

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

As Starmmer goes for flag-waving

REGROUP LABOUR'S LEFT INTERNATIONALISTS



See pages 2, 14, 15. Pic: "artist's impression" of Keir Starmer adorned in Union Jacks

Russia's riot cops storm Moscow

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Regroup Labour's left internationalists!

6699 Editorial

Every now and then on Twitter, users will post about their distress at being diagnosed with a terrible illness. The replies to these posts are almost always full of people making “helpful” suggestions: to forego meals and subsist off fistfuls of turmeric; to subscribe to expensive and miraculous yoga courses; homeopathy.

The illnesses are very real; but the remedies often tell you a lot more about the people proposing them than about how to get well again.

It is the same with the Labour Party's famous disconnection from the working class, or at least from a large portion of it. When advertising agency Republic Communications delivered a report (which has since been leaked) to Keir Starmer and other Labour bigwigs saying that Labour has trouble connecting with voters in its “foundation seats”, that it is perceived as being the voice of well-to-do, university-educated people living in cities, or that under Starmer it is hard to distinguish the party from the Conservatives, they were surely pointing at a very real problem.

But the solutions proposed by various professional politicians for reconnecting with the “real working class” (get Starmer a Union Jack tattoo; hire Rod Liddle and Julie Burchill to write Labour's press releases; stigmatise trans people; criminalise more and more categories of foreigner; pretend to be the Tories) are not much more appealing than stopping your meds and staking your life on a diet of spinach smoothies.

A century ago, Lenin described the British Labour Party as a “bourgeois workers' party”: a party of the working class but dominated by bourgeois ideas and no small number of bourgeois politicians. Over its history the balance of power within the party has shifted back and forth. When the workers' movement has been strong and asserted itself, a strong working-class voice has been heard through the Labour Party. In periods of working-class defeat, the bourgeois voice has predominated.

After the workers' movement suffered a succession of defeats under Thatcher, the right wing of the Labour Party, and in particular the Blairite New Labour “project”, came to call the shots. The Labour Party of council leaders, MPs, parliamentary researchers, mayors, police and crime commissioners, HQ staff, NGOs, think-tanks, and consultancy firms walled itself off from the Labour Party of socialist activists and community and workplace organisation. Trade union influence on the party was mediated through unelected union political department chiefs on management-size salaries.

The “professional politicians” at the head of Labour, and the cowed career bureaucrats leading the unions, accepted much of the heritage of the Thatcherites who had defeated them.

The Blairite “party-on-top-of-a-party” model didn't need



an activist party base. “Comms” could be done via a slick media operation; and in any case a living party grassroots might be a source of dissent.

Meanwhile, deindustrialisation and union setbacks meant that workplace organisation retreated from small-town Britain into the big cities. Many retired people living in “red wall” seats may be former Labour voters. But of the people in those communities still in work, many have never been recruited into a living labour movement to begin with.

Ed Miliband encouraged an influx of new members, and loosened up Labour's internal controls a bit, but changed nothing basic. The party was still run by the “Leader's Office”, and all Miliband's inner circle were people who had gone into political jobs straight out of university.

Under Corbyn, some things did change, but the “party on top of a party” remained (although now favouring more-leftish applicants), and policy formulation and communication was still mostly done by media “experts” (although now those “experts” were drawn from the *Morning Star*-Stalinist left).

An increase in the party membership to 500,000 has opened new possibilities; and Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome's decision to take an average workers' wage, donating the majority of her salary to strike funds and labour movement causes, shows a rare seriousness about remaining close to one's working-class constituents. But the pattern has not yet fundamentally changed.

There is no shortage of people now “helpfully” offering solutions to fix Labour's disconnection from the working class in areas of the north and Midlands. Most of their suggestions have to do with attempting to outbid the Tories on nationalism.

What can create a party that “connects” with the working class? To formulate the question like that is telling. We need not a bourgeois party, run by specialists, that creates policies that score well in working-class focus groups, but a party made and staffed by working-class activists and powered and controlled by big lively branches rooted in communities and workplaces. A party that's concerned about winning campaigns and strikes as well as winning elections.

That can be built only by class struggle. Organise unorganised workers; turn Labour Parties outward into campaigning activity in working-class neighbourhoods; fight for pro-working-class policies and education in socialist ideas; and restore party democracy. □

The night Russia's riot police stormed Moscow

By Loretta Marie Perera

On the night of 2 February, the most central parts of Moscow – that is to say, the fanciest, most iconic, and at other times, the most touristy – were taken over in a culmination of ultraviolence brought to the streets by droves of armed men.

Not three years ago these same parts of the capital became known to viewers around the globe as they were swarmed with football fans from all over the world, packed to the gills with revellers and sight-seers thrilled to be in an atmosphere of joy and fun, camaraderie and sportsmanship. It was Moscow at its best. But on this night, these same streets would soon be filled with fear, violence, and brutality as a combination of police and OMON, Russia's riot police, assembled in file, marched militarily in threes, or patrolled in loose lines.

The authorities were armed with helmets, shields, shin guards, shoulder and arm pads, and batons. Soon enough it would be clear, as the protestors began to arrive, that none of this was for show.

The Lead-Up

This night happened in the aftermath of two large-scale protests over the past two weeks: First on 23 Jan after Putin's critic and opposition leader Alexei Navalny was arrested on his return to Russia, and then on 31 Jan. On both days, protestors throughout Russia gathered in the thousands, and arrests were abundant. Human rights watchdog OVD-Info tallied the number of those detained as more than 5000 on the 31st, surpassing the 4000 arrested the week before.

What Happened

Through a combination of tweets, audio recordings, and live footage, court proceedings and growing unrest around the city was streamed.

At 11am Moscow time, Tuesday, 2 Feb, Navalny arrived in court. Today's hearing would determine the outcome of a 3.5-year suspended sentence for embezzlement, a case determined to be politically motivated by the ECHR. During questioning, Navalny was asked about missing the required parole check-ins, as part of his suspended sentence. (He here pointed out that he was in a coma.)

At 8:22pm, following several long breaks, the verdict is delivered: The suspended sentence was shifted to a prison sentence. Taking into account the ten months already served under house arrest, Navalny is required to serve a total of 2.8 years, which keeps him in prison until September 2023.

At 8:29 pm, the rallying message of Navalny's HQ in Moscow is delivered: "Собираемся на Манежной площади прямо сейчас!" – We are going to Manezhnaya Square right now!



As protestors make their way to this central-most part of Moscow, the messages keep coming: "Will we wait for Navalny's release until September 2023? Let's go to Manezhnaya Square right now!"

Daria, a resident of St. Petersburg, took to the streets right away.

"I made my way to the centre right after the verdict was announced, because this is a personal slap in the face to all citizens of the country," she said. "Even more than the verdict itself, I was struck by the detentions near the courthouse and the metro nearby."

Given Navalny's steadfast battle against the Kremlin and growing unpopularity among the authorities, there had been little hope for a positive outcome. Still, the finality of the verdict, the poisoning, the arrest, its outcome, and the scenes on the streets that would follow, hit hard.

With most movement taking place in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and several smaller cities and regions, the police and riot squad were armed and ready, and they had been from well before the verdict was given.

By 9:45 pm, several major metro stations in central Moscow had been closed. Navalny's team instructed their followers on ways to access the area using other routes.

By 10:45pm, calls are sent out to move to another area in central Moscow. Protestors chant, "Russia without Putin!"

As videos flood social media, police presence intensifies as thousands storm central Moscow. In one video, a horde of riot police officers surround a taxi, hauling the man in it out onto the street. Videos and live footage show protestors chanting "We are not armed" – they are attacked anyway.

With live streams of the streets broadcast on independent news channels and on social media, many watched in horror as the events unfolded.

"I wanted to scream," said Daria. "I came home and burst into tears with anger and resentment, and then all night I watched as protestors were beaten." →

For others, the overwhelming violence that erupted on both ends hit the hardest.

"I was equally speechless when looking at the pictures and videos where the protesters were being beaten by the law enforcement forces in the streets, and when reading the news about a driver of a Moscow administration car whose eye got badly hurt with a glass of a windscreen which was broken by the protesters," said Olesya in Moscow.

"There is no 'their pain' and 'our pain'. It is just pain."

Past midnight, the march of protestors continued, as did the arrests. This continued past 1am, where messages to get home safely began to circulate.

Pushback from Russian citizens, world leaders

On the day itself, world leaders would issue statements of concern and disappointment, and demands for justice and freedom. In the days that followed, diplomats from Sweden, Poland, and Germany would be expelled for their participation.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted, "Today's ruling was pure cowardice and fails to meet the most basic standards of justice. Alexey Navalny must be released immediately," while French president Emmanuel Macron called for his immediate release, tweeting that "respect for human rights and democratic freedoms is not subject to any negotiations."

A statement from the US State Department read, "We reiterate our call for the Russian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Navalny, as well as the hundreds of other Russian citizens wrongfully detained in recent weeks."

In Russia, the hashtag #негрустивсебудутхорошо (don't be sad, everything will be fine – Navalny's words to his wife following his sentencing) was used by citizens to post pictures of themselves in red in a show of support for Navalny's wife Yulia, while a statement from Navalny himself called for protestors to overcome fear. "The truth is on our side," he said.

An uneasy day after

What happens next remains unclear. Navalny, serving his sentence, has had more charges yet brought against him – this time for defamation.



Pic: Nikita Sologub

Meanwhile, street protests have been put on hold for now, with attention directed to more activity in the spring and summer ahead of parliamentary elections in September.

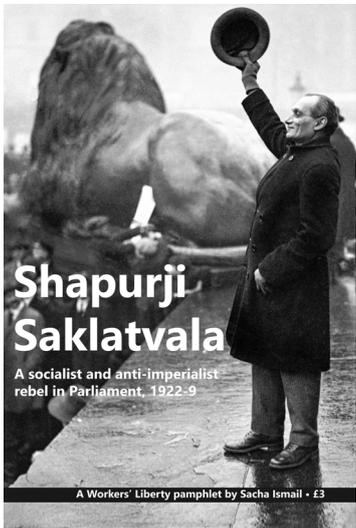
On Tuesday, 9 Feb, Navalny's chief of staff Leonid Volkov clarified that the protests are not cancelled; they will continue in a different format. "We need to adopt something that is stronger than fear," he wrote in a Telegram post. Now, protestors are encouraged to instead show their support in their neighbourhoods by holding up their mobile phone lights for a set period of time – from Sunday, Feb. 14, 8:00pm till 8:15pm.

"No riot police, no fear," Volkov said. "It may seem to you that these 15 minutes will not change anything – but, in fact, they will change everything."

Following the three protests, many Russians are now facing uncertainty.

A resident of St. Petersburg, Albert, believes that more fundamental changes are needed for any progress to be made. "What shocked me the most was not the resilience of the propaganda machine or the older generation's unwavering support for the government's actions," he said, "[but that] somehow even a few of my otherwise liberal college friends were convinced that the verdict was somewhat fair or at the very least legal."

"I do not think there's any hope for Russia's democratic process until people learn to live in the post-truth reality and educate themselves on basic human rights." □



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China sets state strategy for sexism



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The Chinese state has announced a sexist strategy to stop the "feminisation" of Chinese boys. It thinks the nation's teens are too delicate, timid and effeminate.

A letter from China's state education ministry has announced the plan to prevent the "feminisation" of young Chinese males, arguing young men can be prevented from becoming too girly by more sport and being exposed to more traditionally masculine role models. The Chinese Government has recently expressed concern over the growing popularity of movie stars and pop icons, saying widely admired role models were formerly traditional masculine athletic figures.

On state media, journalists have suggested Chinese male celebrities who "wore eyeliner" and weren't traditionally masculine have feminised Chinese boys. Many of China's male celebrities being blamed are known as "little fresh meats", a slang term for young, Chinese male icons who are styled as squeaky-clean, well-groomed, and pretty.

This includes boyband TF Boys and singer Lu Han (pictured). President Xi Jinping is [reported](#) as believing that sports stars and military men should serve as role models instead.

The plan to "toughen up" young boys with physical exercise comes after an initial plan in May by Si Zefu, to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, saying that boys were now too delicate, effeminate, and timid. Si Zefu continued this "would inevitably endanger the survival and development of the Chinese nation" unless it could be "effectively managed".

The letter instructs educators to focus on physical education, and suggested recruiting "retired athletes and volunteers with sports expertise to serve as PE teachers". The letter also urged teachers to "pay more attention to the cultivation of students' 'masculinity', and continue to add new physical education teachers through multiple channels".

The notice to Chinese teachers, on "Preventing the



Feminisation of Male Adolescents", has sparked some backlash. On Weibo, China's most popular social media channel, a hashtag about the plan attracted more than 1.5 billion views and 200,000 posts. Many criticised the sexist plan

"Boys are also humans ... being emotional, timid or gentle, these are human characteristics," one Weibo user wrote, attracting 200,000 likes.

"What are men afraid of? Being the same as women?" another said. □

Drop Walney's inquiry!

By Chris Reynolds

On 7 February the former right-wing Labour MP John Woodcock – now Lord Walney, a Tory supporter, and the government's official for "countering violent extremism" – announced via the *Daily Telegraph* that the government had asked him to do a new "inquiry" into "extremism".

Walney said that the biggest "threat" is the "far right", but the *Telegraph* chose to headline "far left influence in Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Black Lives Matter".

It quoted Walney further as saying that he was worried about people supporting groups like Unite Against Fascism, in which the Socialist Workers Party [SWP] plays a role.

This reads, for now, like an attempt to spook the left. XR has consistently avoided violence against people. Unite Against Fascism has been ultra-respectable, its sponsors including former Tory prime minister David Cameron, and its protests organised to minimise clashes with fascist mobilisations. In any case it is largely dormant now, replaced by Stand Up to Racism. Far from controlling the Black Lives Matter protests last summer (which were non-violent), the SWP usually did not even turn up to sell papers at them.

But we should beware. Demand Labour call on the government to drop the inquiry! □



Activist agenda

Safe and Equal is focusing on careworkers' isolation pay, and approaching other groups which have backed the call for full isolation pay, such as Don't Leave Organise, to propose a coalition or united front on the issue. It also has a new leaflet for door-to-door distribution: email safeandequal@gmail.com to get a bundle. All campaign info and links, and model motions texts, at workersliberty.org/agenda

Capital is the culprit



Environment

By Zack Muddle

“Things are harder for our generation than they were for our parents. But in one respect we are luckier than our parents. We have begun to learn and are rapidly learning to fight – and to fight not as individuals, as the best of our parents fought... but for our slogans, the slogans of our class. We are fighting better than our parents did. Our children will fight better than we do, and they will be victorious.”

*Lenin, 1913,
The Working Class and Neo-Malthusianism*

This article takes up from the [review of David Attenborough: A Life on This Planet](#) in *Solidarity* 580.

Fossil fuel – mostly coal – was used for heating [before capitalism](#). Coal is considerably more energy-dense than wood or other alternatives, suiting it as a fuel to be transported into towns and cities. This heating was largely domestic, so fossil fuel use was tied to population size. That population constraint rules out exponential explosion of fossil combustion.

With capitalism, factories developed and expanded as a way of disciplining workers and regularising production. Having a single external energy source driving its machines – rather than muscle – enforces a constant pace, and yet greater discipline. Automation, and with it deskilling, helps capitalists to break workers’ industrial power more still. External energy sources become even more profitable.

At crucial points in the development of capitalism, coal-fired steam-power allowed capitalists more freedom to move their factories *where* they wanted, and run them *when* they wanted, than otherwise cheaper and better water power.

The freedom to locate factories within densely populated cities gave capitalists access to a greater pool of available workers, already used to factory discipline, and looking for work. This required a much lower investment of fixed capital than building a factory and village for workers at a good location for a water wheel.

The ability to reliably run factories all day, every day, helps capitalists extract the maximum labour from workers, especially when workers won limits on the clock-time they could be compelled to work for.

The introduction and expansion of fossil fuels, as the energy basis of production, was thus largely a manoeuvre by capital in the offensive against labour.

Huge dams and complex systems involving aqueducts could have provided reliable power, located in a wide range of places, and cheaper than steam-power. However, that involved more technical planning, imposed

interdependence on competing capitalists, and required big investments of fixed capital. From the start, the fossil economy was fuelled by the peculiarities of capitalist relations of production.

In the last 200 years, global population has grown by a factor of roughly 7.3, while global emissions have grown over 100 times as fast, by a factor of roughly 730. The *uncoupling* of carbon dioxide emissions from population is precisely the problem. Today, one-sixth of the world population – all low-income people in the global south – make no net contribution to global greenhouse gases. The global discrepancy in energy use, currently, is significantly higher than 1,000-fold.

Population, contrary to David Attenborough and the Malthusians, is not the problem. “Humanity” as a whole is not to blame for climate change. Capital and the ruling-class, not “us all”, have driven it.

Resource depletion and ecosystem destruction are likewise dependent on how society, production, and consumption are organised, much more than how many people populate that society. Indeed, with more people – in a rationally and democratically organised society – comes greater resources of dynamic human labour, which can apply the latest of science to work on environmental issues.

Short of the overthrow of capitalism, we should approach every new person as a potential political agent in transforming society, not simply another mouth to feed.

That all said, the *rate* of global population growth peaked some decades ago. Following current trends it is often predicted that global population will peak in around a century. I would critique many such models, for simplistic extrapolation to future population which elides complex social, political, economic factors. That is, capital’s sometimes contradictory quantitative and qualitative demands for labour, combined with reactions and resistance to these drives, shape population. The social complexity involved means that we cannot assume a reliable smooth bell-curve. But such simplistic theories do puncture the even-more simplistic fear of too many people existing, each having too much fun.

Attenborough does not follow some “populationists” in advocate legal restrictions on reproductive rights, such as a “one-child policy”. Even less does he follow Malthus, the original populationist, in accepting deaths by famine, war, or disease as necessary to keep population in check. Instead, he advocates tackling poverty and raising the standard of living across the global south, helping girls to stay in education, and empowering them and their reproductive freedoms.

These positive changes would unarguably be key aims of any workers’ government; and they would additionally slow population growth. Yet tipping blame towards the global south, where population is growing fastest, or the exploited classes, who form the numerical majority of the global population, lets the real culprits off the hook. □

After the Napier fire: close these camps!

By Josh Lovell

29 January saw a fire in Napier army barracks, in Kent, which is being used to house several hundred asylum-seekers. Simultaneously the site was in the middle of a Covid-19 outbreak, with over 130 positive cases. Clearly the poor, cramped living conditions are driving waves of deadly infection.

Home Secretary Priti Patel's response? Assume the fire was a deliberate act of arson (without evidence) and rubbish claims that the accommodation was at all sub-standard (because it was fine for soldiers, despite having been uninhabited for ten years).

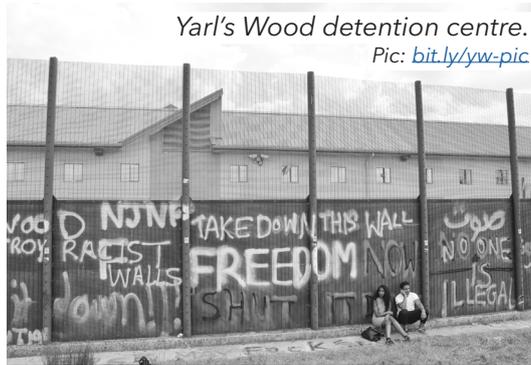
The same issues are raised by the Home Office plans, only just withdrawn, to temporarily house two hundred asylum-seekers at Yarls Wood detention centre in Bedfordshire. People were originally supposed to be moved in before Christmas, but local pro-migrant campaigners had been actively resisting this. None had yet been placed there. Putting anyone in immigration detention at all is barbaric, and additionally Yarls Wood was built miles away from any support services, without reliable transport.

Those two hundred people were to be told they are "free to come and go", but with a curfew and a warning not to go to any nearby villages. Detention in all but name.

The living conditions in hotels are preferable to those of detention centres and army barracks, but that doesn't mean they are decent. The *Liverpool Echo* has reported on the food being provided to asylum-seekers in hotels by outsourcing giant Serco. Some were referred to as "unidentifiable mush" and others far below any reasonable nutritional standards. What it is deemed acceptable to provide asylum-seekers is grimly visible. Without the right to work, and with a weekly stipend of little over £5 a week, they are dependent on these "meals" to survive.

At the root of all this is the Home Office's desire to make life as miserable as possible for asylum-seekers, as a deterrent to them arriving and staying. There are reports of people crammed into Napier barracks fleeing the UK. Internal Home Office documents confirmed this situation only days ago, revealing that ministers justified not providing decent conditions for asylum-seekers since doing so could "undermine public confidence in the asylum system".

In addition, of course, there are profits being made. With the smash-and-grab nature of outsourcing during this cri-



sis, private firms are raking it in from the immiseration of asylum seekers. Serco will be making millions from malnourishing asylum-seekers. Clearspring Ready Homes' contract with the Home Office is worth £1bn, despite the insecure, unsafe accommodation they have provided.

The camps of all kinds should be emptied and shut down, and decent accommodation provided to all asylum-seekers, in normal areas,

with the right move freely, and full and equal access to ordinary financial support and services. Local Labour Parties and union branches should raise calls for this, like that made by Tonbridge and Malling CLP: bit.ly/tonbmotion. The labour movement should link up with migrants' rights and asylum-seekers' groups to make the biggest fuss we can, while also fighting for the party to commit to the pro-migrant changes demanded by Labour conference in 2019: bit.ly/lcfmmotion.

At the moment Labour, as on so many issues, has little to say.

Our movement needs to hold the government to account over their atrocities, build solidarity with those detained and malnourished, and continue the fight to overturn the whole system of detention. □

• Josh Lovell is a Labour Campaign for Free Movement committee member, writing here in a personal capacity

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Myanmar: demonstrations and strikes confront military

By Sacha Ismail

Large demonstrations and strikes have swept across Myanmar to overturn the military coup which began on 1 February.

Events are developing fast as we go to press. For more information and updates, see the website of [Frontline Myanmar](#) and the Twitter accounts [@AndrewTSaks](#) and [@Rgnhardliner](#) (the former in particular for worker-focused coverage).

The military regime has responded with demands to disperse, arrests, snatching people off the streets, water cannons and more extreme violence. At least three people have died after incidents including shootings and a car driving into protesters.

Reports indicate demonstrations in many parts of the country, and from a wide range of communities and ethnic groups, even those who will be frustrated with the overthrown National League for Democracy government's refusal to challenge the military's Bamar- (Myanmar's largest ethnic group) and Buddhist-chauvinist oppression of minorities.

It also seems that striking workers are playing a leading role in the mobilisation, with garment workers, health workers and teachers in the lead. It looks as if workers have taken the lead in mobilising against the coup while the NLD temporised. The role of unionised garment workers, mainly young women, looks particularly striking.

Under the slogan of "Civil Disobedience Movement" and "Stay at Home Movement" – evidently not meaning to actually stay at home! – strikes seem to be spreading across the country.

There have also been specific contingents of LGBT people on some demonstrations.

Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD won a huge majority in the 2015 election, and an even bigger one last November. The army-front party USDP was utterly crushed both times. In reality, the military never gave up much power.

Since 2011 the regime, in power for decades, has loosened up in some respects. A semi-legal trade union movement has emerged, with evidently very important consequences. (See bit.ly/jacmy)

The NLD is a capitalist liberal party, but its leadership at least is also worse than that.

After the first relatively free elections and NLD victory

in 2015, the military escalated persecution of the mainly-Muslim Rohingya people in Rakhine state, cooperating with extreme-right Buddhist chauvinists to unleash a wave of extrajudicial killings, rapes, arson and other brutality. Many thousands were killed, most of the Rohingya are now outside Myanmar, and those who remained are held in an apartheid style-system.

Aung San Suu Kyi and her allies not only failed to speak out for the Rohingya, but denied the genocide was taking place and repeated the military's falsehoods about Islamist terrorism and illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

Ko Ni was a prominent NLD member who had been an adviser to Aung San Suu Kyi and to the party. A secular Muslim of mixed Indian-Burmese and Muslim-Buddhist descent, he opposed the oppression of the Rohingya, promoted inter-community dialogue and advocated removal of the military's role in Myanmar's constitution. When he was assassinated by plotters linked to the regime in 2017, thousands of all backgrounds attended his funeral. Aung San Suu Kyi did not attend or send his family her condolences. □

Against Saudi war in Yemen

By Mohan Sen

Joe Biden has announced the end of US support for Saudi-led offensive military operations in Yemen, arguing in a foreign policy speech that they have "created a humanitarian and strategic catastrophe". The details, so far, are blurry.

Intervention by the Saudi Arabia-dominated military coalition, directed against Iranian-backed Shia Islamist/nationalist Houthi militias, has resulted in many tens of thousand of fatalities, including over ten thousand civilians killed directly by coalition attacks.

Save the Children estimates that between April 2015 and October 2018 85,000 children died from malnutrition. According to the UN, 20 million in Yemen (pop. 24m) need help securing food and 10 million are "one step away from famine". 18 million do not have adequate access to clean water. Four million have been displaced.

Socialists have no reason to support the authoritarian, antisemitic Houthis or their Iranian sponsors; but every reason to demand an end to the Saudis' war and foreign support for it.

The UK is not formally part of Saudi Arabia's coalition, but provides essential technical assistance to the Saudi airforce, and allow billions in sales of fighter planes, arms and equipment by British companies. □

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 □

Return of the Anti-Monopoly Alliance



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The “Recapitulation Theory” in biology claims that the human embryo in the womb passes through every evolutionary stage from amoeba to fish to invertebrate, etc. etc., up to primitive human form. As a biological theory “recapitulation” is long discredited, but the *Morning Star* does seem to do something like “recapitulation” of Stalinism.

“Third Period” Stalinism of 1928-34 was an ultra-left line that held that social democracy and liberalism were the last obstacles in the way of socialist revolution and that their destruction by fascism might even hasten the revolution.

All proportions guarded, some version of that was a strand in the paper’s coverage of Brexit: despite Brexit being a project of the most right wing elements of the Tory party, by its disruption of mainstream EU neoliberalism it would somehow benefit the working class. Pro-Europeans are still regularly denounced (as “liberals”, “centrists”, etc.) with a venom never directed at Boris Johnson, whose Brexit strategy had the paper’s de facto support.

Similarly, contributors like Zoltan Zigedy, (the pen name of the US Stalinist Greg Godels), defended Trump against “the liberal establishment”. Zigedy (like Nick Wright – another regular contributor) denounced “the big lie of Rus-siagate” and strongly hinted that Trump was preferable to the Democrats because he supposedly took working-class concerns seriously and had a less interventionist foreign policy.

“Third Period”

The real “Third Period” lasted from 1928 to 1934 and then in 1935 Stalin’s “Communist International” did a 180% turn and introduced “The People’s Front Against Fascism and War” (better known as the Popular Front). Communist Parties were now instructed to form broad alliances with all “anti-fascist” forces, including not just the formerly reviled social democrats but also openly capitalist forces – especially representatives of small businesses, which were regarded as somehow more progressive than big businesses.

When fascist movements faded (for a while), we then had the “Anti-Monopoly Alliance”, a key part of the British Communist Party’s programme *The British Road to Socialism*, written by or at least approved by Stalin in 1951. It included an appeal to “Small shopkeepers and business men, as well as small landowners and farmers in the countryside, [who] will be freed from restrictions imposed by the monopolists, and will benefit from the rising turnover resulting from the new conditions.”

“Third Period” ultra-leftism had coexisted with strands prefiguring popular-frontism, like Willi Münzenberg’s “An-

ti-War Congresses”; and in its 1950s heyday the “Anti-Monopoly Alliance” coexisted with episodic “Third Period” type essays, like the French CP’s deliberate courting of clashes with the police (two dead, hundreds injured) on its May 1952 “Ridgeway” demonstration.

It has been noticeable that over the past year or so the Anti-Monopoly Alliance has been making more frequent reappearances in the *Morning Star*. Most recently (2 Feb 2021) the paper carried article entitled “Communists call for unity in struggle against capitalism” reporting upon a presentation made by Bill Greenshields to the CP’s executive. The article concludes:

“The committee endorsed his call for an alliance of labour movement bodies, the People’s Assembly and other campaigning organisations to oppose monopoly domination of government policies and the economy.

“We need an anti-monopoly people’s convention to highlight the negative role played by big business in our society and to highlight an alternative strategy,” Mr Greenshields said.”

Although the *Morning Star* and the CPB rarely point it out these days, the entire concept of the “anti-monopoly alliance” only makes sense if it involves an alliance between the labour movement and small capitalists. The then-editor Richard Bagley was at least frank about this in a 2014 interview: “The broad thrust is that there needs to be an anti-monopoly alliance involving small shopkeepers, labour communities and trades unions, encountering the weight of the corporations and global pressures. That’s a comfortable place to be for a newspaper.” (*East End Review*, 13 Aug 2014). □



Upcoming meetings

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

Sunday 14 February, 11:30-1.30pm: Socialist feminist reading group – Gender, Sex, and Identity

Sunday 14 February, 6.30-8pm: What can the labour movement do to help tackle Covid?

Monday 15 February 7:30-9pm: The Workers’ Party (PT) in Brazil

Monday 15 February, 7pm: Making solidarity with couriers

Monday 15 February, 6-7pm: Democratise your uni

Monday 1 March 7:30-9pm: Why is there no labour party in the USA?

Plus

Every Monday, 6-7pm: AWL Students’ discussions

Wednesdays 3, 13 Feb. and 3, 17 March, 7-8.30pm:

The Retreat from Class by Ellen Wood, study group

Thursdays, 8-9pm: Marx’s “Grundrisse”, study group

Our calendars of events: browse or subscribe!

For **full and updated details**, zoom links, more meetings and resources, **visit** workersliberty.org/events □

Vaccines and transmission



Letters

Overall arguments made in “Requisition Big Pharma!” ([Solidarity 580](#)) are important and good. The implicit rejoinder to demands to bump school workers up the queue is apt. Yet the article imbalances further than justifiable, or necessary.

It notes “[t]he carefully-reasoned elderly-first vaccination schedule designed by scientists. (They explain its advantages over “no, vaccinate *me* first” cries from rival younger groups).

“The vaccines probably reduce transmission to some degree; maybe a lot, but we don’t know. It will be difficult finding out. (If transmission drops in Britain now, is that because of lockdown or because of vaccines?)”

The JCVI schedule is right to prioritise strongly according to age, but that is not *all* it argues for:

“[F]irst priorities [currently] should [include] protection of health and social care staff and systems. Secondary priorities could include vaccination of those... at increased risk of exposure, and to maintain resilience in essential public services.”

The top two of nine priorities in the first phase include carers and “frontline health and social care workers”, because:

“Protecting them protects the health and social care service and recognises the risks that they face in this service. Even a small reduction in transmission arising from

vaccination would add to the benefits of vaccinating this population, by reducing transmission from health and social care workers to multiple vulnerable patients and other staff members.”

The article is right to highlight the difficulty in assessing how much vaccination reduces transmission. But implication that evidence will be sought on country-wide bases is misleading.

The day the editorial was published, [a paper](#) submitted to *The Lancet*, although not yet peer reviewed, found a 67% reduction in positive PCR results from the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. The Oxford vaccine team interpret this as translating to an equivalent reduction in infections, hence sources of transmission.

We should not overstate this tentative result. Better would be more direct evidence of reduced transmission. This could be attained through very controlled (e.g. “human challenge”) trials, perhaps even through a very well-functioning functioning and fleshed out track-and-trace system.

Once the most vulnerable have been vaccinated, if firm evidence demonstrates that vaccines do significantly reduce transmission, *perhaps* targeting “transmission belts” will reduce the number of vulnerable people exposed to the virus at all; protecting better than continued vaccination in order of clinical vulnerability.

“The labour movement cannot second-guess the scientists”, the article rightly states. This brings an obligation to balanced reporting. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

Mick Brooks and the banks



Letters

Longstanding socialist and Labour Party activist Mick Brooks (1948-2021), who has died as a result of complications from Covid-19, was co-author with Michael Roberts of the Fire Brigades Union’s 2013 [pamphlet](#) on public ownership of the banks and high finance.

Mick continued to vocally and actively make the case for this essential but little-advocated idea. He also ran regular Karl Marx walking tours in London with Roberts.

In the face of multiple convulsive social crises, the demand for public and democratic control of finance is more relevant and urgent than ever. For those who did not know him, the best way to honour Mick Brooks is to popularise and build labour movement campaigning for it.

He had been involved in the anti-Vietnam-war move-

ment and joined the Labour Party Young Socialists as a teenager. Active in the Revolutionary Socialist League/Militant and the International Marxist Tendency, and then the broader Labour left (he was political secretary of the Labour Representation Committee and editor of its *Labour Briefing*), he supported a wide range of campaigns and struggles virtually to the end.

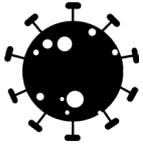
In 2012 he published a book analysing the post-2007 upheaval, *Capitalist Crisis: Theory and Practice*.

You can read other appreciations of Mick at [bit.ly/mickb-lrc](#) and [bit.ly/mickb-hub](#) □

Sacha Ismail, South London



What two numbers tell us



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

Two numbers tell us what to campaign for on the pandemic. Pfizer reckons to make £4 billion profit this year from its Covid-19 vaccine. 70% of people applying for Britain's £500 self-isolation dole are turned down.

We must swell the growing campaign for full isolation and sick pay for all workers. We must demand that governments requisition Big Pharma, in the first place putting vaccine information into the World Health Organisation's [Covid Technology Access Pool](#) so that production can be maximised under public control, on the analogy of war-time. And fund the WHO's Covax scheme to get vaccines for poor countries.

Pfizer explicitly refused US government funding for its vaccine research (though its partner BioNTech got German government funding) to free its hands for profiteering.

The Tory government refuses full isolation pay, not so much because it's expensive – it has paid out far more in business grants and loans, and to the test-and-trace private contractors – as because it fears good isolation pay will reset the worker-boss balance for the future, creating an unstoppable demand for permanent better sick pay.

Solidarity has argued [since May 2020](#) for publicly-organised quarantine for people coming into the country (rather than the unpoliced requests to self-isolate in homes, usually with other people, after travelling to them by public transport...). Closed borders on the New Zealand model do "work" for remote islands; but even if we

were to ignore their downsides they would scarcely be workable for Britain, with about 10,000 truck drivers arriving every day.

Publicly-provided quarantine accommodation for people who would otherwise "self-isolate" in crowded homes; a public-health test-and-trace operation instead of the Serco-Deloitte-G4S-etc. mess; and bringing social care into the public sector, with careworkers on regular public-sector pay and conditions, remain important.

Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands have reopened primary schools (so has New York), and schools have remained open in France, but with anti-infection measures generally not yet instituted in British schools. Worldwide, death rates have turned down (modestly) in all continents in the last couple of weeks (or levelled off, in the USA, with case rates decreasing there); but the rates are still high, especially in Britain, and there is no guarantee against new virus surges.

Vaccination is important, but almost certainly won't by itself get the pandemic down to low levels any time soon. For at least three reasons: new variants against which the vaccines work less well, until reformulated; we don't yet know how much vaccines reduce *transmission* (as distinct from reducing *severe illness*); and even if we win requisitioning Big Pharma, vaccination *worldwide* will take a long time.

Talk of "Zero Covid" in a foreseeable future is unrealistic. Even the remote islands with closed borders don't have that. Australia is running with about 1500-2000 detected cases at any one time, New Zealand with 50 to 100, Taiwan with 70 to 150, and none of those has a real plan for reopening borders any time soon.

In the meantime we need covid-distancing, and the social measures to make it work well and limit its social costs. □

Tories back new coal mine

By Abel Harvie-Clark

The government has come under attack from its own climate change advisors about the decision to allow a new deep coal mine to be built in Cumbria.

It would be the first new deep coal mine in 30 years in the UK. On the other side of the North, recent victories for climate campaigners had led many to think that new coal was well and truly off the agenda. Banks Mining Group had three developments rejected in 2020, to extend their Bradley open cast mine in County Durham; and build new ones at Druridge Bay in Northumberland and Dewley Hill, on the edge of Newcastle.

In each case, opposition came predominantly from community groups formed around protecting the local environment, with support from the Green Party, and the local youth climate strike group, who focussed on the

larger climate crisis.

The new proposal shows the limitations of localised defence campaigns. The promise of "local jobs" still holds appeal in areas blighted by unemployment. Unite's national officer for construction, Jerry Swain, has led the union's efforts for new coal mines to be opened.

In reality, the proposed developments offer a small number of jobs in a completely unstable industry, that is almost guaranteed to be phased out rapidly: campaigning for such jobs, rather than stable jobs in green, socially-useful production, reflects the defeatism ingrained in labour movement bureaucrats.

Whilst localised environmental campaigns might win some battles, we need a mass socialist movement to win the ecological war. □

• Abridged: more bit.ly/n-coal

NHS reshaped under

By Jayne Evans

For many, Covid-19 has exposed the need for urgent restoration of a public health system and an expanded publicly provided NHS. But, while applauding the work of “key workers”, the Government is steaming ahead with the plans to restructure the NHS. NHS England (NHSE) is currently consulting on their latest plans for “integrating care”, including changes to legislation.

The summary below of the key changes, and an explanation of where the current trajectory of privatisation and restructuring may end, is taken from a presentation made by the Save Liverpool Women’s Hospital campaign.

In 2012 the Health and Social Care Act created Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). They were run by GP’s but “advised” by big business. These groups represented a departure from universality of provision of health care, i.e. there was no obligation to treat all patients in an area but there was an obligation to put out contracts to tender.

NHS England (NHSE) has since pushed through a policy to merge the 210 clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) into 42 CCGs coterminous with the 42 geographically based integrated care systems (ICSs). NHS England expects that merger to be achieved by 2022.

Not all areas have agreed CCG mergers and only 18 ICSs are in existence to date. Those areas where CCGs have not yet merged or have refused to merge are being coerced. In Merseyside, the four Cheshire CCGs have agreed to merge but the area that is intended to merge to form one organisation is Merseyside and Cheshire.

The deadline to take part in the NHSE “consultation process” on moves to ICSs was 8 Jan.

What difference will it make?

The “current direction of travel” is that an ICS will submit a collective operational plan for their area to NHS England. Instead of separate submissions for each CCG there will be one from each area. Within that area plan, agreement can be made for one part to make a surplus and another to run a deficit but overall the area is expected to break even. Keep our NHS Public have raised the following concerns:



1. Centralisation and loss of local democracy

ICSs are set up from top down as a bureaucratic fait accompli, with no public consultation or support. They involve not only CCG mergers, but also even larger-scale mergers of hospital and of mental health trusts. Each merger cuts any genuine local links and accountability that might have survived the past 30 years of reorganisations and market-style policies. The ICSs are not going to be responsive to demands or pressures from local communities.

2. Loss of accountability

ICSs lack any legal standing or accountability and are part of a wider NHS England project to enforce tighter regional-level control over cash-limited budgets, impose restrictions on the range of services provided by the NHS, and drive through new data-led schemes for “population health management”. New contracts are already being issued to private companies to “manage” GP referrals to hospital and other services.

3. Structures being established to make the process of privatisation faster

NHS England has set up the Health Systems Support Framework (HSSF) to facilitate even more rapid and easy involvement of private sector management consultants, number-crunchers and other providers into the new ICSs.

The HSSF is a list of accredited companies (plus a few NHS providers) offering trusts and CCGs a range of services that can “support the move to integrated models of care based on intelligence-led population health management”.

The HSSF has established a series of “framework contracts” through which companies seeking contracts can secure pre-approval, allowing contracts to be awarded without a tendering process, either with no competition or through a “mini-competition” between companies on the list. This framework has 83 NHSE-accredited companies, 22 of which are US-based.

Felicity Dowling of the Save Liverpool Women’s Hospital campaign argues that these new regional bodies pave the way for further cuts and privatisation via the route of outsourcing of services or not providing them at all, and also leads to the creation of regional bodies that mirror the US structure of health care provision. The new structure would lend itself to regional health and social care provision being handed over to private health care providers.

It would lead to a further break down of an integrated national health care system which guarantees provision of services. It could lead to an erosion of national agreements regarding pay and work conditions.

Felicity also reported that despite opposition to mergers in the North West, and even though policy hasn’t been

r cover of pandemic

announced or passed to agree mergers, finances are already being discussed on a regional level and the process of changing to the new structures continues without any democratic scrutiny.

These changes come on the back of years of cuts and privatisation of health care: Hospital bed numbers have fallen from 240,000 in 2000 to 166,000 in 2019. There has been a massive move from public to private health provision. In 2018-19 £9.2 million of CCG commissioned services were provided by the private sector. PFI projects have resulted in hospital trusts still having to repay £50bn in loan repayments (even if £12bn of NHS trust debts have been written off in the pandemic) and the list of services no longer available on the NHS continues to grow.

This is not a positive move leading to the “integration” of health with social care.

The idea of integration of services for physical and mental health, hospital care, GP care and social care, sounds desirable and logical. However, these changes are not about integrating care.

“Integrated Care Systems” are the ultimate misnomer. They involve a further disintegration of the NHS into more contracts, including many with private providers. Their purpose is to break up the system of integrated health care and create more opportunities for private companies to make a profit.

They are the latest incarnation of a notion that originated in the “accountable care organisations” (ACOs) referred to vaguely in the 2014 Five Year Forward View and the subsequent 44 STPs “Sustainability and Transformation Plans” (later becoming “partnerships”) that NHS England ordered to be developed in secret during 2016.

The Tories will undoubtedly argue that these changes are necessary because so much has been spent on managing the pandemic. Socialists and NHS campaigners know that a publicly funded NHS is the most efficient way of providing universal health care, and need to continue to explain this in our campaigning. However, while the pandemic continues, the Tories aren’t even having to make the argument that these changes are financially necessary. They are just getting on with it.

They have been giving contracts for test and trace to private companies (£12 billion on Deloitte/Serco test and trace); agreeing contracts with private companies to provide equipment and health care during the pandemic (£15 billion of PPE contracts, and private hospitals awarded upwards of £3 billion of contracts this year), moving to “Integrated Care Systems”. “To help reduce post-Covid waiting lists”, they have agreed private contracts of £10bn for the next four years.

The Tories also refused to support an amendment to the Trade Bill protecting the NHS and other public services in future trade deals (debated in House of Commons on 16 Jan, reinserted in the Lords on Feb, but liable to be taken out by the Commons again).



The health service, the life-saving care it provides, and the work done by NHS workers, have been at the forefront of public awareness over the last year. We need to direct that universal support into a renewed drive to defend health and social care provision from further cuts and privatisation.

We need to explain to those who work in health and social care and the wider trade union movement what the planned structural changes are and what the implications will be for the future of health and social care provision. We need to explain why we need trade union rights, which include the right to strike for political demands like universal public health provision, and why we should organise a campaign which includes the call for industrial action in defence of the NHS rather than wait for legal rights to be won.

We also need to defend the current Labour party policy, in the Labour Party manifesto of 2019, for ending privatisation and repealing the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Starmer and the Labour right will undoubtedly want to ditch this commitment. If we organise, the support exists in the movement to stop them.

The Tories are yet to publish the Bill that provides the legislation to enable the next stage of these reforms. When they do, we need to be ready to re-raise the call for a national labour movement campaign to stop them.

The Save Liverpool Women’s Hospital campaign has recently produced a power-point summary of the changes that can be used by trade unionists and NHS activists: bit.ly/nhs-ics □

Labour and looking to the future

By Jason Hill

I really think we need to challenge the prevailing narrative that it was Labour's position on Brexit that caused it to lose the "red wall". Unfortunately, this seems to be the prevailing view in the Labour Party (and I've also heard it from SWP [Socialist Workers Party] members).

The real reasons for Labour's electoral disaster are, in reality, far more complex than this simplistic explanation, and go back many years before Brexit became a political issue. Labour has been haemorrhaging votes in the "red wall" areas a long time, and the Brexit issue was only the straw that finally broke the camel's back.

Let's just look at my own area, Stoke-on-Trent. At one point in the 1980s, every single councillor in every ward was Labour. Occasionally, a Tory might break through, but this was usually only as a protest vote over a particular local issue. This all changed, however.

Labour was seen as the political establishment, and so began to be blamed as Stoke-on-Trent started to descend into permanent decline. Now, we can argue that Stoke's problems grew out of Thatcher's deindustrialisation and central government's increasing propensity to starve the industrial cities of money and investment, and instead throw cash at the leafy South, but the electorate of Stoke didn't see it like that. They saw that Labour, as the party in power, was doing nothing to arrest the decline, but, instead, throwing what little money they had at useless vanity projects.

Furthermore, they began to buy into the narrative that immigrants were the problem, and that Labour was "soft" on immigration.

In the early years of the 21st century, exploiting and promoting this anti-immigrant narrative, the fascist British National Party became ascendant in Stoke-on-Trent. After nearly winning the first Elected Mayor election, and then winning more seats on the council than anywhere else outside London, BNP leader described Stoke-on-Trent as the "jewel in the BNP's crown". When the BNP's bubble finally burst ten years ago, following a sustained campaign by [the local anti-fascist campaign] NorSCARF, many ex-Labour voters who had given their allegiance to the BNP switched not back to Labour, but to the Tories.

By 2015, the Tories had taken effective control of the City Council, and it was only a matter of time before the local Labour MPs would lose their parliamentary seats to the Tories.

Contrast this with Portsmouth South. When I lived in Portsmouth, this was a safe Tory seat. Labour took Portsmouth South for the first time in 2017, and retained it in the 2019 general election. Unlike Stoke-on-Trent, with its ageing population, Portsmouth has a much younger demographic, a demographic that is drawn to voting Labour. These young people are for the most part in insecure, non-unionised jobs, often in the gig economy, with no hope of ever getting on the housing ladder. These are the Labour voters of the future.

But what is Keir Starmer doing? Instead of pitching La-



bour's message to the young people who are actually open to voting Labour, he is trying to chase the ageing working class votes in the "red wall" which are largely lost to Labour. To do so, he has embraced the rotten Tory Brexit deal, ditched Labour's commitment to free movement (thereby, in effect, taking an anti-immigration stance) and endorsed the Tories' increase in defence spending.

However, trying to win back Tory voters by adopting Tory policies is a forlorn hope. People who are pro-Brexit and anti-immigration will trust the Tories to deliver those policies rather than Labour, which is why they voted Tory in the first place.

Let's be realistic. In the 2023 local elections in Stoke, Labour may claw back a few seats, but they won't win back control from the Tories. In the 2024 general election, one or two local constituencies may be regained by Labour, but most Staffordshire MPs will still be Tories.

Of course, we should still fight for and rejoice in these victories. But the "red wall" areas like Stoke-on-Trent are no longer the main battleground for Labour.

The problem is that Keir Starmer is still fighting the 2019 general election. That's gone. He should be looking forward to the 2024 general election, and engage with the younger people who have the potential to win the election for Labour – especially those in the big cities around the country, north and south.

What Starmer's Labour lacks at the moment is any kind of vision. Whatever you may think of Jeremy Corbyn – and he undoubtedly made some fatal mistakes – he did offer a vision of a radical transformation of society which struck a chord with the younger electorate.

Being safe but dull, and "forensically" pointing out Tory failures at Prime Ministers' Questions is not enough. If Labour doesn't have that vision, then it won't win the next general election. □

Schadenfreude or struggle?

By Luke Hardy

No, the Labour Party is not “dead”, “dying”, or in “a death spiral”. For good, but often for ill, Labour remains the dominant and unavoidable fact of working-class politics in Britain (although a bit less so on Scotland).

Even with a dull right-wing leader attacking the left, failing to attack the Tories, and not making much impression, millions of people still vote Labour, including the most organised workers.

It still has organisational and organic links to the biggest unions (or to their bureaucracies at least).

It still retains a prestige, however tarnished, from founding the NHS and the Welfare State, that even Blair hadn't totally managed to rub off.

Just declaring Labour dead is a rhetorical flourish, a retreat from reality, an abstention from thought.

As a socialist you can entirely focus on trade union or social struggles or think we need a new working-class party outside of Labour, but you still have to think about how you relate to the many many people who see the election of a Labour government as the main route to achieving any positive social change or concessions.

It would be a tragedy if socialists spend nearly four years entirely engaging in Schadenfreude and telling ourselves “Pasokification” is on its way [a huge decline like that of Greece's formerly strong social-democratic party Pasok]. Liking tweets of people who say they can never vote Labour again. Setting up competing electoral pro-



jects then trying to persuade people 1.3% of the vote is an impressive result. Flirting with trade union bureaucrats who dangle the enticing prospect of disaffiliation before left wing audiences before falling back in line behind Labour.

And then, in 2024, ending up telling people to vote Labour anyway “without illusions”. Honestly, are the illusions in the voters' heads or in ours?

Would it not be better whether inside or outside of Labour to accept that most working-class people with any kind of political class consciousness want a Labour government, even one headed by a someone as wretched and as bourgeois as Starmer?

Those people are not wrong to want this. It's easier to wrest concessions from even a thoroughly right wing Labour government than it is from a Tory one.

We should be part of that fight to kick the Tories out and get Labour into office. Even if it's with our own materials and on our own terms. A united front.

We also simultaneously fight for the kind of labour movement and government we want to see:

- through our own demands placed on the leadership of that movement, including Starmer and Labour councils.
- through developing and building rank and file organisation in the unions and in the Labour party.
- getting local Labour parties collecting for strike funds, going to picket lines, getting involved in working class social struggles, building international solidarity campaigns.

It is those struggles, in the final analysis, that will bring about socialism.

All of that was easier under Corbyn but his leadership on its own did not fundamentally change the nature of Labour, its relationship with the union bureaucracy and its fundamental limitations as a vehicle for socialism. □

12 councils to follow Croydon?

According to the *Financial Times* of 9 February, quoting local government finance expert Bob Whiteman, at least 12 further local authorities are on the brink as budget-making for 2021-2 approaches.

In November Croydon's Labour council issued a “section 114” notice, an emergency freeze on spending because it couldn't balance its budget. Whiteman says the 12 are “the tip of the iceberg”. Six may avoid “section 114” by doing deals with the government to shift spending into capital accounts.

The Tories have cut some £15 billion from central government funding to councils since 2010. In 2020-1 councils have spent more and got in less income because of the pandemic, with the gap only part-filled by extra cash from Westminster. The impact varies widely between councils. Many have lost heavily from commercial ventures made for alternative income. □

- London local government trade unionists and Labour activists have called a meeting on 23 February (7pm on Zoom) to rally campaigns against cuts: bit.ly/23febcb

Students challenge Erdoğan

Some 600 people have been detained in Turkey since 4 January after [protests](#) against the government's appointment of Melih Bulu as head of Boğaziçi University spread in Istanbul and Ankara. Most have been released, despite repeated statements from officials that the protesters are "terrorists".

Boğaziçi University students have sent an open letter to Turkish President Erdoğan. Excerpts:

"You are not a sultan and we are not your subjects. All our friends who have been arrested or detained in this period must be released immediately and rector Melih Bulu must resign!

"You appointed a trustee rector to our university with utter disregard for the students and faculty. Is what you did legal? Yes, as you like to mention every chance you get, but it is not legitimate.

"To top it off, you open [new] faculties and appoint deans with an overnight presidential order on a Friday night, in order to intimidate the whole institution with all its students, teachers and labourers.

"All campaigns to defame and disenfranchise our LGBTI+ friends and all other targeted groups must end!

"All government-appointed trustees, starting with Melih Bulu, must resign!



"In universities, democratic rectorate elections must be held with the participation of all constituents of the university!

"Members of your party attacked miners in Soma. We actively stood in solidarity with the mine workers, and we will continue to do so..." □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/bogazi

FBU calls for recall Labour conference

By Martin Thomas

The Fire Brigades Union [FBU] is calling for an emergency recall Labour Party conference to protect democracy in the party.

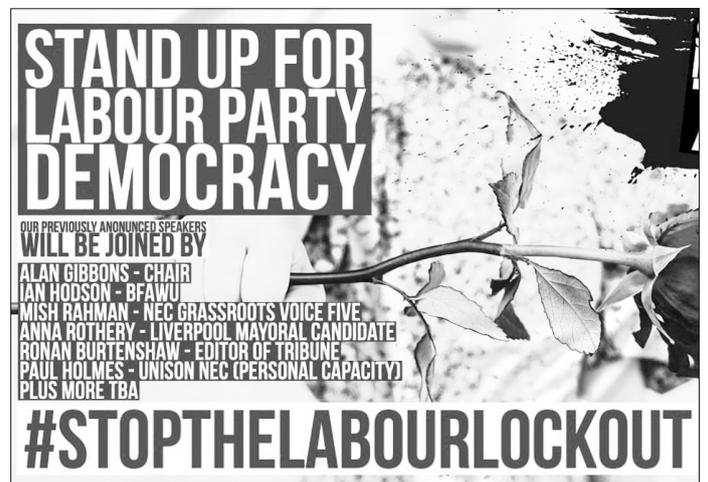
FBU general secretary Matt Wrack announced the call at an online meeting on 7 February attended by over 400 Labour Party people and organised to demand the reinstatement of dozens of Constituency and branch Labour Party officers.

The dozens were suspended for allowing debate on critical motions following Jeremy Corbyn's suspension, reinstatement, and withdrawal of the whip.

Other speakers included Tony Kearns, deputy general secretary of the post and telecom union CWU, and Ian Hodson, president of the Bakers' Union. Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett was billed but absent with internet difficulties.

The Skwawkbox blog reports that 50 of those suspended have been reinstated (though with a warning, or "reminder of conduct", finding them guilty of "not following the guidance of the General Secretary"). Alan Gibbons, secretary of Walton CLP, chaired the 7 February meeting and told it that he had a reinstatement letter, but other speakers said that only one other letter had yet definitely been received.

An [analysis](#) by John Stewart counts 91 CLPs passing motions which might have flouted the General Secretary's bans, and 29 with officers suspended, a total of 56 indi-



viduals. That may not be all.

Skwawkbox claims, plausibly, that the reinstatements were due to Labour Party HQ fearing that it would lose legal cases over the suspensions.

Sadly, some speakers in the 7 February meeting identified the key problem with Keir Starmer as him having been too anti-Brexit. No-one mentioned the background fact of the EHRC [Equality and Human Rights Commission] finding on Labour antisemitism. No-one talked about tackling antisemitism in Labour, although one of the big issues of the current clampdown is the barring of local Labour Party plans to organise educational about antisemitism. □

The Perfect Candidate



Film Review

By Zack Muddle

I've been wanting to watch *The Perfect Candidate* ever since watching *Wadjda*, by the same director Haifaa al-Mansour, last year. For far too long, the former was not readily available online: it finally is now.

Haifaa al-Mansour is Saudi Arabia's first female filmmaker, and one of the countries most well-known and controversial. Both films are set in Saudi Arabia; both follow outspoken, confident female protagonists, living within and struggling against the misogynist society they find themselves within.

Wadjda, the 2012 movie's title character, is a ten-year-old rebellious girl who desperately wants a bicycle, to cycle with and race her friend – a local boy. In a deeply conservative society girls and women cycling is frowned upon. *Wadjda's* mum, feeling this pressure, refuses to buy *Wadjda* a bike. To raise the money herself, *Wadjda* – a character full of life, and full of a youthful innocence which refuses such restrictions – hatches various mischievous schemes.

It's been said that *The Perfect Candidate's* protagonist, Maryam, could be *Wadjda's* older sister. While Maryam is, initially at least, less outwardly rebellious, in many ways the issues dealt with in this 2019 film resemble a grown-up version of those seen in al-Mansour's feature-length debut.

A female doctor, Maryam faces sexism, restrictions, and infantilisation from patients, co-workers, state officials, and wider society. Then almost by accident, Maryam finds herself running for office in the municipal elections. Her campaign's central plank is to mend the unusable road



leading up to the hospital she works in. But the sexist backlash and the gender segregated society she faces forces her to fight back, to champion women's rights.

At a time when cinemas were more-or-less illegal, *Wadjda* was the first feature film set entirely in Saudi Arabia. As a woman, al-Mansour had to direct much of the film hidden in her van, communicating with cast and crew via walkie-talkie. In Saudi Arabia, women cannot publicly interact with men outside of their families.

Yet this highly critically acclaimed film reveals none of that distance. It interweaves comic relief with scenes which leave the viewer feeling upset, angry, empowered, or jubilant.

It could be easy – and justified – for either of these films to become a single-minded righteous polemic. But they don't. They develop character depth, revealing the sometimes contradictory intricacies of Saudi life in schools, homes, work, social situations, and beyond. A fully painted picture makes the situations and characters relatable: only someone with a heart of stone would not find themselves rooting for *Wadjda*, or for Maryam.

The Perfect Candidate too, has comic, emotional, and human sides. It reveals more of the parallel but different difficulties adults face in a segregated society, one in which women are – legally and socially – generally treated as men's property.

For me, a crucial ingredient necessary for a genuinely great left-wing film is agency. Both films meet this criteria, and leave the viewer with a sense of empowerment. Not in a Hollywood-style cliché of one inhuman hero who saves or transforms the world. No: in the sense of individual women not giving up, and instead fighting back against a system stacked against them – and getting somewhere.

Both deserve to be much better known. If I had to pick, I think *Wadjda* has the edge: but you should watch both. □

Our pamphlets

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- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
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- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine □

More: workersliberty.org/publications

Uni battles over job cuts

By AWL students

As rent strikes continue around the UK, other fronts of struggle in higher education are opening up.

Leicester and Liverpool Universities have recently announced redundancies of academic staff. A strike planned for 8 February at Brighton Uni over cuts in the IT services was called off after management made some concessions but the fight continues. Action Short of Strike by UCU members at Goldsmiths continues with no sight of management backing down on long-threatened redundancies, despite no drop in student numbers.

Many university managements are using the pandemic as an opportunity to cut workers and wage bills.

Student-organised solidarity with these disputes is essential, as the victories over cuts will help us to win our demands for fee freezes, rent rebates and more. It is up to fledgling student activist groups at a local level organised around rent strikes, and growing activist groups such as [Liberate the University](#), to push for that solidarity.

→ to undermine and damage democracy, too).

The US is not Turkey, for example. Sure Erdogan, Modi, Bolsanaro, Johnson and the Brexit vote, are all products of the same worldwide crisis. But local traditions and conditions are important too.

The US has enormous power and money, with traditions of free speech and liberty of the individual that will not just be blown away easily. The US has a ruling class with no interest in throwing support behind QAnon or Proud Boy crazies.

And, while we discuss international parallels, the events of 6 January differed from the riot of 6 February 1934, in Paris, where the first result was the fall of Daladier and a new government under Doumergue. The election and 6 January was a defeat for US right, when Biden replaced Trump, a setback, not a step forward.

The US ruling class opposes the Trump movement. And it is not just the tiresome "liberal" elite that runs the social media companies that have banned him recently that have clearly rejected Trumpism. The big investment banks, Marriott Hotels, CocaCola, AT&T, Walmart and, most recently, Microsoft's political funding committees have pulled money from Republicans who defend Trump's claim that the Presidential election was rigged.

Deutsche Bank has stopped banking for Trump's businesses. Signature Bank has closed two of Trump's personal accounts.

Trump faces various lawsuits. So do some of those around him. Rudy Giuliani faces a \$1.3bn lawsuit lodged by Dominion Voting for lying about electoral fraud.

Carolan states that the Republican Party is in flux and that Trump controls it (as any decent fascist would). Well, it can't be both.

Reuters has completed an interesting survey of the

Throughout the pandemic post-graduate (PhD) students have been pushing for more funding for extensions to research in order to help overcome problems arising from Covid. Student parents, students doing lab work and field work and disabled students have been particularly badly affected. Government funds for extensions are paltry. As PhD students are not classified as workers (despite contributing to research) they are not eligible for furlough schemes. [Pandemic PGRs](#) have published a report: bit.ly/pan-pg

Meanwhile the government has said it wants to get students back onto campus by 8 March (in line with schools). Unions are concerned that this will result in compromises on health and safety and staff being bullied into face-to-face teaching where it is not necessary: that would be a cosmetic exercise to indicate that Unis are now "open for business", just three weeks before the end of term. It could provide cover for Unis who want to avoid or minimise paying out for rent rebates. □



opinions of Republican Representatives. Almost none of them actually believe that Trump won the election. Those that voted to not recognise Biden's victory did so out of fear of the Republican base. However, that is more problematic than it might seem: Reuters write that about a third of those representatives face electorates where they might lose their seats if they are associated with such lies about the election.

It is difficult to know how the tensions will play out.

Carolan states that Trump "brought over 60 cases of alleged electoral fraud, every one of which he lost." Indeed, including at the Supreme Court, packed by him. Which underlines my point: US democracy has not been overrun, despite four years of Trump's rule. And, if I concede, for the next ten seconds, that Trump is a fascist, perhaps Carolan might concede, in turn, that Trump is an incompetent fascist.

Yes, there is now a real danger of right-wing terrorism. But that has become more probable precisely because of the defeat of Trump and of the movement around him.

It is most likely, now, that the right wing mass movement will emerge around future elections and, in particular, the run up to the next Presidential election. Unfortunately that movement might well thrive because the Biden-Democrat government will solve none of the problems faced by US workers.

A lot now rests on the activity of the US left. And our solidarity with them. □

More on Trump, Trumpism, and responses

Online at bit.ly/trump-d

India: farmers' movement grows

By Sacha Ismail

The far-right Hindu nationalist government of India is also a radical neo-liberal government. Not long ago buffeted by a wave of protests against its anti-Muslim changes to citizenship laws, it is now being rocked by mass demonstrations against its neo-liberal policies – by India's farmers.

There have been five national general strikes against the Modi regime's privatisations and weakening of labour laws, including two in 2020, mobilising tens and maybe hundreds of millions of workers. Although they slowed the assault on workers' rights, these mobilisations were over quickly.

The 2020 strikes were accompanied by farmers' protests against Modi's agricultural "reforms" – and after the December 2020 general strike, the farmers' protests continued and stepped up. Now, following clashes on India's "Republic Day" (26 January), they are surging again.

Three laws passed by the Indian parliament last year further open up various aspects of agriculture – including sale of seeds, storage and sales prices – to takeover by large corporations (including some run by rich Indians with strong links to the regime). They look set to undermine the system of guaranteed prices for farmers introduced in the 1960s, as well as subjecting them to more unaccountable control by corporations and state bureaucrats.

The situation for many farmers in India is already grim, with the spread of poverty and indebtedness dramatised by a spread of suicides. Many, particularly farmers from tribal communities, have been displaced from their land by mining and other corporations.

Encampments

In addition to protests in Dehli, numerous farmers' encampments have been set up, particularly in the North West, with an infrastructure of protest and cultural resistance growing up around them. Since 26 January, the movement has been experiencing a fresh influx of support, with new protests and assemblies of thousands being held. On 6 February farmers blocked highways across India.

The protests have drawn international attention, particularly since widely discussed tweets from Rihanna, Greta Thunberg and Kamala Harris' niece Meena Harris – which elicited a wave of sexist and racist denunciation from Hindu bigots online.

The government has resorted to stark repression, turn-



Solidarity protest, Australia

ing chunks of the capital into an armed camp and unleashing tear gas, water cannons and baton charges. Hundreds of farmers have been injured and a few killed, in addition to many dozens who have died as a result of camping out in bad conditions or committed suicide.

Legal actions are being initiated against journalists and politicians who have written or spoken out about the protests, including in several cases charges of criminal conspiracy and sedition.

Hindutva

The regime has also mobilised far-right Hindutva gangs to attack the protesting farmers. It is attempting to portray the protesters as terrorists, and to link them to Sikh-separatist nationalism. Many of those mobilising are Sikhs, who are concentrated in two states where the protests are strong (Punjab and Haryana). There seems a real risk of anti-Sikh pogroms.

The farmers' movement itself is not without contradictions. Although few Indian farmers are rich (over two thirds own less one hectare of land), in some areas the protests are dominated by the relatively better-off and higher-caste, with the government claiming it has support from poorer and lower-caste people. And farmers' interests are not the same as farm labourers'.

Some farmers' leaders have previously been involved in Hindu-nationalist attacks on Muslims and others.

However, these protests are drawing in a growing variety of farmers from different religious, ethnic and caste groups, weakening barriers and forcing some reckoning with previous divisions and oppression. It is also mobilising many women. In some areas farmers' organisations have also formed new alliances with farm labourers' unions.

How far these processes will go remains to be seen, and how much this movement can push back and undermine the Hindutva-neoliberal regime. It deserves solidarity – particularly in countries, like the UK, whose governments actively support Modi. □

“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! □

Unison left needs unity and democracy

By Gerry Bates

Following the relative success of Paul Holmes's candidature for UNISON general secretary (GS), the left should hope for gains in the elections for the National Executive (NEC). Nominations are open from 1 Feb to 5 March, and voting will be 4-27 May.

However, making the most of the situation needs an open approach to left unity, as a fore-runner to a democratic rank and file organisation. Sadly, that has taken a step back after the GS election result.

Paul Holmes and the SWP [Socialist Workers Party] have interpreted the result of the GS election to mean there is no need for left unity or democracy in selection of candidates. The draconian "democracy in Unison" guidelines are being used to avoid open organisation. A slate has simply been announced as Paul Holmes's recommendations, following closed discussions.

The Socialist Party (who stood Hugo Pierre for GS) and activists who backed Roger Mackenzie in the election have similarly announced separate lists.

The unstable agreement between different left groups (most recently through Unison Action) for joint candidates, or at least not standing against each other, has



broken down. This may result in competing left candidates in at least five seats this year, splitting the left vote.

Workers' Liberty people in Unison will nominate the Paul Holmes candidates, as those backed by the network of activists most likely to grow into a significant left organisation in Unison, but we are calling for attempts at unity even at this late stage. Activists and candidates from the left should hold

an open meeting in early March to discuss a unified slate, with the option of candidates withdrawing (as they can do up to 19 March) so we avoid losing seats to the right.

Most importantly we want discussion of how we can bring together an open and democratic rank-and-file group in Unison that ordinary members can be involved in, building campaigns, action and solidarity between elections as well as democratically selecting and holding to account left candidates. □

Care workers demand parity with NHS

By Ollie Moore

Workers at the Sage care home in north London struck again from 4-8 February, following an initial strike on 15-17 January, as they seek to win wages of £12/hour, and parity with NHS staff on conditions such as sick pay and annual leave allowance. Safely distanced picket lines were held outside their workplace.

In a video published on the United Voices of the World union's Twitter feed, striking worker Bile said: "We are once again on strike, for a living wage, better sick pay, better annual leave, better overtime when we are at work, for a better life. We are tired of working long, long hours. We are here after thinking about it for a long time. We went through all the channels. But we've had to go on strike to be listened to. We're on strike because we want equality for care workers. We want parity with the NHS." More: bit.ly/uvw-sg □

GMB choice cramped by rules

The election of a new General Secretary for the big general union GMB is underway. Anyone wanting to stand has until the beginning of April to obtain at least 30 branch nominations. Voting runs from the beginning of May until the beginning of June. However, tight rules limit the chances for members to use this election to push for reforms to remedy the condition of the union revealed in September 2020's Monaghan report. More online: bit.ly/gmb-gs

Second-hand books

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand books, on politics and many other topics. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the full list, pricing, and to order them.

Featured this week:

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- *The First Five Years of the Communist International* by Leon Trotsky
- *The History of the Russian Revolution* by Leon Trotsky
- *The Revolution Betrayed* by Leon Trotsky
- *Spartacus* by Lewis Gibbon

Filing yet another report



Diary of a paramedic

By Alice Hazel

I returned to the road last week after a couple of months off recovering from Covid, most probably caught at work from a patient. More than half the patients we were seeing before Christmas had symptoms.

The numbers are noticeably lower on my return, and workload has reduced generally, though not compared to the first lockdown, when the streets were very quiet and everybody wanted to stay away from hospitals. There seemed to be an increase in calls to community cardiac arrests back then, as people got really sick at home but were scared to contact health services.

I catch up on who is off work with Covid. A couple of workmates had been admitted to hospital. All those I know who've gone in have been men in their 50s. But a young workmate updated me about his recent worsening breathlessness.

On my first call I quickly remember the eye-wear we've been given as part of our PPE is totally unsuitable. It clouds up and then falls off as I bend over to talk to an elderly woman on the floor after a fall. Most people are using googles they've bought themselves. I file yet another report.

We take the patient to hospital but are turned away at the door. The department is full and we'll have to wait with her in the ambulance until there's space. The busier we get, the less we do, because of the delays.



On the next call I want to take the patient to the local minor injuries unit, rather than A&E. It's closer and usually quicker for patients. When I call I'm told it's closed, temporarily, to make more space for Covid treatment areas.

The unit has been saved from closure twice by campaigners, so later in the shift I ask a nurse, who does occasional shifts there, about it. He says staff assume closure will be permanent. Some in the NHS hierarchy are obviously not too busy to push through their long-held plans. Never waste a crisis as they say.

We have a steady day but get a call 15 minutes from the end of our shift, miles away. That means we'll be really late off again. When we get back to station there's a crew waiting. Our extended shift has meant no vehicle for them. I think back to the beautiful graphs we were shown by management when the last rota change came in. □

• Alice Hazel is a paramedic.

Films from Cuba



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Recent *Solidarity* articles on Cuba bring to mind the visually stunning film *I Am Cuba* (1964) directed by Soviet cinematographer Mikhail Kalatazov and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968). Alea's film is no Castroite propaganda piece, but instead a measured study of the growing alienation of Sergio, a wealthy bourgeois intellectual who, unlike his family, has not fled Cuba. He stays behind not from any commitment to the revolution, but because of sheer inertia. Sergio wanders around aimlessly but cannot make up his mind what to do. Documentary footage shows the CIA-led Bay of Pigs attempted invasion in 1961 and other moments in Cuban history which contrast with Sergio's voice-over, his comments on the changing world around him, and his inability to find a place within it. □

£20,000 by 11 July

Our fund appeal received £495.35 this week, from online sales of second-hand books donated by supporters and a donation from Daniel.

People in Britain paid down £16.6 billion, net, on credit cards, personal loans, car finance, and student loans in 2020, or an average of about £250 per child, woman, or man.

Nine million people *increased* their debt burden: people who had lost their jobs, lost hours, or had to support young family members unable to get first jobs.

At the other end, Cineworld bosses have paid themselves a £208 million bonus while leaving zero-hours staff with nothing and threatening thousands of other staff with redundancies.

A range of only modestly well-off workers with relatively secure jobs have saved a lot of money on commuting, eating out, holidays, and other outings.

Quite a few of our readers, we know, are in that "middle" group. We're asking you to contribute some of your pandemic savings to our fund appeal, so that we can finance a good "return to the streets" when that becomes possible: workersliberty.org/donate2021 □

Ballot coming in DVLA



**John Moloney,
PCS AGS (p.c.)**

We are moving towards a ballot of our members working at the DVLA [Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency] complex in Swansea. Safety measures there have been totally inadequate and thousands of people still being compelled to come into the workplace. This is unacceptable, a view shared by members who in a meeting on 2 February voted 80% for industrial action.

Barring a complete climbdown by the employer, we'll proceed with a ballot as quickly as possible given the legal restrictions and requirements around notice periods and so on. This is yet another example of how the anti-strike laws function as brakes on workers' ability to act, even in defence of basic safety. We're also continually reminding members of their Section 44 rights, which as individual rights don't need a ballot.

Our members working as outsourced cleaners and security workers for the contractor OCS in the Ministry of Justice have voted by a 91% majority for industrial action to win demands including a living wage, increased annual leave, and full contractual sick pay. Early on the pandemic, we won an agreement that the bulk of outsourced workers would be paid in full for periods of sickness and self-isolation, but that's been patchily enforced in some departments, and in any case is not a contractual guarantee. All workers should have access to full sick pay all the time, not just as an emergency measure in the pandemic. There have been outsourced workers' struggles in the Ministry of Justice previously, and we've worked with the United Voices of the World union who also have members there.

We also plan to ballot directly-employed Ministry of Justice workers in ten courts over safety issues. The court system is one of the areas of the civil service where workers have continued to be forced to come into the workplace. We believe everything except the most urgent and emergency work can be conducted remotely.

The Group Executive Committee for the DWP [Department of Work and Pensions] will meet again soon, and will review the situation in that department in terms of workplace safety and home working. Some progress has been made there but it will be kept under review, and if our reps don't feel it's satisfactory, we can move into dispute if necessary.

A referendum on the department-specific pay offer in HMRC [Revenue and Customs] is now underway, and is due to close on 12 February. As discussed in previous columns, Independent Left and PCS Rank-and-File activists in that department are campaigning for a rejection of the offer. Even if it is accepted, we need to continue to make the case for a national campaign on pay, involving all departments. □

More online

Oppose the HMRC pay deal, by a PCS activist.

• bit.ly/vs-hmrc

Bus drivers will strike for pay

By Ollie Moore

London bus drivers in the Unite union on three networks (London United, London Sovereign, and Quality Line, all owned by French company RATP) will strike in February, in an effort to win better pay and conditions.

London United drivers, who drive routes in south and west London, will strike on 22-24 February. Proposed new contracts there could see drivers face pay cuts equivalent to £2,500 per year, and introduce zero-hour working for some drivers.

Quality Line drivers, who drive out of a depot in Epsom, Surrey, and earn £2.50/hour less than drivers at other RATP-owned companies, will strike on 22-23 February. London Sovereign drivers, on routes in north west London, will strike on 22 February. Their employer's most recent pay offer was for an increase of only 0.75%.

The discrepancies in pay, terms, and conditions between companies are a legacy of privatisation. Rather than operating bus services directly, Transport for London tenders the operation of different routes to private companies, which can each set their own conditions. □

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Solidarity



For a workers' government

GAS ENGINEERS WILL STRIKE THROUGH FEB

By Ollie Moore

British Gas engineers continued their strikes against their bosses' "fire and rehire" threat from 5-8 February. Their union, GMB, has announced further strikes on 12-15, 19-22 February, and 26 February to 1 March.

There have been 17 strike days so far, leading to a backlog of over 170,000 boiler repairs and more than 200,000 delayed service visits. The strikes have remained solid throughout, with well-supported pickets and demonstrations taking place on a safely-distanced basis throughout the country.

2 February saw British Gas CEO Chris O'Shea called to Parliament, along with GMB National Officer Justin Bowden, to discuss the dispute in front of a Select Committee convened under the auspices of the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy. At that Committee, O'Shea announced that a clause due for inclusion in the new contracts which would have allowed the company to unilaterally change terms and conditions with 28 days notice has now been dropped. This shows the company clearly feels under pressure, and could be forced into further concessions if the strike continues and escalates.

British Gas's current position is that all workers must sign the new contracts by the end of March. As many engineers are paid two weeks in lieu and two weeks in advance, British Gas has begun deducting pay for strike days that have yet to take place – a clearly unlawful act, but one which workers say has backfired on management by galvanising support for the action and making workers more likely to participate in the strikes. A public strike fund set up to support the dispute now stands at £40,000, with British Gas reps speaking at trade union and Labour Party meetings to build support.

The new contracts British Gas wants to impose would lead to an overall 15% reduction in the basic rate of pay,



as well as:

- A levelling down of holiday entitlement, representing a loss of up to a week's holiday for many workers
- A move to an across-the-board 40-hour week, an increase in working hours for many workers
- A new bonus scheme that could see workers deducted pay if they are less active during certain periods of their shift
- A reduction in sick pay, to 13 weeks full pay followed by 39 weeks half pay (currently 24 weeks full pay,

24 weeks half pay)

- A three-year pay freeze for all workers except smart-meter installers
- Rostering changes representing up to an additional 156 working hours per year for some workers
- An increase in compulsory weekend working.

The Unite union recently settled a "fire and rehire" dispute involving British Airways cargo workers. Strikes by those workers succeeded in forcing BA to drop the "fire and rehire" threat, but several changes to workers' terms and conditions will still take place.

The lesson here is twofold. Resistance to "fire and rehire" threats can force concessions from employers. But there needs to be a clear focus on the substantive content of the changes employers are seeking, not merely the method by which they are imposing them, and ongoing mobilisation to ensure conditions are protected.

If British Gas workers succeed in forcing the withdrawal of the "fire and rehire" threat, that will undoubtedly give pause to employers attempting to use the tactic. But if their strikes, solidly supported so far and showing little sign of petering out, are able to force climb-downs on the content of the contract, then a significant counter-blow will have been struck against a burgeoning employers' offensive, in which bosses seek to use the economic crisis as a pretext to level down workers' conditions. □