental element of it which is why I think the financial support payment is a very good thing."

The financial support that she refers to is the £500 isolation support payment which was introduced in September. But millions of workers, including thousands of Harding's own frontline Test and Trace workers, are ineligible for even for that meagre payment.

According to government figures, around eight million workers remain ineligible for the support payment. If they have to isolate with suspected coronavirus, at best they would receive just £95.85 a week Statutory Sick Pay.

With higher infection rates, the Tories are finding it difficult to ignore the evidence that poverty wages and a lack of sick pay are driving astonishingly low levels of isolation compliance. An official estimate back in August was that fewer than 20% who had tested positive for infection were isolating properly. Another study has suggested 89 out of 100 people with suspected Coronavirus infection are breaking isolation rules.

Despite bearing the NHS brand, Test and Trace is run by a hodge-podge of private contractors. [Safe and Equal](#) has received reports that staff employed by G4S at Covid Test Centres are on zero-hour contracts with no rights to sick pay. Many of those workers will not be eligible for social security payments and therefore will not get the £500 isolation payment.

Even if a worker did meet the criteria for the £500 payment, they would still have to gamble income and future employment on the outcome of a positive test. Many, especially those who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms, will not take that risk.

Moreover, only those people who are contacted by Test and Trace are eligible for the £500. Former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has argued that just 3% of people who should be isolating are being identified by Test and Trace.

Alongside G4S, Test and Trace have also given contracts to Amazon, Serco and other firms well known for their hyper-exploitative employment practices. The whole Test and Trace system has been set up to filter £10 billion of taxpayers' money through many layers of sub-contracting, with dozens of private firms filling their profit mar-



gins, leaving very little for the workers on the ground.

Workers in the test centres are coming into close contact with dozens of Covid-positive people every day, and despite precautions are at high risk of contracting the illness. As long as they are also some of the workers least likely to be able to follow public health advice, that turns each Test Centre into a potential Covid hotspot.

Test-Trace-Isolate could be an important tool to allow us to return nearer to usual social life before the vaccine takes effect. By putting an ideological commitment to privatisation before rational planning, Harding and the government have created a system that is extraordinarily ineffective and may well be contributing to the spread of infection.

Test and Trace should be taken into public ownership and its workers should be employed on NHS terms and conditions. Even before that, Harding should insist that all companies operating under the Test and Trace banner pay full sick and isolation pay as an essential infection control measure. Without those basic rights, Test and Trace is undermining its own efforts to slow the spread of the virus. □



Our audio!

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

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

See workersliberty.org/audio for all episodes, and for information on using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". □

“One should not pretend there is only one imperialism”

By Pavel Katarzheuski

Pavel Katarzheuski from the “Fair World” party in Belarus talked with Pete Radcliff from Solidarity.

I am a member of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Left Party “Fair World”. It is the oldest left-wing party in Belarus. It was founded in 1991 under the name “Party of the Communists of Belarus” as the successor of the Belarusian section of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In 2009 the party changed its name to The Left Party “Fair World” in order to avoid confusion with the second communist party, which is a split from our party in 1996 and supports Lukashenko.

Since Lukashenko came to power, our party has been in principled opposition and believes that Lukashenko in 1996 did not hold a “referendum on amendments to the Constitution” as he himself calls it, but in fact a coup d’état, which was accompanied by the destruction of a democratically elected parliament with a strong communist faction.

The minimum program of our party is the democratisation of the political system and the dismantling of the dictatorship, the maximum program is socialism. However, I am trying to promote the idea of adopting a transition program. At the moment, I have success in this direction and now the party puts forward not only democratic slogans, but also demands the abolition of anti-labour legislation, introducing a progressive scale of taxation and reducing the working day.

I am also currently one of the leaders of the party’s youth organisation. Our youth organisation is now actively working in the student and trade union movement and organises educational projects. As often happens, we are a little more radical than our senior comrades and consider it our goal to push the party even further to the left than it is now.

Trade unions are recognised by even the Coordination Council as a key force that might bring down Lukashenko but Tikhonovskaya’s call for a national strike had a limited impact.

The workers today need a national strike committee. In August, there were attempts to form a similar body, but they failed. It is obvious that the coordinating council does not represent anyone but itself and, in my opinion, it is rather a brake on the workers’ struggle against the dictatorship.

Today people continue to join the strikes, and I want to note that workers add to the general democratic demands a demand for higher wages. And this is a good indicator. However, this is not enough.

There are, of course, objective conditions which hinder the labour struggle and the strike movement. Now, in factories and throughout the country, a police regime has

been effectively introduced, workers are facing criminal charges for participating in strikes, and left-wing parties and independent trade unions have been squeezed out of the public space for 26 long years.

Stalinist organisations

Unfortunately, there are a number of Stalinist organisations in Belarus that support Lukashenko and use communist symbols at rallies in support of the dictatorship.

In 1996, the presidential administration created a split in our party, as a result of which some members left our party and created their own “Communist Party of Belarus”. This party consists of officials, business directors and small and middling bureaucracy. This party has access to major state media and support from the state. Of course, the very fact of their existence strongly discredits the communist and socialist movement.

It is noteworthy that even “revolutionary” Stalinists, who are guided by the Greek Communist Party and other “anti-revisionist” forces, at a critical moment when the revolution began, supported Lukashenko, although they had previously criticised him. In fact, Stalinism once again showed its counter-revolutionary and anti-communist essence.

The situation is complicated by the fact that Lukashenko used to often use the rhetoric of “Soviet nostalgia” and criticised Western imperialism. However, one should not pretend that there is only one imperialism in the world. Criticising the Western imperialists, he flirted and received money from the Eastern ones, and it is obvious that his “anti-imperialist rhetoric” is just populism and a desire to please other bad guys, just from the other side. We also try to remind you that in the 1990s Lukashenko built his political career on anti-communism and right-wing populism. The fact that the state symbols of Belarus are similar to Soviet ones, and that monuments to Lenin still exist in cities, does not mean that socialism exists in Belarus.

We can say that our party and other independent leftists are caught between two fires. And, of course, we are forced to expose the anti-worker and anti-people character of the dictatorship. □

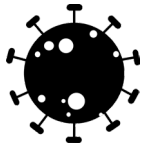
• Abridged: more at bit.ly/pk-be

“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 □

Virus: getting through the months



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

The news is good on vaccines for Covid-19. But, as every expert says, it will be several months at least before vaccination shrinks the need for covid-distancing and quarantining. Longer, if the vaccines block symptoms but not the virus itself or transmission. (We don't yet know).

As of 24 November, infection rates have been edging down in Europe since 8 November. They look like plateauing worldwide, after rapid growth since mid-October, but are rising sharply in the USA.

The lockdowns in Belgium and France have reduced rates there sharply, and Spain and Italy (without lockdowns) have also turned the curves (slightly) down. Wales is so far [plateaued](#) since its 23 Oct to 9 Nov lockdown, and at a rate similar to 23 Oct.

England's lockdown has reduced rates, but, at two-thirds of the way through it, not much. If "tier 3" is applied very widely after 2 December, then post-lockdown will be not much different from lockdown, and the statistics suggest that's how it should be.

Thinking that unenforceable bans on people meeting family and friends over Christmas may bring more harm (by building habits of disregard for covid-distancing rules) than good, the four UK governments promise a temporary easing then.

(Full disclosure: the writer's younger daughter plans to visit. There is a case for banning such visits; but we'll take advantage of the fact they're not banned. I guess many others will feel similarly to me. My daughter arrived from Australia to start a new job in the Netherlands, where she knew no-one, in mid-March, and went straight into lockdown. She will observe her self-isolation after travelling, and we'll be careful. I'd rather reduce my statistical expectancy of disability-free life, seven years at my age, than definitely lose to inactivity one of my maybe-few years left...)

Labour movement demands

Further lockdowns or strict tiers must be very probable for January. Whatever the details, the core issue for the labour movement is still to shift the Tories on:

- Full isolation pay for all, and publicly-provided quarantine accommodation for those who would otherwise "self-isolate" in crowded housing
- Requisition facilities and supplies for the NHS; bring social care into the public sector, with regular public-sector pay and conditions for staff
- Public-health testing-and-tracing
- More funding for schools to allow more staffing, rota systems to "thin out" crowding, improved ventilation, and extra temporary buildings
- Workers' control of workplace safety.



We need those social measures for their own sake and to build the social solidarity necessary to make covid-distancing work all across society, including in its restrictions on private socialising.

An 18 November report from the National Audit Office showed how the Tory government has undermined that social solidarity.

It documented £18 billion of pandemic contracts handed out, mostly off-hand, many via a "high-priority lane" for contractors recommended by officials and MPs, some with the paperwork done retroactively after the contractor had actually started, many with the proper information for checking and auditing not published.

“Social measures build the social solidarity necessary to make covid-distancing work.”

NHS supplies and logistics were already tangled up with [four layers](#) of profit-taking subcontractors between the public authorities and the actual work. The Tories have added more layers of profit-taking and given more jobs to their cronies.

The Tories have denied that they are set to spend £100 billion on mass rapid testing ("Operation Moonshot"), but they are doing a pilot scheme in Liverpool. Scientists such as [Angela Raffle](#) and [Jon Deeks](#) argue that the effort will do more harm than good. Probably more people will get "false positive" tests than true positives: that will further undermine commitment to self-isolate when testing positive. Many will get "false negative" tests, and be encouraged to discard precautions when in fact they're infectious.

It looks like another of the Tories' gimmicks: like the ballyhooed antibody testing, the phone app, the new test-processing labs which return results slowly and in a way that leaves the rate of real self-isolating among those testing positive below 20%.

Gimmicks and profiteering won't curb the virus. Social provision and social solidarity will lay the basis to do that. □

Capitalism, not just cronyism



Letters

Jim Denham's criticisms in [Solidarity 572](#) of the No Holding Back report produced by Ian Lavery, Laura Smith and Jon Trickett were on point, particularly in terms of its nationalism and lack of a coherent understanding of what the working class is.

There's one aspect which I think deserves to be drawn out further. The report proposes a "cronyism watchdog" as a way of "challenging the Tories' economic priorities". It fails to define what they mean by cronyism or what this "watchdog" would do. It's hard to see how it would have the significance and cutting edge even plenty of quite limited social-democratic reforms do.

Further, I think the idea of "cronyism" itself needs criticising. It's commonly understood as a process whereby jobs, contracts or other awards are given to friends or others with close personal connections. Implicit in the watchdog proposal is the idea that the concentration of wealth and power that allows a narrow elite its control is an aberration, a mistake easily righted.

It's not. "Cronyism" surely grows out of capitalism acting as it always does, the working out of the bourgeoisie acting in its own class interest against ours.

Cronyism is a real issue, obviously, with this Tory government, but the idea that cronyism, not capitalism, is the



fundamental issue is an oft-touted myth of the libertarian right and of "anarcho-capitalists", who justify the farcically contradictory nature of their ideologies by claiming we don't have true capitalism but crony capitalism, which needs to be done away with to usher in the capitalist utopia they seek to create...

Obviously this is not the perspective of Lavery, Smith and Trickett. The point is that members of the socialist wing of the Labour Party should aspire to a better, more substantial understanding of capitalism and class struggle than the libertarian right! □

Wilson Gibbons, Croydon

Who represents whom?



Letters

I think Victoria Rivera Ugarte ([Solidarity 572](#)) is right that as Chile writes a new constitution, it'll make a big difference if workers, students, and others stay mobilised in the workplaces and on the streets.

Voting people into the constitutional convention and then leaving them to it would maximise the effects of inertia and of lobbying and pressure by the wealthy.

As Victoria writes, "the action and pressure of the citizenry, as an actor that can influence the agenda, outside of the formal constitutional process, is essential".

However, Victoria also seems to hint at some system of election to the convention which wouldn't be a straightforward democratic vote (with whatever proportional-representation or other safeguards), but would allow groups self-proclaimed as representing different constituencies to bypass that.

Thus she writes of "representation of autonomous citizens not depending on political parties". In every country,

the people who don't support (and, if more energetic, try to shape) any political party, the "don't know", "never vote", etc. are not a homogeneous group which someone can "represent" just by claiming to.

If they had a common view and program, they would be... another party.

Equally, no-one can claim to represent "feminists", "LGBTQ+", or "environmentalists" without debate and voting between the differing "party" programs within each of those groups.

The idea of assemblies being composed not from democratic contest between parties, but from a patchwork of leaders of movements self-proclaimed as representing different demographics, has an unpromising history. It was pioneered, as far as I know, by Mussolini in Italy and Stalin in the 1936 constitution of the USSR.

They could make it "work" by solving the problem of who represented each demographic group by administrative decree. Not in Chile now! If the parties aren't good, then the task is to build a new one and win democratic support. □

Colin Foster, London

Macron's sledgehammer and the nut

By Yves Coleman

Yves Coleman in Paris responded to questions from Solidarity.

CFCM, the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman, CFCM, set up in 2003 with the encouragement of Sarkozy as a "Muslim" interlocutor, has proposed, and Macron has accepted, the idea of a national register of imams run by CFCM, but how will that work given that most mosques do not recognise CFCM? Macron indicates that he doesn't want imams paid by other governments, but how could that be regulated by law? Mosques operate under the "1901 law" regulating associations in general, which actually gives them more latitude than the "1905 law" regulating churches and synagogues. Under the law, how could the government intervene in mosques?

Macron is facing a very difficult problem. On the one hand, he does not want to be labelled as an "Islamophobe", and on the other, all the measures his government proposes imply that Muslims are not able to study Islam correctly without the "help" (control) of the State, and not able to spot and denounce fundamentalist anti-Republican imams or militants in mosques or Muslim associations. This looks like a very paternalistic attitude towards Muslims, whether they have a foreign passport, French nationality, or have been recently converted to Islam (some thousands convert every year).

The CFCM is not considered as a representative institution by most Muslims. A recent study made by "The Muslim Platform" shows that the majority of Muslims don't even know the name of the president of the CFCM. Macron is trying to push the CFCM to the front of the stage and to oblige them to write a declaration of republican principles within the next two weeks, but it does not seem very realistic.

Macron made a big mistake in not contacting the most sophisticated and educated imams and not letting them leading the debate inside the Muslim community. As regards "mosques" (which most of the time are just prayer rooms, i.e. meeting halls or warehouses, with no minarets), the government has cops and informers, and from that information it can launch legal action against imams who are making jihadist propaganda or anti-republican propaganda. There is no need of a new law for that. But by focusing on foreign imams, the government does not really help Muslims to forge an "enlightened Islam" as it claims.

Concerning the training of future imams, it could be financed by a tax taken on the plane tickets sold for the pilgrimage to Mecca, but this project has not been approved by the CFCM yet because its members are competing to manage this money. Another option could be to create a specific formation inside the university system (the Catholic Institute is ready for it) but once more it puts into question the separation between the state and the churches...



As regards the verification of possible foreign funding, tax services and "prefectures" can check the accounting books of any association created under the 1901 law. That's true in theory; in practice the state will probably need to recruit thousands of employees to do that job on a national scale, for the 1.4 million associations – if it were to do that verification without any special bias against Muslims. This looks more like a symbolic threat than a measure which can be applied.

Resignation

Last point: the government wants to oblige the cultural associations managing the mosques and prayer-rooms under the 1901 law (less strict in terms of state control), to switch to the 1905 law regime (which would help the state to watch these religious associations more closely).

Samuel Paty's decapitation has shocked most Muslims, that's obvious. As regards Macron's measures I think there is a certain resignation. Muslims see most political parties use Islam, the hijab, the terrorist attacks and murders, al Qaeda, Daesh, social problems in North Africa or in the Middle East as arguments against their very presence in France, including those who have French nationality. So they just think: "Let's be patient and ignore all this discussion because it only gives us headaches. Anyway, it will start again next year, or even in a few months, so let's just live our life".

A minority of educated Muslims (professionals, lawyers, doctors, academics, imams, theologians, etc.) has decided that enough is enough, and groups like the "Muslim Platform" are determined to oblige the French state to respect its motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity".

What is very positive is the fact that there is no growing hate against Muslims among "ordinary" French people. I tried to check with my friends who work in secondary or high schools, and none has seen a rise of anti-Muslim racism among the teachers. I was at the Sunday demonstration after Paty's beheading and it was very peaceful and respectful; no anti-Muslim hate was expressed. This lack of pervasive hate was also observed after the 2015 attacks; the little messages laid at Place de la République and at the Bataclan and the cafés attacked were all peaceful messages, as well as in Brussels the same year.

This means that what both far right populists and Islamists want is not occurring... for the moment at least. □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/macron-s

Marcus Garvey a

By Stephen Wood

When in our predecessor paper *Workers' Action* (no.117, 1978) Colin Waugh wrote about Marcus Garvey he noted, I think rightly, that Garvey is a figure known now more by reputation than by belief. In the recent Black Lives Matters demonstrations, "Garveyism" as an entire political outlook has certainly been marginal. But "Garveyite" beliefs persist. His legacy is probably more readily accessible to people in the popular consciousness via Roots Reggae and Hip Hop.

Garvey led for a short period the largest black organisation of its day, the United Negro Improvement Association And African Communities League (UNIA). It boasted hundreds of thousands of members, and in almost every nation with a black population.

It would be easy to write off Garvey's connection to the left based on his avowedly bourgeois outlook, the fact he himself was a capitalist, and that fundamentally for him the division in society was one of race.

Writing from prison in 1925 Garvey said the "Negro should keep shy of Communism or the Workers' Party of America." But that was because he thought those roused up by his agitation might well go on to look at revolutionary socialism. It would be too simplistic to write him off as forever a committed anti-socialist. There is a great deal of history between Garvey, the left, and prominent socialists in the USA, and within the UNIA itself, that makes an examination worthwhile. Even without that more complex and not-well-told history, there is much to learn from the rise and fall of "Old Marcus Garvey".

Born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, in 1887, to a family that was middle class but struggling due to legal difficulties, Garvey became a printer's apprentice, moving to Kingston and becoming a foreman. During an early strike he sided with the workers. That was the last time he backed a strike, at least explicitly. He then lost his job, became disillusioned with Jamaica and did a number of jobs, mostly in the fruit industry across Latin America. He started publishing a paper and newsletter there. He was increasingly angered by the treatment of him and other workers by the United Fruit Company. He abandoned Latin America, at first for London.

While in the UK he headed to Speakers' Corner to hear arguments from Pan Africanists and socialists, religious preachers (Garvey was a lifelong Roman Catholic), and others. He made the acquaintance of Dusé Mohamed Ali, an early Pan-Africanist. He worked for his magazine, and spent time studying at Birkbeck and reading in the British Museum. It was there he read Booker T Washington's *Up from Slavery* and decided he wanted to meet him.

On his return to Jamaica, aboard a ship for three weeks, he met a couple returning from Basutoland (present day Lesotho) who influenced his view that black people had



Marcus Garvey

their own interests to fight for, as a race, and that those were tied up with the future for black people in Africa.

In 1914 in Jamaica he founded the UNIA. With the slogan "One Aim. One God. One Destiny," Garvey sought to "establish a brotherhood among the black race, to promote a spirit of race pride, to reclaim the fallen and to assist in civilising the backward tribes of Africa."

His attitudes to Africa, which owed a lot to those of the British Empire, seemingly never shifted. He never set foot on the continent throughout his life. The UNIA first saw itself as a self-improvement, charitable movement rather than a political one. Its commitment to "repatriation" came later.

Booker T Washington

At first Garvey hoped to follow the lead of Booker T. Washington and set up a college or university. The UNIA was loyal to the British Empire, going so far as to support the call for more Jamaicans to sign up to fight in World War 1. He angered many Jamaican blacks with a condescending attitude and denouncing "coloured" men as well as fueling his own ego, winning his own competitions, seeking patronage from the white elite in Jamaica.

Garvey was quite deliberate when he chose the name Universal Negro Improvement Association. In Jamaica a majority of black workers were governed by a small white elite who ensured Jamaica's continuing loyalty to the British empire. Another layer of mixed-race so-called "quadroons" and "octoroons", alongside Chinese traders and Middle Eastern tailors, acted as a kind of middle class.

The use of the term Negro offended many Jamaican blacks because it denoted a "purity" of the black race. Garvey and the UNIA were against mixed marriages, particularly when they produced "mixed-race" children. For Garvey "coloured" was not a euphemism for "black", as in the US. Garvey associated a particular pride with being dark-skinned.

Realising his organisation was unlikely to grow, he decided to head to the United States. He hoped to meet Washington, but Washington died just before Garvey arrived in 1916. Like many black people from the Carib-

nd the socialists

bean, Garvey settled in Harlem. He set about building the UNIA there.

Harlem had seen a growing surge of migration of Southern and rural blacks to the North, often through the army, others for work. Harlem and the North were not like the Jim Crow South but racism was still rife. A number of friendly societies, the left, and others, had set up organisations competing for the black population's allegiance. The UNIA soon became one of the largest, and in its own way most militant. It was by far the largest of the strictly black nationalist organisations.

Setting up newspapers

Garvey had previous experience setting up newspapers and he soon launched *The Negro World* as the paper of the UNIA. Printed on the Socialist Party's printing press and with a Jamaican socialist, Wilfred Domingo, as the editor, *The Negro World* was widely read and was soon to be banned in several countries. Domingo was an important figure in the Harlem branch of the Socialist Party, and did not hide his convictions when editing the paper. He was never a member of UNIA, and Garvey eventually removed him as editor of the paper following a wave of "red scare" agitation from the state against Domingo.

It was through Domingo that Garvey met A Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen, editors of *The Messenger*. All of them, despite their very different views, were initially able to collaborate.

The UNIA was held together by its paper, which was unique for black papers at the time. It carried no adverts for hair relaxing products or skin lighteners. The UNIA itself through charitable and welfare work and bombastic assertiveness continued to grow. Its speaker tours and rallies were able to draw huge crowds. Upwards of 20,000 people would come to Madison Square Gardens for month-long conventions.

The Socialist Party and later the Communist Party saw the conventions as an opportunity. The Socialist Party had never been able to get crowds like that in Harlem. Black members like Owen, Randolph and Hubert Harrison (later an editor of *The Negro World*) were strong critics of the "colour-blindness" of the SP. Nationally the SP refused to recognise the oppression of black people in the USA as anything more than as a result of the black working class being some of the most highly exploited. Some SP branches were segregated, and while the leadership opposed that, they did not intervene to stop it.

The UNIA was important enough that both Eugene V Debs and Morris Hillquit attended conventions. Garvey himself gave the UNIA endorsement to socialist candidates in elections, if they were black. Garvey believed that he could cooperate with the left, where it benefited him, though he had little sympathy for its class and economic analysis. Even beyond material necessities and

some ideological common ground, Garvey did not show reservations or fear of association with the radical Left. He did not perceive socialist convictions as an impediment to cooperation.

And similarly Garvey was not always opposed to collaboration with white organisations. "I am not saying that the Negro must not be a radical if he wants to, but he should be a radical on a programme of his own... Sometimes he may have to cooperate with other people and other movements, but this should be done only to the extent of winning his cause..." Garvey viewed early collaboration with the socialists, more practical than ideological, as a useful tool for him at the time.

In some ways he admired the labour movement, not for its principles but for its organisation. "[The] fair example to us as Negroes" to learn from the labour movement is "the immediacy of organisation", which is "that force that has changed the destiny of governments and races. [W]e must be as solidly organized as labour is today."

Garvey had little sympathy with the Bolsheviks or the Russian Revolution, which he saw as primarily a white people's conflict. He said that Marxism was an ideology of the "white man's making", and that nowhere were black capitalists in control, so how could Marxism address the issues for the black population. But he was fascinated by what kind of upheaval Bolshevism might provide for him and his movement.

"The aristocracy that once ruled the common people must be destroyed according to the will of the common people. They have started to destroy that privileged aristocracy in Russia, in Germany, in Austro-Hungary ... the equality of man has become indisputable."

Part two will look at more of Garvey's beliefs and how his relationship to the left completely broke down in the 1920s. □

Second-hand books

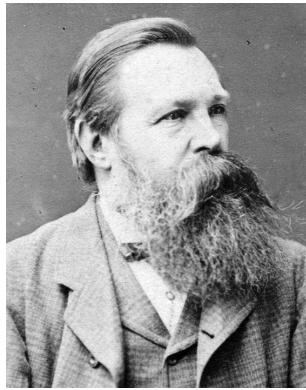
Workers' Liberty is selling one hundred second hand books, on politics and many other topics. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the full list, pricing, and to order them. **Featured this week:**

- Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Health Book by Women for Women – Boston Women's Health Collective
- A History of Communism in Britain – Brian Pearce and Michael Woodhouse
- The Life and Times of James Connolly – C. Desmond Greaves
- Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolution – Che Guevara
- The Lost Revolution – Chris Harman □

“The most learned man in Europe”

By Len Glover

The young Friedrich Engels, born 200 years ago on 20 November 1820, was a troublesome youth for his parents. He persisted in arguing for the rights of the poor, attending meetings of the radical Young Hegelians and contributing to a journal based in the Rhineland edited by an obvious troublemaker called Karl Marx.



In 1842 he met Marx for the first time. A deep lifetime friendship would soon evolve. In the same year his exasperated father packed him off to England, to work in the family firm of Ermen and Engels in Manchester, at that time the industrial heart of Victorian Britain. A dose of hard work among those no-nonsense Mancunians would surely knock the liberal-radical stuffing out of the wayward scudder. Or so it was thought.

When Engels arrived, age 22 and hardly overjoyed at the prospect of living in Manchester, its claim to be the workshop of the world was no idle boast. Together with manufacturing of many other kinds, it was the world centre for the production of cotton cloth.

For the workers it was a stinking filthy hole, where thousands toiled long hours in the most appalling conditions imaginable, living in crowded rooms in back-to-back terraced slums, which rarely had any sanitation, running water or light. Child labour was common practice, and diseases such as TB were endemic.

Engels soon met Mary Burns, a fiery radical Irish woman, and they formed a lifelong bond until she died in 1863. Mary was illiterate and, by all accounts, a heavy drinker (Engels himself being no slouch in this department), but she introduced him to Irish politics and showed him round the slums of Manchester, thus providing much of the raw material for Engels' famous book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1844. The pair never married.

Engels intended to return to Germany for a time in 1844 but stopped off in Paris and then Brussels to spend time with Marx. That period produced the famous *Communist Manifesto* and the co-authored *German Ideology*.

During the latter part of 1848 he was in Germany and volunteered to fight in the revolutionary battles of that year. The revolutionary wave was soon broken and Engels had to escape through Switzerland, making it back to Manchester in November 1849.

Thereafter, Engels was constantly in touch with Marx (in London), helping him financially, exchanging ideas and information, and working with the Chartists and the International Working Men's Association (First International). In 1870 he moved to London, to be closer to Marx, who was to die in 1883.

After Marx's death, Engels edited the manuscripts of Volume 2 and 3 of Marx's *Capital*, wrote *The Origin of*

the Family, Private Property and the State, and, as he did throughout his life, maintained a lively correspondence with socialists in Europe and America. After Mary's death, a relationship developed with her sister Lizzie, and the two were married on her deathbed. Engels survived his friend and comrade by 12 years, and his ashes were scattered off Beachy Head.

It is easy to see Engels as the “other one” in the Marx-Engels relationship, but he was always much more than Marx's financial helper and note-taker.

His work in editing various of Marx's manuscripts, particularly Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, was a Herculean intellectual effort, not helped by Marx's appalling handwriting. His own writings such as *The Holy Family* (1844), *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850), *Anti-Dühring* (1878), *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (taken from sections of *Anti-Dühring*, 1880) and *Dialectics of Nature* (unfinished, written 1872-82, published 1925) have a real claim to permanence even if for example *The Origin of the Family...* has partly been superseded by later developments in anthropology and other sciences.

Some critics seem to “position” Engels as the “good guy” in the Marx-Engels relationship, as if the easier-going Engels would have produced a “lighter”, “happy-clappy” form of socialism than the supposedly dour Marx, poring over tables of economic statistics in the British Museum Library.

Others delight in pointing out that Engels' life held many contradictions: it was not unknown for him to frequent prostitutes, and he loved fox-hunting. While not excusing any of this, the point surely is that all our lives are lived in some state of contradiction. We are all, in a myriad of different ways, the product of our circumstances and time, of the cultural, social and moral limitations in which we live. This must also be offset with Engels' advocacy of women's rights, his internationalism, and his consistent support for Irish self-determination.

When you are next in Manchester go and have a look at his statue in New Street, which was brought over from Ukraine by the artist Phil Collins a few years ago.

And the final word must go to Marx, who, so his son-in-law Paul Lafargue reported, “esteemed Engels as the most learned man in Europe” and “never tired of admiring the versatility of his mind”. □

Stalinist's shameful behaviour on jobs demo

In September, at a Tate gallery workers' demonstration against job cuts in London, a supporter of the Stalinist-nationalist group Red London threw abuse at, harassed and threatened one of our comrades. The labour movement must crack down on this kind of behaviour, and root out the politics and culture Red London represents. Report and protest at bit.ly/redlondon1 □

Mike Perkins, 1932-2020

By John Bloxam

Mike Perkins, a long standing supporter of *Solidarity* and Workers' Liberty, died on 9 November aged 88.

Mike joined shortly after his retirement from work, some 20 years ago. Through his union, Unison, he was on the trade union education course at Southampton College. Run by a socialist tutor, the course was lively, relevant and political, rooted in the class struggle and related political issues. It was 1997. The Labour Party had won the election, but were led by pink-Tory Blairites who had captured control. These issues were discussed on the course, with a number of members continuing that discussion directly with Workers' Liberty. Mike was part of that group and joined our fight as a result.

When the college victimised the trade union education tutor shortly afterwards, there was a strike. Mike, despite health issues affecting his mobility and living outside Southampton City, attended the strong picket line throughout the dispute.

Mike, a lifelong Labour Party and trade union member, was particularly impressed and convinced by John O'Mahony's *The Labour Party in perspective* (Workers' Liberty 28, Feb 1996), and the conclusion of the need to link up and knit together the three main fronts of the class struggle – trade unionism, politics and ideas – into a coherent strategy and activity. Mike acted on this as best he could – both in the local labour movement, including the Southampton Trades Council, and also in Southampton Workers' Liberty forums, which attracted significant numbers of local trade unionists in the same way that Mike had been attracted in 1997.

Mike's commitment and thirst for political ideas remained undimmed, despite failing health that prevented him continuing to attend national Workers' Liberty events for the last few years. But locally he was able to respond to the "Corbyn surge" situation in the Labour Party, and although now in a wheel chair was a keen attender – with the help of his daughter, Susan – at the large Southamp-



ton Momentum meetings.

Quiet and unassuming, Mike's commitment to socialism, the labour movement and workers' liberty remained undimmed until the end. His daughter Susan wrote to Workers' Liberty after his death: "He was a great believer in your cause and I took great comfort in your ideals." Our condolences to her.

Mike was a lovely man, a warm comrade and friend, who will be greatly missed. □

Ukrainian miners' victory blocked in court battle

In October, after a long-running struggle by workers at Ukrainian public mining company KZRK, the workers reached an agreement with management. Now the management is seeking to rob the workers of the gains they won by taking a number of key activists to court.

The KRZK workers have fought hard, and been at the forefront of a recent flurry of workers' struggles in Ukraine. The labour movement internationally must help them win.

For a detailed report and solidarity, see the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign bit.ly/ukrainsc □

Subscribe to Solidarity

Trial sub (6 issues) £2 special deal; Six months (weekly) £22 waged, £11 unwaged, €30 European.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub to subscribe

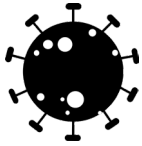
Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923). Standing order £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms [online](#). □

“What we stand for

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

See workersliberty.org/about – if you agree, join us! □

Fighting Covid: the police or workers' control?



Covid-19

By Rhodri Evans

A new campaign was launched on 14 November, called [ZeroCovid](#). It takes up full isolation pay and public-sector Test and Trace, two of the demands raised by campaigns like [Safe and Equal](#), and it is backed by a number of left-wingers, notably in and around the SWP.

Yet its chief demand is a “full” and indefinite lockdown of everything which is not “absolutely essential” until we get to zero or “near-zero” infections.

And its second demand is for international travel to be “reduced to an absolute minimum”. As we shall see, that means closing borders.

The model for ZeroCovid “working” is New Zealand. On 26 March New Zealand started a lockdown. It *wasn't special*. It was similar to the one Britain had from 23 March in its rules and in its perspective, to “flatten the curve”.

But infections started to decrease fast as early as 29 March. NZ's experts had a new thought: maybe they could actually get cases down to zero. They *didn't* keep NZ fully locked down right to zero, as ZeroCovid recommends. There were easings as early as 27 April. But by 6 June they indeed had zero cases in the whole country.

The “zero” proved unsustainable. A new (lighter) lockdown was imposed in the Auckland region from 12 August to 23 September, and wasn't driven to zero either. Since late September NZ's active cases have oscillated around 50. But certainly NZ has done well, with only 25 deaths so far.

The police dealt with [37,000](#) breaches and got new powers to enter homes without a warrant. But the restrictions were sufficiently brief and effective enough for huge voluntary compliance (as in the early-2020 lockdown in Britain, though there was much more police action in France and Spain).

NZ's special virtue was not making lockdown sharper, or continuing it more doggedly. Buenos Aires continued a sharp lockdown for many months from 19 March, yet cases rose until late October. Many countries which have done well have had no lockdowns (in East Asia) or only light ones (Norway, Finland): the strongest common factor is greater acquired social solidarity of one sort or another.

The NZ lockdown worked so fast mostly because the virus had reached NZ later than other countries, and *because NZ closed its borders rigidly from 19 March*. It is two remote islands.

ZeroCovid talks about the pandemic being “over far sooner” the NZ way, but the border closure is far from “over”, and won't be for a long while yet, even with vaccinations.

Another problem with the “ZeroCovid” program is its idea of the role of the labour movement.

If all workers other than those doing “absolutely es-

sential” work are staying home, workers' action is by definition no factor in the program except in improving precautions within “absolutely essential” workplaces.

Socialists are no more against all police-enforced virus curbs than we are against police-enforced traffic laws. We were against the reopening of pubs and cafés and tourism in early July. It doesn't follow that we can zoom off into enlightened-despot-by-proxy politics (as Momentum has put it, “strong leadership”), and pretend that it is really all about freedom and social solidarity.

Labour movement

The specific role of the left and labour movement should be to fight for the social measures and social provision necessary to underpin the social solidarity required for effective covid-distancing.

Borders in Europe are often crossed and not easily closed. Generally that's good, not bad. Britain usually has about 400,000 entries per day. At the lowest this year, it went down to about 30,000, plus 10,000 truck drivers coming through Dover each day and 1,200 through Holyhead. By contrast, on many days in mid-2020 *literally no-one* entered NZ.

Britain's quarantine system for arrivals could surely be made better than the government's current token effort, but even with tight policing it is bound to be leakier than NZ's.

When praising “full lockdown”, ZeroCovid skates over the fact that it means also and centrally (in NZ, too) barring people from meeting their friends, family, lovers. People will do it voluntarily for a while, but not for indefinite months just on the say-so of ZeroCovid amateur epidemiologists.

A full lockdown for as long as it takes to get to zero across Europe *might* have been plausible in early February with rigid border controls. I don't know. Not even relatively successful Norway and Finland tried anything like that.

From now, a new indefinite “full” lockdown in Britain would not bring a quick “zero” like NZ in March. Melbourne, in Australia, had a second surge from mid-June, apparently caused by a “leak” from its border quarantine system. It took restrictions and lockdown until 28 October to get back to the near-zero it had in early June.

That was a much smaller surge than in Europe now, and with closed borders. ZeroCovid's “full” lockdown would have to be for many months, at least. It probably would fray long before it got anywhere near zero. □

• See also “Quarantine, not border closure”, bit.ly/bc-q and “Momentum and the pandemic”, bit.ly/mo-pand

ZERO COVID

Hitler's unwilling citizens



Book review

By Natalia Cassidy

The resistance to the Nazis from within the German working class itself is a subject much overlooked in mainstream narratives around World War 2. The typical narrative that most people in Britain will come across is one of a relatively homogenous fascist population (minus Jews, homosexuals, Romanis, disabled people, etc.) that was overcome by the "good guys" of world politics at the time, chiefly Churchill and his plucky band of Brits. So the myth goes.

Anti-Nazi Germans by Marilyn Moos offers a compelling left-wing alternative to this narrative. How could militants from the most advanced section of the European working class all be subsumed into the Nazi state? The answer is of course that they were not.

Whilst the key organisations and institutions of the German labour movement were systematically dismantled, militants continued to operate underground at great personal risk though with limited impact. The lesson here for the working class today is of course that if we are going to have any hope against the growing threat posed by the far-right it is urgent we set about strengthening the capacity of organised labour to resist attacks against any and all sections of our class.

Moos' book is particularly worth reading for her approach to documenting the German resistance. Rather than simply taking the official lines of the leadership of the [social-democratic] SPD, [Stalinist] KPD and other smaller left organisations of the time such as those of the Trotskyist tradition and projecting those views on the rank and file members of each organisation, Moos takes a detailed view of individual rank and file militants and shows that their approach to anti-fascism and resistance to the Nazi state was not necessarily in line with what their party line dictated.

That is perhaps most evident in the KPD, whose approach to the Nazis was nothing short of disastrous, both on principle and in terms of antifascist tactics. That does not however exclude working class militants active within the KPD from displaying a great deal of bravery in the face of extraordinary difficulty.

Within the same volume, published by Community Languages, Steve Cushion writes about the presence of German volunteers within the French resistance, another topic that has been the subject of much revision as a part of France's national myth.

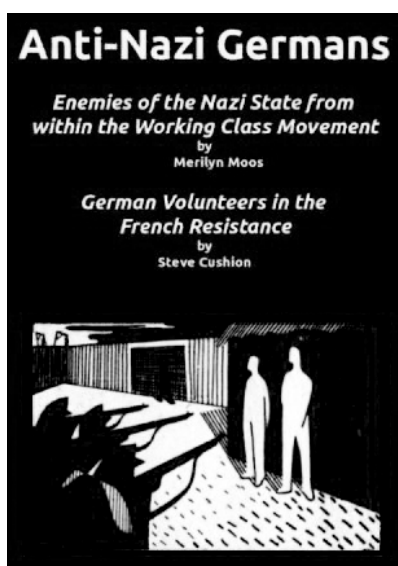
The official French story of the French resistance, constructed in the post-war period by the supporters of De Gaulle and the French Communist Party, both portrayed the resistance as simply a struggle for national self-determination and largely ignored the role of foreign militants

active in the resistance. The resistance did of course involve a great number of left wing Germans as well as a large proportion of Jewish militants from Eastern Europe, many who found themselves in France after fighting in the civil war in Spain. That constituent of the resistance certainly had very little interest in liberating France in order to maintain French imperial rule.

In general, Cushion argues in favour of the Resistance's policy of individual assassination as a tactic against German soldiers – though he does mention alternatives such as that put forward by [Martin Monath](#), a German exile who helped to produce *Arbeiter und Soldat* [a Trotskyist newspaper circulated among German soldiers in France] and argued that French workers and German soldiers should work together given the potential for German soldiers as activists in a German uprising at the end of the war.

That was a position that was held by the Trotskyists in France at the time, who argued against individual assassination on the basis that it drove a wedge between the French and the Germans, the unity of whom was essential for a working class victory.

This book is well worth reading for anyone seeking a bottom-up account of resistance in the Second World War, a topic which holds clear lessons for our own time and the challenges that will no doubt confront the labour movement. □



Our pamphlets

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

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

More: workersliberty.org/pamphlets

Labour retreats on Ofsted and primary tests

By a Lewisham teacher

Reports that the Labour Party leadership is [moving](#) towards reforming Ofsted and SATs testing in primary schools, rather than scrapping them, as promised in the 2019 election manifesto, should give activists and educationalists cause for alarm.

Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, in an interview with [Schools Week](#), has said she wants to lower the stakes in primary testing, but does not commit to scrapping the statutory tests. The statutory tests have nothing to do with improving children's education. They are about measuring schools and school workers to make a competitive, semi-market system.

Any significant testing on children of primary school age (4 to 11) will cause stress and distress to them. In Britain, we continue to suffer a mental health crisis amongst our young people. That is not solely due to the testing culture, but it is a big contributory factor. Surely a big contributory factor to the significant evidence that the effect of school closures during lockdown on children and young people's mental health has been [mixed](#), with many reports suggesting that many students' mental health improved during the closures!

In *Schools Week* Green argues that she is "immensely frustrated" by Ofsted, and she wants to see it be "more of an improvement agency, that it doesn't just come in, write a report and leave, and the school is left to pick up the pieces". However, the new shadow schools minister, [Wes Streeting](#), in the same publication, argues "if you didn't have Ofsted, you would need to reinvent it", adding "Don't tell us what you want to scrap, tell us what you want to build."

That sounds reasonable, and we could support a system of local authority inspectors mandated to support improvement; but Ofsted is not about improving education. Like standardised testing, Ofsted is about grading schools and inculcating a culture of competition and marketisation.

Radical overhaul

The education system needs a radical overhaul. Schools' improvement should be based on collective, collaborative and supportive approaches. Ofsted is steeped in a divisive, individualistic and punitive approach. It should be scrapped.

In her *Schools Week* interview Green also says there is a "compelling logic to scrapping GCSEs". That is to be welcomed.

What is clear from all of this, however, that those in the NEU leadership and around the left who believed that we can wait for education to be positively reformed by an incoming Labour Government should be disabused of this notion. Only if school workers, labour movement activists and Labour Party members fight for it will an education system which meets the needs of our children and young people become part of the Labour Party's platform. □

Our videos!

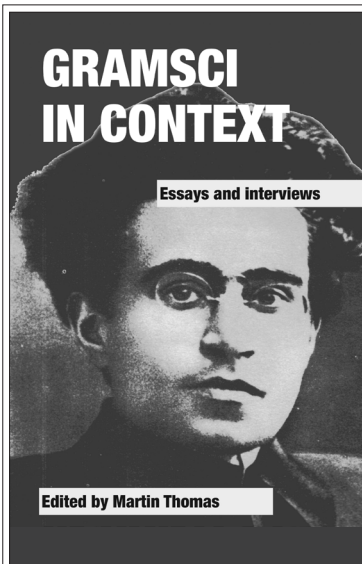
Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **New this last fortnight:**

- After the US election, which way for the left? With Ruth Cashman (AWL), Robert Cuffy (DSA and SWA-Guyana), and Tom Harrison (New Politics EB)
- After the US elections, with Pat Murphy

Plus playlists including

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

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share, all at: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK



Featured book

Gramsci's ideas, name, and terminology are widely misused. This book presents and engages with debates around Gramsci's major ideas; disputes the "post-Marxist" readings of Gramsci; discusses the relation between Gramsci's ideas and Trotsky's; and more. Second, expanded edition: 140 pages, £6.

workersliberty.org/books

Cambridge, Manchester, Bristol: rent strikes spread

By AWL students

On 23 November students at Cambridge University were the latest group to declare they will refuse to pay their rent for their university accommodation until certain demands are met.

Cambridge rent strikers join groups at Manchester (who are also occupying a University building) and at Bristol currently not paying rent; other student groups have either pledged to strike in January or are planning to strike if demands are not met (York, Edinburgh, Goldsmiths).

Cambridge are demanding: a 30% rent reduction; all students allowed to study remotely should they wish to; no Covid-19 job losses; no disciplinary action for rent strikers.

Rent reductions vary: Manchester have demanded a 40% reduction in rent, Edinburgh a 50% reduction. Other demands from rent strike groups include an improved quality of online learning platforms, more academic, social and mental health support, and better access to outdoor spaces. So far no university (with the partial exception of Glasgow) has responded positively to the demands. At Bristol management threatened and then withdrew the threat to take unpaid rent out of the bursaries of some students.

These groups, other student campaign groups, some student union officers and representatives of the National Union of Students are discussing national co-ordination in a build up to what we hope will be a national rent strike at the start of next term.

The co-ordination should also look to make links with Higher Education workers fighting job, other cuts and worsening conditions. Cleaners at SOAS are the latest to open a dispute (over understaffing) with a university management.

Some of the most drastic cuts are proposed at University of East London. 367 jobs are threatened including academics, technical and professional services workers. The management claim they are saving the university. The workers and post-grad students leading a campaign against the cuts at the university say managers are destroying its long-term viability as a functioning and credible academic institution. Years of mismanagement have led to the £31 million deficit, and, further, Covid-19 has become a cover for cuts.

Here as elsewhere there is a recognition that the government financial support that is available for higher education (for example, through the furlough scheme), has been deliberately not been taken up. □

Sheffield couriers strike

By Michael Elms

On Wednesday 25 November, food couriers in Sheffield will carry out an all-day, all-out strike.

Their demands, aimed at all food platforms, are for a living wage plus costs, a fair process on terminations from platforms, and a hiring freeze.

In recent weeks, many couriers across Uber, Stuart and Deliveroo, have found themselves being terminated with no right of appeal. In many of these cases the reason for the termination is computer error. For example, Uber requires riders to submit selfies during a shift in order to prove that they have not rented out their account to a third party. But Uber is either using incompetent HR staff, or, more likely, inadequate facial recognition technology. One courier was accused of fraud and sacked because he had shaved his beard. Alongside poverty pay and Deliveroo's threat of flooding the streets with an additional 15,000 couriers, there is a lot that needs changing in this industry, fast.

The organisation of the couriers in Sheffield into the IWGB union, with the assistance of both the IWGB nation-



ally and local Workers' Liberty and Labour Party activists, has come on by leaps and bounds. Of the core full-time workforce (i.e. drivers who work 50-70 hour weeks, upon whom the service relies), a majority are now paid-up union members. Even more are part of the "open" pro-union WhatsApp group. The strike on Wednesday has been organised in detail to ensure flying picket coverage of the whole city, with arrangements for strike pay and Covid safety.

Through organisation, with the help of the socialist movement, couriers in Sheffield are setting out to civilise a lawless industry. □

“This can inspire work



Interviews

Rolling strikes by Rolls Royce workers in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, are continuing, as workers resist attempts by bosses to cut 350 jobs. The strikes, which involve workers in different parts of the factory striking at different times, maximising the impact on the employer whilst minimising the impact on workers, started on 6 November and will run until Christmas Eve.

A statement by the workers' union Unite said: “This week [starting 23 Nov], the company will be meeting with ministers and MPs to discuss the proposals. Given the criticism of Rolls-Royce's actions from across the political divide, Unite is in no doubt that the company's leadership will be urged to reconsider its plans by MPs in attendance. If Rolls-Royce refuses, the government must make any further support conditional on the jobs staying in Barnoldswick.”

Unite organiser Ross Quinn spoke to Daniel Randall from Solidarity about the dispute.

This dispute takes place in the context of a wider package of 9,000 job cuts Rolls Royce is planning. How does this fit into the union's overall strategy, and is the hope this strike will light a beacon for Rolls Royce workers in other areas of the business to fight back?

At the moment, all our focus is on winning this strike. But there is a wider dimension, which extends beyond Rolls Royce workers. It's about understanding that, whenever there's an economic crisis, employers will use that as a pretext to cut jobs or drive down conditions, and a lot of the time they do that without much resistance and get away with murder. There are a lot of attacks happening that could be stopped.

If this strike is successful, of course we hope it inspires workers in all workplaces, not just Rolls Royce, to see that there is an alternative to just accepting redundancies.

The legacy of the Lucas Plan seems to have a real relevance to this dispute. It's the same industry, and you already mentioned that part of the union's position is to demand the employer finds additional sources of work to keep people employed, so there's obviously already a consciousness around the need for alternative production. Is that kind of approach – workers' plans for repurposing production – part of the union's thinking? Especially in the context of the climate crisis, this seems a really key opportunity to not just have those discussions in the abstract, but to link them to a live struggle.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, in the aerospace sector in the north west we've been organising Zoom



meetings with the shop stewards, where those questions were being put. One thing that was evident early on is that there were aerospace companies involved in “Ventilator Challenge UK”, a government scheme to reorient manufacturing capacity towards producing badly-needed ventilator equipment for hospitals. That's a clear example of how easy it is for these companies to diversify. They've already got all the skills and equipment.

We were speaking to shop stewards about that, and we were developing plans. We put out a report on behalf of the north west aerospace sector within the union, we engaged politicians around that, and were pushing on those issues, talking about diversification. But there's still that magic question of how you get from that to actually making those plans a reality. And then being faced with an attack like the one at Barnoldswick, due to anti-union legislation it took two to three months just to get to where we are today, having to jump through all the necessary hoops in terms of organising the ballot, so there are still big challenges in terms of how you turn a defensive struggle into something that's about changing the way production is organised.

But the shop stewards here were involved in those discussions, as they're part of the sector. This is all part of wider discussions about a the “new industrial revolution”, potential automation and so on... these things are going on anyway, people are already talking about the meaning

British Gas workers fight “fire and rehire”

By Ollie Moore

The GMB union has announced plans to ballot its members in British Gas for industrial action, after bosses refused to withdraw a plan to sack 20,000 workers en masse and rehire them on worse terms and conditions. A union statement said a “a national strike in the gas industry is weeks away” unless British Gas, now owned by the multinational firm Centrica, backed down from the fire-and-rehire plan.

The union has yet to announce a timetable for the formal ballot. An indicative ballot in August returned a 95% majority in favour of action. □

ers in all workplaces”

of a “just transition”, so surely this is the perfect opportunity to try and develop that approach. There’s a long way to go – we’ve found that once you start speaking to people outside the shop stewards’ network, they’re often simply not on the same page, so there’s definitely work that needs to be done to take this forward.

You’ve mentioned legal threats you’ve faced, and the difficulties posed by the anti-union laws. Unite is pursuing what seems a very important legal challenge around the right to picket during lockdown, following police obstruction of a bus factory workers’ picket in Leeds. How have you found the experience of striking and picketing during lockdown? Have you faced any police obstruction?

We haven’t had any police obstruction here. We’re obviously aware of what happened in Leeds, which took place the day before our strike started. By law we’re only allowed six people on the picket line, and we’ve been making sure distancing is maintained. We have asked supporters from other workplaces and unions not to visit the physical picket line, but on 12 November we organised a virtual picket on Zoom via the union’s local activist committee, which we then projected onto a screen at the physical picket, so the strikers could feel that wider support. Of course there are challenges, but that was a good way of communicating the solidarity.

This isn’t a dispute that will be resolved by taking the odd day’s action, we’re going to have to dig in, so those expressions of solidarity will be hugely important for

keeping morale up.

What can workers elsewhere in the labour movement do to support the strike?

Because it’s a well-organised and well-financed branch, the strike fund is relatively healthy. In fact workers have been making donations from that to local food banks. However, as the strike goes on, donations to the strike fund may become more needed, and there are costs associated with the picket line day to day. If people want to make donations, cheques are payable to “Unite NW0062”.

We’re constantly thinking of different ways of building support, of keeping the strike in the public eye, and keeping that wider pressure on the company. A lot of that wider support activity costs money, so donations will certainly help with that.

We have two social media hashtags, [#BattleForBarnoldswick](#) and [#SaveOurSite](#). We encourage supporters to record a short video message, maybe just 20-30 seconds, and post it with those hashtags and tags in any of the Unite social media, such as [@unitetheunion](#) and [@unite_northwest](#) on Twitter. We’ll be collating those videos and projecting them on the picket line, so members can see that they are supported and they’re not on their own. We’ve been getting messages of support from all over the world, and that really does make a difference, when people see there is a lot of people on their side. We’ve got a way to go yet, so all messages of support and solidarity are appreciated. □

• More: bit.ly/rr-bw

Skewed from the start

By Martin Thomas

The quarterly journal *Historical Materialism* has put out a [call](#) for articles for a special issue motivated by the “rise of a new wave of antisemitism”.

Good: except that the call is written so as to define this “new wave of antisemitism” as solely a matter of the European and American far right, i.e. as scarcely “new” at all compared to the 1930s. It dismisses in advance all discussion of strands of antisemitism *within the left* as just “machinations” “to attack Palestinian liberation, Muslim populations in the West... Jeremy Corbyn... the left in the Labour Party... silencing critics of Zionism”.

Machinations by whom? The call doesn’t say, but you can guess...

And this assessment is not presented as one of the views to be debated, but as the framing principle of the symposium.

The call doesn’t say what it means by “Zionism”, but we know that in such “machinations” theories “Zionism”

is usually defined as any doctrine which recognises the right of the Israeli Jews to national self-determination, i.e. the right of Israel to exist, however strongly the doctrine also supports a Palestinian right to self-determination (“two states”).

So what happens to critical dissection of that demonisation of the Israeli Jews as uniquely undeserving of self-determination? Or of the dismissal of all criticism of antisemitism other than in the European and American far right as “machinations”? Or of the history of antisemitic strands in left-wing movements (under Stalinist influence, for example) and their influence within the left today?

Historical Materialism was launched in 1997. Most of its initiators were academics in or around the SWP, but since then its (and their) links to the SWP have weakened and it has had a broad range of contributors and some useful articles. Hopefully contributors will speak out against this regression to preconceived SWP agitational stock. □

Two conversations



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

I'm writing about these conversations because one is crushing, the other is hopeful. The first is some racist young men at college lashing out, the other is a young dad talking his family through some emotionally complicated stuff.

A class discussion

The teacher has given us machine-monitoring YouTube videos to watch. He apologises for the number of American videos.

"I have tried where possible to obtain British sources – but the fact is the US dominate the market when it comes to content like this. The problem is they often try to sell you their particular product and their style is, well... Anyway I've tried to find British videos."

"I'm aware that when you google engineering demonstrations most of the content is American or Indian, but you shouldn't knock the Indian engineering. Yes some of the English is very bad and the accents are hard to understand, but how good is your Farsi, or Hindi?" (One of the students mutters as-salam alaykom) "There's a reason they've produced much of the educational content on the internet, and that's because their engineering infrastructure is huge, and their space program is well ahead of ours, so –" he holds his hands up "they must be doing something right."

When the teacher leaves the room, four of the students look at each other and smile.

"The only reason the Indians have all that is because we gave it to them."

"Eighteen-hundred, we just handed over everything – there you go! That's how they got a space program. They used to be subservient to us and now they think they're in charge –"

They look at M for confirmation, who's a mature student and ex-marine. He doesn't make any arguments, just sits quietly and nods, "Exactly."

A colleague

It's 6am and C's phone keeps chirping. "For God's sake."

"What's up?"

"It's a long story, do you wanna hear it?"

"Sure."

C is recently separated from his partner, but it's his ex's sister who's been texting him since 5am. Her Mum, C tells me, has finally fled an abusive relationship and is staying with her daughter and newborn granddaughter. Her mum has a problem with alcohol, and after breaking promises she's moved her in with her other daughter.

After many texts, C finally gets a call and picks up. "Bet

your fingers are sore?"

I leave the room for a bit, but C doesn't seem to need privacy. I look through the jobs list and finish the admin from yesterday. C continues:

"The thing is – and I've had this conversation with [my ex] many times – is that she's gonna be like this. No matter what you do. She's had a horrible life, she's got a problem with booze – she needs professional help. You can't be there all the time to take care of her – you just can't do it. Be in her life, of course, and she's lucky to have you and your support, but don't go blaming yourself. It's not on you, it's not on you."

"I remember four or five years ago she was talking about coming home from the States – I said I will buy you that ticket, right now I will buy you that ticket. I don't care how much it costs, as long as you're on it. We just want you home. She didn't take it – she wasn't ready – but she's here now."

"When she's with the kids she's brilliant, she is really good with the kids. I think when she's with them she just doesn't think about booze – it's gone."

C takes his chat next door to finish privately. He doesn't bring it up again. □

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

One of the most beautiful films ever made



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

There are other reasons than the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for us to take an interest in Armenia. The countries of the Caucasus have a rich cultural history, and Armenia is home to one of the most beautiful films ever made. Sergei Parajanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1969) is a poetic biography of the eighteenth century "ashugh" (bard or minstrel) Sayat Nova. Its seven dialogue-free chapters follow Nova's life from "Childhood" to "Death" and contains scenes, like tableaux or paintings, of stunning beauty which resist description. Of mixed Georgian and Armenian parentage, Parajanov lived at a time when the region was part of the Soviet Union. His unconventional films and outspoken nature frequently displeased the authorities and he was imprisoned for four years, ostensibly for his homosexuality. He died in 1990. □

Planning to fight pay freeze



**John Moloney,
PCS AGS**

The expectation is that the government will impose a pay freeze or squeeze on public sector workers, with possible exclusions for some healthcare workers. This will hit our members, who've had years of pay freezes following by only small increases, very hard. It will take us backwards.

Our National Executive Committee (NEC) meets on 10 December, and will decide our strategy. I am sure industrial action will be considered. If it is, no doubt the union will approach other public sector unions and trying to build towards coordinated action, but we of course have to be prepared to go on our own if necessary.

If the NEC say yes, then we could build towards action in the new year. There's a specific process inside the civil service called the "pay remit", where the Treasury issues guidance about how much money is available. That usually takes place in April, so that could be the trigger point for industrial action, either on our own or in combination with other unions.

If the NEC votes for a dispute and an industrial action ballot over pay, campaigning on that needs to start immediately. The target should be to speak to every single member of the union – in the workplace for those working in offices, and using phone-banking and other forms of communication to reach workers working from home – about the campaign, convincing them that it's worth fighting back, and ensuring they vote in the ballot. We've missed thresholds in previous national ballots, we can't afford to have that happen again.

Discussion also needs to take place about what kind of action we build for. We need a comprehensive campaign involving national strikes, rolling and selective strikes, and other forms of industrial action such as work-to-rules, all designed to maximise the impact on the employer. Organising effective industrial action in a context where the majority of members are working from home will require some creative thinking. Those discussions need to happen in advance, well before any ballot takes place, so members have ownership over the strategy and feel like

they're voting for something they've had a say in drawing up and which they're confident will be effective.

Local struggles

There are local struggles developing in a number of departments. In the Ministry of Justice, a survey is being sent to members working in courts about a possible industrial action ballot over safety issues will start. Some of our Driving Examiner members are also likely to ballot to resist being pushed back into conducting tests when the lockdown in England ends.

In the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial strategy, our branch will be balloting members working for outsourced contractors such as ISS and Aramark. Outsourced workers are still being compelled to come into work, despite the fact the office building is basically empty.

The directly-employed workers the outsourced workers "serve", as security guards, mailroom staff, cleaners, and so on, are overwhelmingly working from home, but outsourced workers are still having to come to work. That's clearly discriminatory, and in an essentially racialised way, as the outsourced workers are predominantly from BAME and migrant backgrounds. We want those workers put on special paid leave, safe away from the workplace. □

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

ScotRail guards to strike

From Off The Rails



Off The Rails

ScotRail guards based at Glasgow Central station will strike every Sunday between 29 November and 3 January, in a dispute over bosses' abuse of disciplinary procedure.

The strikes are accompanied by a ban on overtime, rest day working, and higher grade working from 30 November to 2 January.

RMT says ScotRail has used company disciplinary policy in a punitive way. A union statement said it was sending a message that "We will not tolerate these continued attacks on the Conductor grade" and "to bring an immediate stop to the punitive disciplinary action against our members". □

Contact us



020 7394 8923



solidarity@workersliberty.org



Write to: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG



Production team: Cathy Nugent, Martin Thomas (editor), Sacha Ismail, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle

Solidarity



For a workers' government



FIGHT THE CUTS, FIGHT THE PAY FREEZE!

C hancellor Rishi Sunak claims he is not “returning” to austerity. This while:

- All public-sector workers outside the NHS get a pay freeze. And the government will not confirm that NHS workers will get a pay rise!
- Councils are saying they need billions more just to avoid yet another round of even deeper cuts.
- The government refuses even to make its measly £20-a-week increase to Universal Credit permanent; it will be withdrawn in April.

Meanwhile the Tories have announced they will increase military spending by £16bn – just enough, as it happens, to cover these less-than-basic but “too expensive” social demands.

All along the line, the Tories are further reshaping the British state to cut back its social provision and support functions while strengthening its repressive and nationalistic ones. The chaos and regression of a hard Brexit will tend to strengthen this trend.

There is a clear ideological dimension. More “defence” spending projects a nationalistic narrative, trying to cement Brexit-inclined layers of voters in support of the government. Unlike popular policies which involve increasing social provision, this one goes with the grain of the Tories’ class commitments.

Two other items which indicate the character of Tory plans are floating a cut of £4bn a year from the foreign aid budget – and, in a grotesque footnote, giving £30m to a “Festival of Brexit”.

The Labour leadership, while saying little about social provision, has backed the increase to military spending.

The labour movement should fight against any mili-

tary increase and for billions in emergency funding to block further cuts and begin to rebuild public services. Labour and trade union activists should build pressure on the Labour leadership to reverse course.

So outrageous is the Tories’ contempt for public sector workers that even Frances O’Grady refused to “rule out” strikes. Union and workplace activists need to seek every opening for launching fights about pay, as an essential part of pushing the wider movement into action!

Political campaigning against cuts and for more funding is also essential. We need much more of it.

The issue of welfare provision should be central. As the (Blairite-but-thoughtful) Resolution Foundation points out, free school meals are surely a help, but the much bigger problem is that Universal Credit pushes millions of people into poverty. In April, that will get even worse.

Council funding is also key. Councils have been on the frontline of cuts for a decade, and were in a catastrophic state before the pandemic. Even the Tory-led Local Government Association is now calling for an extra £8.7bn a year to ward off disaster. Far from vocally calling to reverse all the cuts – let alone campaigning seriously – the labour movement is largely asleep on the issue.

Croydon council in South London is now about to follow Northamptonshire as the second local authority declaring itself bankrupt and saying it will provide, essentially, less than a bare minimum of services. Who will be next?

Labour movement activists need to encourage and magnify every local struggle against cuts, and launch more, while finding ways to weave them together into a wider campaign to reverse cuts and restore funding. □