



For social ownership of the banks and industry

VICTORY FOR TEST CENTRE WORKERS

»» Now win full isolation
pay for all

»» Social solidarity to beat
the pandemic

See page 2

Batley: defend the right to question

Defend the right to
debate, discuss and even
offend in schools.

Page 6

Rebellion at Pimlico Academy

Students' graffiti condemn
school as "run by racists...
for profit!"

Page 3

Shrewsbury 24: learning the lessons

John Bloxam explains why
it's taken 48 years to win
some justice.

Pages 12-13

Scrap the Police Bill!

Street protests continue
strong, and more set for
17 April.

Page 9

Now win full isolation pay for all!

“ Editorial

For the past few months the [Safe and Equal campaign](#) (S&E) has been working with Labour MPs to demand full sick and isolation pay for all frontline Test Centre workers. On 29 March 2021, S&E and Emily Thornberry MP got a letter from Sodexo HR Director Greg Austin: “Since receiving your enquiry I am pleased to report that the DHSC have approved the payment of occupational sick pay for periods of self-isolation for all workers at Test Centres. This commitment has also been included in the tender specification for the new Test Centre contract which commences in July 2021.”

Previously, G4S and Serco had confirmed that many workers in their Test Centres would receive only Statutory Sick Pay of £95.85 a week if they got suspected Coronavirus infection and had to isolate. As S&E said at the time: “In effect, NHST&T is a system for concentrating together all the people in the country with suspected Coronavirus infection and getting them to file past an army of workers who cannot afford to follow isolation rules.”

Many infections might have been prevented if isolation pay had been in place from the start. And if full isolation pay is necessary for Test Centre staff then why not for the other 12 million workers who lack occupational sick pay?

We are yet to see the details. We know that many Test

Centre workers are employed by agencies, creating another layer of bureaucracy and complication. In the NHS, agency workers are the only group of workers who have not been guaranteed full sick and isolation pay: all outsourced workers and “bank” staff have been entitled to full isolation pay since March 2020.

But agency workers at Sellafield power station, for example, are guaranteed full isolation pay. Will agency workers at Test Centres be covered by this new provision?

And how is this new entitlement is being communicated to workers? When the government introduced full isolation pay in the NHS in March 2020 and then in care homes in June 2020, it did it very quietly, with little fanfare. Many outsourced workers in the NHS were unaware they were entitled to full isolation pay, and some employers actively denied the entitlement.

The u-turn by government needs to be advertised widely so that Test Centre workers are aware that they are covered. That’s a job for the labour movement. □

• Adapted from [Safe and Equal](#). In Sheffield S&E has been working with workers in Exemplar care and residential homes to win full pay for self-isolation. Despite being given hundreds of thousands of pounds of Infection Control Funding by the council, Exemplar have refused to put one penny of it into the pockets of their workers. They have forced workers needing to self-isolate to take annual leave. The council has dished out the money without making any effort to stipulate conditions. Unison Sheffield community health branch is now circulating a statement to support the workers: bit.ly/s-exem □

US police killings still at 100 per month

By Mohan Sen

Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin’s trial for the killing of George Floyd last May opened on 8 March. Even after last year’s Black Lives Matter protests, and with all the attention focused on the police, the number of killings they commit has remained very high. According to mappingpoliceviolence.org, 1,127 people were killed by US police in 2020. In the first two and half months of 2021, the figure was 207.

Chauvin faces charges of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter – but has pleaded not guilty to all. Three other police officers will face separate trials.

Already a diverse range of witnesses have described their horror at seeing what was done to Floyd. Firefighter and paramedic Genevieve Hansen testified how she repeatedly requested, argued with and begged the police to let her assist Floyd, but they refused, despite the fact she identified herself and her job.

Left-wing Minneapolis congresswoman Ilhan Omar has commented: “It’s been really horrendous to watch the defence put George Floyd on trial instead of the former police officer who’s charged with his murder.”

Chauvin’s defence lawyer has attempted to use the presence of drugs in Floyd’s system to exonerate his cli-

ent. What such a “defence” actually proves is the viciousness of police brutality towards people, particularly black people, suffering from drug and mental health problems. (One demand made by BLM protesters is for a chunk of police budgets to be spent on putting social workers alongside police.)

CNN commentator Van Jones has been widely quoted saying that an acquittal for Chauvin “will be perceived as open season, telling police officers from coast to coast you can literally get away with murder in broad daylight”. That’s obviously right.

Jones says: “The system is on trial”. It seems likely a majority of the US ruling class and political establishment will want Chauvin to be convicted, in order to prevent a further collapse of trust in the police. In an extremely unusual move, Minneapolis police chief Medaria Arradondo has testified for the prosecution.

The eviction of Trump and other radical right-wingers who defend the likes of Chauvin is a relief. But the right remains strong and with popular support; and the Democratic leadership is not serious about challenging the US’s brutal and racist police and criminal justice systems.

Solidarity with sisters and brothers in the US fighting to seriously challenge the police and the interests and ideologies they defend, and to change society! □

Rebellion at Pimlico Academy

By a Future Academies worker

On Wednesday 31 March, their last day of term, almost a thousand students at Pimlico Academy, the flagship school run by Future Academies, sat down in the playground and refused to go to lessons.

The students were protesting a racist school uniform policy, which instructed students with afro hairstyles to cut their hair and students wearing hijabs to cover all of their hair; miserly and “humiliating” free school meal provision; the failure to support students that have been sexually assaulted at school; a whitewashed history curriculum and the cutting down of arts, music and technology departments. The protest also sought to remove their Head Teacher, Daniel Smith – or, as the image circulating on social media in advance of the protest put it, to “kick the racist out!”

The protest was the latest in a long line of events. In September 2020 students tore down the school’s union jack, took it to their local estate and set it on fire. Shortly after, they set up a petition against the racist school uniform policy. At the beginning of this week, staff and students arrived at school to see graffiti around the school’s premises declaring: “Pimlico Academy. Run by racists... for profit!”; “Ain’t no black in the union jack...”; “A white school for brown kids... are you mad?”

School workers, too, have been organising. Inspired by the actions of the students, the National Education Union held a meeting on the evening before the protest, at which members voted 83:2 that they had no confidence in the Head Teacher. The meeting also voted, again overwhelmingly, to ballot for industrial action. The chief grievances are: authoritarian, bullying management; a failure to respond to accusations of racism and safeguarding concerns; a refusal to engage with the union; and excessive workload.

On the day of the protest, a delegation of six students met with Daniel Smith and with the CEO of Future Academies, Paul Smith, to discuss their demands. Two rather grovelling letters sent to parents set out some of the assurances given to the students, although they are, for the moment at least, quite insubstantial.

Future has agreed to take down the union jack for the duration of a consultation with the school’s “stakeholders”, and students will be invited to shape the way that Black History Month and other significant dates in the calendar are celebrated at the school. The major victory is the scrapping of the worst elements of the school uniform policy.

The school defended its curriculum and safeguarding measures, and yet safeguarding concerns were raised by teachers and other school staff that very day. With students as young as 11 taking part in the protest, school workers were troubled that management weren’t keeping the pupils safe. At least one member of staff was threatened with disciplinary action for raising their concerns. In the end, Sixth Formers had to head to the local super-



market to buy crates of water to distribute amongst the protestors.

A combination of restrictive anti-union laws and slow union processes mean that staff will have to wait many weeks for a legal strike ballot to be in place. Widely-held concerns over the school curriculum are unlikely to be on the ballot, because of the narrow interpretation of what makes a trade dispute.

However, staff and students are committed to tackling racism and bigotry within the Future Academy chain. No doubt students will be feeling empowered by their protest and the victories they have already won. We can certainly expect more from these students if significant changes to the school’s culture aren’t forthcoming. Meanwhile, the NEU (National Education Union) is already strong at Pimlico Academy and union members across the Trust are growing in number. With a strike on the horizon, Future Academies has got a real fight on its hands. □



Upcoming meetings

Workers’ Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom.

Saturday 10 April, 1-2pm: Momentum Internationalists, Myanmar: Q&A with strikers resisting the coup

Sunday 11 April, 11:30-1pm: Socialist Feminist reading group. *Rape* by Mithu Sanyal

Tuesday 13 April 6.30-8.30pm: Free Our Unions – Striking for the climate?

Sunday 2 May, 6.30-8.30pm: The Poplar Rates Rebellion of 1921

Sunday 16 May, 6.30-8.30pm: Socialists on the Israel Palestine conflict – Workers’ Liberty debates Red Flag

Plus

Mondays 6-7pm (from 26 April): AWL Students’ discussions

Thursday 15 April- 27 May, 8-9.30pm: Lenin’s *What is to be done?* study group

Our calendars of events: browse or subscribe! □

All online

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

Coaxing small capitalists?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Andrew Northall (letters, [24 Mar](#)) takes exception to my Antidoto column ([10 Feb](#)) on the Communist Party of Britain's concept of the "anti-monopoly alliance".

One thing Andrew says is undoubtedly correct: "The 'anti-monopoly alliance' is very much written into the DNA of the CPB and its programme, Britain's Road to Socialism (BRS)."

Where we disagree is on whether or not this represents (in Andrew's words) "a cross-class alliance that cannot by definition be anti-capitalist since it includes small capitalists."

Andrew claims that the term monopoly capitalism "simply describes the nature of capitalism in Britain since the early 20th century", not any plan to "de-monopolise" capitalism or to suggest that "other forms of capitalism are in any way preferable."

In fact, says Andrew, "opposition to monopoly capitalism... means opposition... to capitalism itself." This raises an obvious question: why, then, doesn't the CPB just talk about capitalism – why use the word "monopoly" at all?

It isn't clear to me whether Andrew is arguing that the anti-monopoly alliance is not "a cross-class alliance" (despite its appeal to small capitalists) or whether he's proposing that despite the involvement of small capitalists, it can somehow still be anti-capitalist. I'll work on the assumption that Andrew's case rests upon the second.

Small capitalists are still capitalists!

Andrew, paraphrasing the 2018 version of the BRS identifies "intermediate strata" of "small business owners, small farmers and shopkeepers who are also subject to the economic and financial domination of the big monopoly capitalists." But small business owners, small farmers, etc are not "intermediate strata" devoid of any class identity: they are small capitalists! And small capitalists are often the worst employers and the most anti-union bosses.

And to win this so-called "intermediate layer" over to an anti-capitalist programme, here's the relevant section of the 2018 edition of the BRS: "This means campaigning for measures such as cheap credit, restrictions on monopoly price manipulation, controls on rent, relief from high business rates, the abolition of Value Added Tax (VAT), etc. as well as winning small businesses for the wider democratic demands of the working class, including the struggle for peace, disarmament and environmental protection." Does that sound like an anti-capitalist programme?

At the root of this disagreement lies a fundamental disagreement about the task of socialists in the class struggle today: supporters of Solidarity and Workers Liberty



Members of the Communist Party march with anti-EU banners

prioritise organising within the working class to encourage struggle and transform it (eventually) into revolutionary change.

Our work focuses on working-class activism organised within the Labour Party and the trade unions. Within this movement there are tens of thousands of activists who form the most politicised and class conscious workers. The Labour Party and unions are the arena for the debates and struggles that take place within the British working-class movement.

Why should we expend time and energy orientating towards small business people, when our overriding priority must be to the working class? In the course of the struggle for socialism – probably in an immediately pre-revolutionary situation – sections of the small-business class and even of the capitalist class may come over to us and we would welcome them. But for now, adapting our programme to appease small capitalists would undermine the very class independence we seek to build. At a more mundane level, the left (including the CPB), does not have the social or political weight to force any segment of capital, the liberal middle classes into any kind of alliance. Pursuing such a strategy would divert us from our central task of organising and educating within the working class. □



Women's Fightback is a socialist feminist publication by Workers' Liberty. Order issue 25 for £1 including post, or, until 14 April, together with 6-issue subscription to *Solidarity* and our Saklatvala pamphlet, for £5 including post. □ workersliberty.org/publications

Changing culture in schools



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Everyone's Invited, a website describing itself as a movement committed to eradicating rape culture, has collected 14,000 testimonies so far of sexual harassment and violence in schools.

Elite private boys' schools, St Paul's, Harrow, Westminster, Latymer, Eton, Highgate, and Dulwich among them, were named in testimonies sent to the platform, inspiring students at Dulwich to write an open letter and organise a demonstration about rape culture at the school. Students at Highgate, meanwhile, planned to stage a walk-out after the school was accused of turning a blind eye to issues. The school has now appointed a former High Court judge to lead an inquiry into allegations.

A similar campaign is happening in Australian private schools. What started as an Instagram poll targeting elite private Sydney schools quickly went viral as thousands of sexual assault victims came forward to call for an end to outdated consent laws.

The founder of Everyone's Invited, Soma Sara, has warned against assuming the problems are unique to private schools. "If we start pointing fingers at certain demographics, or singling out individuals or institutions, we risk making these cases seem like anomalies... when really this problem is pervasive, it exists everywhere."

Single-sex private schools which foster a greater culture of entitlement and sexism, and have militaristic authority structures, likely do have particular problems, but harassment and assault occur across the school system.

A report by the National Education Union and UK Feminista in 2017 found that 37 per cent of girls at mixed-sex schools have been sexually harassed while at school.

Ofsted, which is responsible for ensuring safeguarding measures are carried out in state schools, inspects only around half of private schools, while the rest are covered by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. The government has asked Ofsted to undertake an immediate review of safeguarding policies in state and independent schools.

Inspection, advice and review of all school safeguarding should be carried out by local authorities. Additional funding should be provided to resource this, including specialist services to support young people who experience sexual violence and harassment. There should be a phasing out of private, single-sex, religious, and academy schools.

New guidance has come from the Department for Education on how to manage and prevent incidents. "This highlights the importance of making it clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment are not acceptable, will never be tolerated and are not an inevitable part of grow-

ing up".

Schools should focus not only on what is not acceptable, but should have lessons geared at building positive relationships, sexual and otherwise, and encouraging empathy and good communication including at times of frustration, anger, and distress. They should seek to build pupils' trust in safeguarding measures.

Testimony by a teenager on the Everyone's Invited site criticised their school's approach: "Their strategies are always 'don't send nudes, it's illegal', which is correct, but they should also state we won't be in trouble if we report grooming and harassment instances."

A dedicated number, run by the NSPCC, is going live to provide both children and adults who are victims of sexual abuse in schools with the appropriate support and advice. This includes how to contact the police and report crimes if they wish. The helpline will also provide support to parents and professionals too. Young people and adults can contact the NSPCC helpline, Report Abuse in Education on 0800 136 663 or email help@nspcc.org.uk □

More online

Shedding little light

On the Momentum Internationalists website, Edward Maltby argues that Momentum's new "strategy document" sheds little light

bit.ly/mo-crit

School exclusions go up

Secondary exclusions are up from 6.7% to 10.8%, and highest for students from worse-off backgrounds

bit.ly/sc-ex

USA: politics as a "business"

Engels on the special US version of bourgeois democracy, and a survey of developments since

bit.ly/us-fe

Israel after the poll

Ira Berkovic on Islamists or ultra-Orthodox as "kingmakers" after Israel's fourth election since April 2019

bit.ly/is-el

Stan Newens, 1930-2021

From business manager in Britain for the ISL press to Labour MP

bit.ly/s-newe

How Stevenage fought Future Academies

Another battle with the chain behind Pimlico Academy

bit.ly/fa-stev

Batley: defend the right to question!

By a Lewisham teacher

Following protests at Batley Grammar School, a teacher has been suspended and there is a school investigation. The issue is around the teacher allegedly showing cartoons of Mohammed in a lesson discussing blasphemy.

As of 3 April, it is reported that a further two teachers have been suspended due to their knowledge of the content of the lesson. There has been no evidence that the teachers have done anything wrong. On the evidence thus far, they are innocent and the union should vigorously and robustly defend them.

Showing images of Mohammed is considered offensive to many Muslims but not all. There is no evidence that the teacher failed, for example, to warn students who might have wanted to look away.

There has been an increasing attempt by the right and the religious right to control what is taught in schools. We must oppose this. In particular we must defend and extend the right to discussion of issues around race, gender, sexuality and religion without interference or control from either "parents" pressure groups or right-wing politicians.

Schools must be spaces where children and young people can experiment and define and redefine themselves without the control of their parents or the communities they come from.

School workers should not go out with the aim to offend, but it is impossible to teach effectively without the right to offend. You cannot develop children and students' critical abilities without challenging their existing views and sometimes offending them.

Myself, on many occasions teaching Relationship and Sex Education to Year 6s, I have offended students by teaching about same-sex relationships. I think I have not only a right to do that, but a duty to the LGBT+ and potentially LGBT+ students I teach and the wider LGBT+ community.

There is a drive by the religious right to reintroduce blasphemy laws. We must strongly oppose this. All views must be open to being contested.

Blasphemy laws are always used by the powerful in organised religion to squash dissent, most often and acutely within the communities where the religion is dominant.

If we allow the religious right to control what can and can't be said about religion the victims will predominantly be women, LGBT+ and lapsed believers in those communities. Schools and teachers should be defending and facilitating a thoroughly critical approach to all religions, beliefs and views.

The Department for Education has hypocritically responded to the Batley events saying it is "never acceptable to threaten or intimidate teachers", adding that schools are "free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their curriculum". However, the government is trying to ban the use in schools of resources from organisations that are anti-capitalist or promote "victim narratives" (sic) in schools.

The labour movement and in first place the school unions must defend the right to debate, discuss and even offend in schools, against attack by right wing ideologues, whether they are protesting outside schools or sitting in cabinet. □

Labour "auto-exclusions" are back

The Labour Party has [published](#) a new complaints policy, and, at last, some information on disciplinary decisions. 356 cases have been heard by panels of the National Executive Committee (NEC) over the last ten months, since May 2020. Almost half of those (170) were in the three months May-July 2020.

94 members out of those 356 have been expelled. We don't know for what, except that the report says 70% of the 356 cases were charges about antisemitism. On top of the 94, 43 members have been "auto-excluded" (i.e. expelled without a hearing) on the catch-all clause about "supporting a political organisation other than an official Labour one", which makes anyone supporting the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or Friends of the Earth or such theoretically open to instant expulsion. That clause was used in 2015 and 2016 to expel hundreds of left-wingers; it was then apparently sidelined, but it's back in use now.

We're working on detailed proposals for a reformed and democratic discipline code. □

Back to tabloid 14 April

With street protests multiplying, and covid-restrictions easing enough for street stalls, we will return to our usual tabloid format from the next issue, 14 April. □

Our videos!

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **Playlists include:**

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

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

Covid: some lessons from Chile

By Martin Thomas

So far the news in Britain from the vaccine roll-out and the gradual lockdown-easing is good. News from Chile reminds us that battles for isolation pay and for workers' control of workplace safety (as in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, see page 23) remain urgent.

Chile has done more vaccinations per population than Britain, 58 per 100 population vs 56 here. Yet on 25 March it imposed a new lockdown in its major population centre, around Santiago, because of soaring Covid infection and death figures.

The new lockdown is stricter than anything we've had in Britain, with borders closed, a night-time curfew, and only two permits per person per week to leave home unless you have an "essential worker" certificate. It is enforced with troops on the streets.

As of 6 April, both cases and deaths graphs show only very tentative and recent signs of turning down.

Chile has long had different Covid restrictions in different areas (which may make more sense in a country 2,700 miles long but only 100 miles wide, on average), but they have almost always, since May 2020 and in at least some areas, been tighter than Britain's.

Guesses about its new Covid spike (since 20 February) include:

- Restrictions being eased, and people becoming less careful about them, after cases started falling in January
- Travel restrictions being eased, and people travelling to Brazil and bringing back the P.1 and P.2 variants common there, which partly evade immunity from previous infections with other variants (and [may also](#) partly evade immunity from current vaccines)
- The Coronavac vaccine widely used there possibly being less effective
- Seasonal effects (it's now autumn in Chile)
- Chile using a smaller time-gap between jabs than Britain, so it has more people who've had two jabs but also more who've had none.

I don't know. But the evidence from Chile, and the rising infections in many parts of the USA despite many vaccinations there, make the case for continued effort on measures like isolation pay and workers' control, and a slow, check-each-step approach on easing Covid restrictions. Worldwide case and death rates are trending up again (since late February or early March).

The full reopening of schools from 8 March shows no evidence of producing anything like the 0.5 jump in the reproduction number R which some media, and even official SAGE documents, talked of. There was a marked slowing of measured infection-rate decline in early March, but that may have been to do with increased testing or other factors. [Estimates of R](#) by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine show an uptick in late February, *before* schools reopened, and then a new *decrease* soon after the reopening.

The US National Bureau of Economic Research has [found](#) that street protests are unlikely to lift infection curves visibly, even in conditions of high virus circulation

as in the USA during the Black Lives Matter protests last summer.

But unsafe workplaces and lots of socialising can raise infections, and give new variants a better chance to develop and spread.

Some scientists, notably [Jon Deeks](#) of Birmingham University, [criticise](#) the current huge roll-out of lateral-flow virus tests in Britain because, they say, those tests in real-life (rather than lab) conditions are fairly unreliable. Money and effort put into them should (they say) instead be put into improving isolation pay and quarantine accommodation and services.

Their arguments also suggest some scepticism about the talk of pubs and similar being licensed to demand "Covid passports", on top of the problems there for people with insecure immigration status or medical reasons for not being vaccinated.

A [new study](#) finds an improvement in rates of people with Covid symptoms actually self-isolating, from 20% last summer to 43% now. But still, 43%... Not all the failures of self-isolation are people going to work (the study finds only 16% of the breaches are going to work, rather than going to shops, visiting friends, etc.). But that is still a lot of failures, and it's among those with symptoms. The rate of effective self-isolation among people without symptoms who are nonetheless "contacts", or recent entrants to the country, is probably lower.

Other recently-published [research](#) highlights the scale of "long Covid", finding that only 29% of 1,077 Covid-hospitalised people studied in 2020 had fully recovered five months later.

Our campaign demands remain:

- Full isolation pay for all, and publicly-provided accommodation and services for those otherwise trying to "self-isolate" in crowded housing. Convert contracted-out "Test and Trace" to a public-health isolation service
- Requisition patents and other Big Pharma assets to allow maximum vaccine production and roll-out across the world. Requisition private hospitals and PPE and medical supply chains
- Bring social care into the public sector, with NHS-level pay and conditions for care workers
- Workers' control of workplace safety. □

Our archive online

We now have a page on our website, workersliberty.org/wl-archive (or click on "Archive", from the panel to the right of carousel, or the Publications drop-down menu) collecting links to archives of our publications back to 1966-7. We'll develop it further. We appeal to older readers to help by checking their archives, or asking around, to find items which we can't trace (like some issues of industrial bulletins produced in the 1970s, *The Hook*, *Real Steel News*, etc.) or have only damaged copies of (like *Socialist Organiser* 326 and 327). □

Myanmar workers call for solidarity

By Mohan Sen

On 3 April Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners said that the Burmese security forces have killed 550 people, including 46 children, since the 1 February military coup.

In parts of the country inhabited mainly by the minority Karen people, the coup regime has begun carrying out airstrikes, killing dozens and displacing tens of thousands.

Still, many thousands, including striking workers, continue to protest in the streets across Myanmar.

Corporations with suppliers producing garments in Myanmar have refused to accede to workers' demands for protection if they continue to support the "Civil Disobedience Movement". Now it has also emerged that multinational oil and gas companies are continuing to do business with and transferring large amounts of money to the military.

We should support the calls from Myanmar's democracy and workers' movements for these companies to break off their dealings with the regime and for govern-

ments to act if they will not.

Some governments, including Russia and India, have ostentatiously stood with the junta, while others including the US and UK are more critical but reluctant to cause too much disruption to capital.

For actions you can take to support our sisters and brothers in Myanmar, see bit.ly/myanmarsworkers

Garment workers' leader Moe Sandar Myint, on the run but continuing to rally protests against the coup, has said:

"In the movement against the military coup the workers participated in the leading role, and they continue to fight for democracy and the country's future, standing strong against repression... Because the military is fearful of the strength of the workers, they have cracked down on the workers and aggressively killed them. The crack-down is because the military is afraid of workers' power. Our workers' movement against the military dictatorship needs support from the public and the international community to stay intact. I urge you all to support us. We must win this revolution." □

India: "deeper than farm laws"

On 30 March Momentum Internationalists held a meeting in solidarity with the Indian farmers' struggle with London region Fire Brigades Union black and ethnic minority officer Amit Malde, and Pritam Singh, a left-wing academic and economist specialising in the economy of Indian Punjab and an ally of farmers' leaders. Amit's statement of solidarity, which drew out parallels with anti-privatisation and climate struggles here, was followed by a comprehensive and informative presentation from Pritam, and many questions. MI will put up videos soon. Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome, who was due to speak but ill, sent a statement. Extracts:

The Indian farmers' movement feels very close to my heart as my grandparents were farmers in Punjab. These new exploitative farm laws will allow big companies to drive down crop prices. They threaten to leave families and entire communities without the means to live. More than 40% of people in India work in agriculture.

But the protests also cut much deeper than just the farm laws. They have also become about the BJP and their divisive Hindu-nationalist politics and neo-liberal policies. The farmers' movement is an anathema to their bigoted regime – it transcends caste, religious, and regional differences. Many women are at the forefront. A few months ago 250 million workers went on strike alongside the farmers. This movement provides a vision of a different India – one which can be united in its diversity.

So it is no surprise Modi's government is doing everything it can to suppress the movement. Indian government-controlled media has demonised farmers.

The government ordered Twitter to suspend accounts that tweeted support for the farmers or criticism of its treatment of them. It has shut down the internet around the protest sites, and arrested protesters, sympathetic activists and even journalists. Water cannons, tear gas and brute force have all been used against farmers.

Here in the UK, the Conservative Government is a close ally of Modi's regime. Modi spoke alongside David Cameron when he visited the UK, our Home Secretary is an active supporter of the BJP, and there are billionaire donors who bankroll both parties. In the 2019 election, Hindu nationalists mobilised for the Tories, and the Tories are responsive to their bigoted agenda, like their opposition to banning caste discrimination.

We have to expose these links and put pressure on the government over this issue. So thank you to everyone attending – we need to keep on raising the profile of the protests and showing our solidarity. Victory to the farmers! □

• Solidarity statement bit.ly/indiastatement • Ask your MP to sign Early Day Motion 1278 bit.ly/indiaedm

“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 □

Scrap the Police Bill, don't just amend it!

By Gerry Bates

Protests against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, mostly more or less ad hoc, continued on the weekend 3-4 April, almost a month after the Tories pushed the Bill through its first parliamentary vote on 9 March.

There's talk of a national day of action on 17 April, but varied local protests are likely to continue too (best followed [on Instagram](#)).

The Bill [limits the right to protest](#) already hemmed in by the Public Order Act 1986 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. It increases criminal penalties for people who fall foul of police-imposed conditions, establishes new offences like "public nuisance", and bans protests from a large area round Parliament. It would threaten people taking down statues like slaveowner Edward Colston's in Bristol with ten years jail (maximum sentence at present: three months).

Two marches were held in London, the second one several thousand. There were some arrests late on in the second protest, after most people had left, but mostly the police were on the back foot. Maybe two thousand protested in Bristol, where there have been two or more pro-

tests each week for a while now. Later on, about 10pm, some protesters blocked a motorway.

Around 300-400 marched in Newcastle, from one side of the city centre to the other and back again, without police being confident enough to intervene.

Sheffield also had 300-400. There were about 350 on the Northampton protest, about 300 in Liverpool.

Everywhere the demonstrations were mostly young, with a high proportion of women. Labour and trade-union contingents were few, but socialist publications like *Solidarity* and *Women's Fightback* got a good reception.

The government has set no date for the Bill to go to its next parliamentary stage, amendments in committee, and is under pressure to amend it before it returns to full parliamentary debate. The battle will continue to establish the right to protest, not just reduce the new restrictions, and activists will push unions and local Labour Parties to join it. □

Momentum primary results due

By Michael Elms

In March, Momentum ran a "policy primary" for the first time – a one-member-one-vote email ballot of its members to decide what motions Momentum should take to Labour Party conference.

This was a step forward for democracy in Momentum, but still limited: making decisions by email referendum is a partial form of democracy, and one which favours central control. Momentum had some democratic structures prior to 2017 which were based on meetings of representatives of local groups. But the unelected office staff are central to shaping and holding email ballots: indeed, they get to set the questions.

Momentum's leadership has still not released the results of the vote (which closed on 31 March, and was electronic, so counted instantly). Moreover the leadership has stated that it will meet in September to revise the list of approved motions, essentially overruling the ballot.

We understand that they will announce the results soon on the [Momentum website](#). The motions supported by Momentum Internationalists can be read on the [MI website](#). □

Win on disability rights

Disabled people's organisations have scored an important victory as the government has announced that local councils will no longer be excused from meeting their social care obligations. A year ago, the Coronavirus Act included provisions for councils to apply for "easements", under which they would not have to provide assessment and care under the Care Act.

Eight councils had used this provision, including – shamefully – two Labour councils. But campaigners had objected throughout the year and their pressure has finally been rewarded.

This follows the withdrawal late last year of the Coronavirus Act's measure of allowing just one doctor to "section" a person experiencing mental health problems, which had also been condemned by disability, mental health and civil liberties campaigners.

However, some discriminatory provisions in the Act remain in place, including a relaxation of the requirement for education authorities to provide suitable education for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (Additional Learning Needs in Wales).

Hann Sutcliffe, Manifesto and Policy Officer of Neurodivergent Labour, told *Solidarity*: "It's pleasing to see that the voices of disabled people and advocacy groups are being heard in a time when so often they are considered expendable. Lockdown has impacted the most vulnerable people especially disabled so disproportionately that we should celebrate any victory we get. While we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that the original measures go nearly far enough to adequately support disabled communities, it's heartening to see a considerable win such as this." □

No Singapore on Teesside

By Walter Brennan

Listening to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, billionaire Rishi Sunak, you could be lured into thinking that the establishment of so-called Freeports in the UK is the cure-all for British economic ills, the “Big Idea”. Sunak has been banging on about Freeports for years, as he did in his recent Budget speech.

What’s all the fuss about? Actually – not very much.

A Freeport is an area, often around a port or an airport, where the normal rules of import-export do not apply. Imported goods that do not go outside the boundaries of the Freeport are not subject to the usual tariffs, customs duties and paperwork associated with importation. If goods are transported outside the Freeport area, standard importation procedures apply. The idea is that manufacturing will be attracted to the Freeport, to manufacture goods for export without having to go through import procedures for their supplies.

It is a popular idea. In 2017 there were 82 Free Trade Zones (ports or inland) within the EU. According to Sunak jobs will be created and industry will flourish.

But Freeports have been tried before in the UK. Six freeports were established in 1983, under Thatcher; but in 2012 their licences were not renewed. If a factory was set up in a Freeport, it was re-located from somewhere else. The growth in employment was minimal, and often pre-

carious and poorly paid jobs, mostly in warehouses. The lost revenue in duty and tariffs etc. had to be replaced and that could only come from the taxpayer.

Concerns were also raised about how Freeports attract criminals keen to utilise warehouse space to store goods intended for money laundering. As it becomes more difficult for criminals to use banks for money laundering, they are turning to art works, precious stones, antiques or vintage wines (all of which tend to hold their value), storing them in unregulated Freeport warehouses until market conditions are favourable, then selling them on.

An unexpected police raid on a warehouse in the Geneva Freeport revealed rare Ancient Egyptian artefacts and even two mummies waiting to be released onto the black market.

Freeports are part of the neo-liberal mantra, promising huge dividends when stifling bureaucracy is done away with and goods are, supposedly, allowed to move freely (though, contrary to the propaganda, Freeports do not allow goods to move freely). Singapore is often held up as the model to follow, ignoring the special and unique features of that city state.

Despite all these concerns, some even from sections of the capitalist class, Sunak seems determined to go ahead, but there will be no “Singapore-on-Teesside”, or anywhere else for that matter. If any Labour Councils are attracted to the idea: they should think again. □

The enemy is capital, not London



Letters

The Northern Independence Party, now promoting a candidate in the 6 May Hartlepool by-election, looks to me like all the worst traits in Corbynism solidified into a bad joke.

It even has a whippet in its party logo.

There is no real call for “Northern Independence”, but there is an increasing rise, at least where I live in Yorkshire, of regional identity and calls for Yorkshire “home rule”.

You see way more Yorkshire flags than you used to. Yorkshire Day has become an actual thing observed by councils and companies rather than a joke involving Yorkshire puddings.

Much of this cultural assertion is reactionary and goes along with support for Tories and Farage. Indeed the Tories up here lean into it as a way to differentiate themselves from the national Tories’ London-centric poshness.

However the main political expression of the “Yorkshire-ism” is “The Yorkshire Party”, which is ideologically

centrist or even, like the Northern Independence Party, social-democratic.

It is eating into the Labour vote, mostly in the places like safe Tory seats where it gets some of the frustrated anti-Tory vote, but also in working-class areas among people disaffected from Labour who would never vote for the Tories.

In some ways, I am glad just that this disaffection isn’t going to the right. But I think even the “leftish” versions of the particularism store up problems in future for socialists.

The idea seems to be that if we can’t defeat the Tories, then we carve out a bit of the UK to be slightly less horrifically right wing and protected from the worst Tory policies. As the Yorkshire Party grows, it could well move to the right. Defecting councillors may see it as an increasingly viable vehicle for their careers.

Whilst advocating much more autonomous, democratic, and assertive local government, we need to make the argument that the working class of Wakefield have the same fundamental interests as the working class of Walthamstow or Wolverhampton. London is not the enemy: it’s capital and the bosses. □

Luke Hardy, Leeds

Class inequality and racism

By Sacha Ismail

The government-commissioned Sewell report into “race and ethnic disparities” (bit.ly/sewellreport) has been widely panned, rightly, as minimising the reality of racism and racial disadvantage in the UK.

Though overwhelmingly black or Asian, the Sewell commission’s members are a privileged and conservative bunch, including six holders of MBE or CBE “honours”, a corporate executive and former banker, the head of a large academy chain, a department store owner and chamber of commerce worthy, a former police superintendent and a full-timer for a right-wing think tank. The commission’s chair Tony Sewell has been in hot water before for broadcasting various bigoted and regressive opinions.

Kenan Malik’s response in the Guardian bit.ly/malik-sewell hits what seems to me a central issue: “... the commission... criticises others for seeing everything in racial terms – but does exactly that when it suits its agenda... The underlying theme of the Sewell report is that the causes of disadvantages faced by minority groups lie primarily within those groups. This places it in a longstanding tradition of moralising social problems, from blaming poverty on the behaviour of the poor to condemning ‘lifestyle choices’ for health inequalities. Social issues – including the complex interactions of race and class – are reframed as moral choices and the behaviour of individuals.”

The report refers repeatedly in a shallow way to class (i.e. socio-economic) inequality, prominently citing a claim that “Britain is doing much better on race than on class”. As historian David Olusoga puts it, the whole thing is “wilfully blind to the interplay between race and class”.

A large part of racial inequality in the UK is heavily intertwined with socio-economic inequality; these structures and systems in turn provide a culture medium for racist ideas and prejudices to flourish. Class disadvantages disproportionately impact ethnic groups over-represented in the working class and in its worse-off sections, and generate additional social and cultural signals and assumptions, creating a self-reinforcing dynamic which can run over generations.

The Sewell recommendations contain essentially nothing to lessen class inequalities – and meanwhile the commission is covering for a regime that has dramatically and deliberately *widened* those class inequalities, disproportionately hurting many racialised groups.

In addition racism and racially-based disadvantage, and respects in which they remain dire problems or are even worsening, are intertwined with but clearly not reducible to class inequality.

The report has very little to say about the increasingly hostile environment for migrants and how this is driven by state structures and government policy. It plays down the reality of racism in policing in criminal justice and ignore its structural aspects. The reforms it proposes are meagre in the extreme.

In regards to broader ideological struggles against racism and inequality, the Sewell report at best dismisses them as the “idealism” of the “well-intentioned”.

The logic of its alternative, which will be all too welcome to the Tory right, is demonstrated by what Shadow Women and Equalities Secretary Marsha de Cordova called the Sewell report’s “positive spin on slavery and empire”. □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/sewelltravesty. Also bit.ly/sc-ex

HK activists face sentences on 16 April

By Pete Radcliff

On Thursday 1 April nine leaders of Hong Kong’s Civil Human Rights Front, were convicted of organising and participating in an unauthorised assembly.

Those convicted include most of the long term leading activists of the movement for democracy in Hong Kong, including 82 year old Martin Lee, Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) leader Lee Cheuk Yan and socialist activist Leung Kwok Hung (“LongHair”).

Sentencing was delayed for two weeks to 16 April. Prison sentences of up to five years for each offence may be handed down.

Whilst waiting for sentence, Lee Cheuk Yan faces another trial starting on 7 April and yet another later in the month.

Then early in June the show trial, under the National Security Law of June 2020, will start of the 47 participants in the 2020 democracy primaries, considered by the Hong Kong prosecution an act of sedition to the Chinese regime. The charge carries possible life sentences, and many trade unionists are in the frame.

Some look to action by Western governments. But the weak Magnitsky sanctions, for example, applied by the Tory government on agents of the Chinese regime complicit in the atrocities on the Uyghur people, won’t affect the regime.

A delay to the ratification of the EU-China trade agreement because of China’s failure to comply with human and labour rights may have some effect. But Hongkongers cannot trust capitalist governments around the world to act with any determination against the Chinese regime. They are tied to the profits it makes for them.

Ending the repression in Hong Kong is down to the radical opponents of capitalism and imperialism around the world – and to the international labour movement in particular. □

Shrewsbury 24: lea

By John Bloxam

On Tuesday 23 March, the Court of Appeal overturned the convictions of 14 North Wales trade unionists who had been sentenced for picketing in the 1972 building workers national strike. They were part of the "Shrewsbury 24": 24 workers were originally put on trial 48 years ago.

The appeal was granted because original police trial statements had been destroyed and the defendants had not been informed of that, or of the reason why. The secret destruction was uncovered a decade ago by the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign's researcher, Eileen Turnbull. The discovery included the following note between the police and the chief crown prosecutor – "In most cases the first statement was taken before photographs were available for witnesses and *before the officers taking the statements knew what we were trying to prove.*" (emphasis added).

The government had been defeated twice in the first part of 1972 – the miners' strike and then the freeing of five dockers jailed under the Industrial Relations Act. In these and other working-class actions at the time, effective picketing to spread the fight, get solidarity, and prevent strike breaking were essential elements. The Shrewsbury 24 trials were a major example of the bosses' attempt to change this situation. For this purpose, and after the failure of their Industrial Relations Act, they used common law and 19th century conspiracy law against trade unionists for the first time.

Two of the North Wales pickets were jailed for lengthy terms. Des Warren got three years, and died in 2004 partly because of the prison treatment he received. Five of the other trade unionists also convicted died before the court decision. Ricky Tomlinson, now an actor, got two years, and was in court to hear the vindicating result.

In July 1972 militant rank and file working class action, of near general strike proportions, forced the government to free five jailed dockers after a few days in prison. Although many working class activists fought hard for similar action to free the Shrewsbury building workers, we were unsuccessful in the end. There was widescale rank and file fund raising, publicity, support meetings. Local defence committees were established. There were a number of strikes: building workers, car workers, dockers and others. But nothing on the scale needed to free the jailed pickets.

The building workers' national strike was in the second part of 1972. Weeks later the police brought charges against a number of North Wales pickets, which were then dropped. It became clear that suggestions about any real damage on picketed sites, and even violence, were baseless. In fact, on one of the main sites the police were there all the time, without making any arrests, issuing cautions, or even calling for reinforcements. The state then, in early

1973, brought much more serious "conspiracy" charges against 24 of the pickets in early 1973. At that point the leaders of the two unions involved (TGWU and UCATT, now both merged into Unite) abandoned their members completely after legal advice about the charges (e.g. "illegal assembly" and "conspiracy to intimidate") and likely costs.

19 of the charged pickets were TGWU members. Initially, they were offered legal support only if they handed their cases over to the union solicitor. Later, when the conspiracy charges were brought, the TGWU Executive withdrew any support. That was changed to financial support after the strength of rank and file feeling was made clear at the 1973 Delegate Conference.

Five were UCATT members. They faced the most openly hostile union leadership. General Secretary George Smith wrote to the Shotton branch secretary to say: "it would be doing the Building Unions a great disservice... (to) demonstrate or call a national stoppage in regard to these matters as the charges range from civil offences to criminal acts." In June, Smith wrote to all UCATT branches saying he would report Lambeth Trades Council to the TUC. Lambeth's "crime" was to be the first Trades Council to form a defence committee and fund for the North Wales 24. Smith said that no money from UCATT branch funds should be given to the defence of the victimised pickets.

In early June 1973 Flint Trades Council wrote to the TUC about the North Wales 24 case. Ken Graham, TUC Organisation Department Secretary, responded and referred to cases under the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act brought against pickets "who have in the view of the police officers on the spot committed acts outside the definition of peaceful picketing. Trades Councils should not encourage delegates or affiliated branches to take part in any industrial action in support of workers before the Court on charges arising from the Act unless requested to do so by the NECs [National Executives] of the Unions concerned".

Communist Party slow off the mark

That the campaign in support of the victimised Shrewsbury workers was much weaker from the beginning than it should have been had much to do with the Communist Party (CP). At the time, the CP was strong in the building workers unions and led the powerful Building Workers' Charter rank and file movement. They had members among the victimised North Wales workers. They were also a strong force in other major unions.

However, it was left to rank and file North Wales building workers – many working as contractors at the Shotton steel works – to set up the North Wales 24 Defence Committee in March 1973. This was suggested and assisted not by the CP but by Workers' Fight, a forerunner of Workers' Liberty, which was doing political activity around

arning the lessons

the steel works. Workers' Fight printed the Shotton Building Workers Solidarity Bulletin, and then the first bulletins of the NW 24 Defence Committee. The aim here was to initiate a powerful national rank and file campaign, based on the victimised workers themselves – publicising the case and threat to all workers, getting financial support and laying the basis for widespread working class action and strikes in support of the pickets.

Nationally, the Communist Party – together with the Building Workers Charter – moved very slowly and cautiously. At first the *Morning Star*, the daily controlled by the CP, would not publish reports of the police frame-ups, and articles from local CP building workers were “lost”. Concerned above all not to disrupt relations with trade union leaders, the *Morning Star* printed an interview with UCATT boss George Smith, despite the UCATT leadership’s scab attitude towards North Wales building workers. Local CP building workers were involved in the Defence Committee, but some weren’t, including Des Warren. He did not work at Shotton but had a lot of credibility with his long record of militancy and 29 charges against him for picketing. At this stage, much of his work was aimed against Workers’ Fight (WF), to marginalising the influence we had in the Committee and establish CP control. There was pressure on other building workers to cut any ties; factional abuse against “Trots”; and the popular front type argument that we would lose “liberal” support if WF was involved. As though “liberal” support had freed the jailed dock workers.

Too little, too late

Later in 1973 there was a public shift in the national CP approach towards the Shrewsbury case, in part in response to the anger amongst many CP members and rank and file workers. Articles regularly appeared in the *Morning Star*, and the Building Workers’ Charter made it their central campaign. However, pushing the trade union leaders to the “left” still remained central for them. They wanted to ensure that any rank and file response was kept under their control, was consistent with their strategy, and therefore largely tokenistic. The alternative approach, guided by the idea that if “the leaders won’t lead, the rank and file must”, and campaigning from the start for the kind of militant industrial action that alone could free the victimised pickets, had been argued for by Workers’ Fight, but we had been pushed aside by the CP.

When the sentences were confirmed just before Christmas 1974, there were a number of strikes against the jailings, some led by CP members. But the Defence Committee, CP controlled from late summer 1973, advised they should go back to work pending promised future action, which did not happen.

The conviction and jailing of the North Wales pickets, without the required working class response, was a major working class defeat. The individual pickets paid a heavy

price, both in their sentences, then being blacklisted and many unemployed. For the working class as a whole, the basic class weapon of effective picketing had been demonised and pronounced “illegal”. That laid the basis for Tory government anti-trade union legislation with the same aim and effect, supported by subsequent Labour governments and still in place.

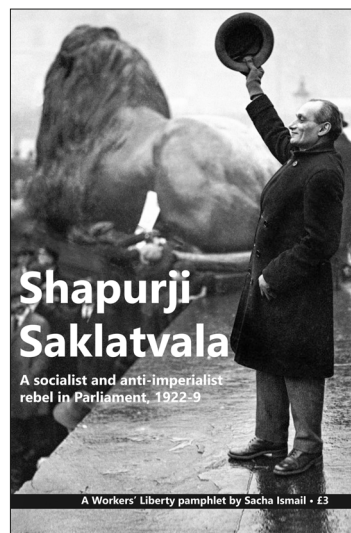
However, since the defeat in the 1970s, there has been a rearguard action on behalf of the victimised pickets. In 2006 the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign was established, including those jailed pickets still alive. The campaign was supported by the majority of trade unions. It called for the release of all relevant documents and an application to the Criminal Cases Review Commission.

In 2014 backbench MPs voted overwhelmingly for the government to release all documents relating to the jailing of the pickets. The government, quoting “national security” refused. The Shrewsbury 24 Campaign’s researcher, Eileen Turnbull, still managed to unearth the documents critical to the Court of Appeal’s decision to overturn the convictions.

The 23 March legal decision is an important and welcome decision for the victimised pickets – “innocent” even in the bosses’ courts – and should be celebrated for that. But the best memorial for the victimised North Wales pickets, dead and alive, will be for the court victory to spur a renewed effort to learn the full lessons of the Shrewsbury 24 case and prevent anything similar happening again.

That calls for renewed activity on campaigns like Free Our Unions, aimed at overturning the unjust present anti-trade union legislation, aimed to prevent effective picketing and the type of working class action used by the building and other workers 49 years ago. □

• Abridged. More, including some key documents from the campaign: bit.ly/nw-24



Until 14 April

Special offer to 14 April: for £5 including post you can get: the new *Women's Fight-back*, a trial subscription to *Solidarity* for six issues, plus our pamphlet on Saklatvala, revolutionary socialist and Labour's first BAME MP. □

workersliberty.org/publications

Trump: serious threa



Debate

By Paul Hampton

Part of an ongoing debate on the USA, all available online at bit.ly/trump-d

"In order to be capable of foreseeing anything with regard to fascism, it is necessary to have a definition of that idea. What is fascism? What is its base, its form, and its characteristics? How will its development take place? It is necessary to proceed in a scientific and Marxian manner."

– Trotsky, Letter to Shachtman,
15 November 1931

Thomas Carolan (*Trump, Caligula and Nero*, [Solidarity 580](#), 3 February 2021) warns that "By any one of a dozen tests, Trump is a fascist". In [Solidarity 565](#), 30 September 2020, he wrote: "a fascist is what Trump is in his opinions and in his actions where he is free to act as he likes. The USA is not fascist." Martin Thomas ([Solidarity 584](#), 3 March 2021) says Trump is a fascist because "he aims for autocratic rule unrestrained by bourgeois democracy, and is building a mass plebeian movement on nationalist and populist lines, with a significant militarised component, as his battering-ram to achieve that." These are assertions, lacking proof.

Fascism has a precise meaning for Marxists. Trotsky: "Names are used to distinguish between concepts; concepts, in politics, in turn serve to distinguish among real forces." Fascism is an exceptional form of bourgeois politics. The goal of fascist movements is the annihilation of the working-class movement, particularly when it threatens capitalist rule. Fascist movements create mass plebeian armed bands that physically attack the labour movement, especially its most militant sections. After they take power, the fascists systematically destroy the labour movement and bourgeois democracy.

The classic examples are Mussolini and Hitler. Fascism takes different forms, but fascist movements and fascist governments have those ends and means in common. The political conclusion: labour movements must immediately organise their own forces to physically combat nascent fascists.

In 1919, Mussolini formed his Fasci di Combattimento. On 15 April 1919, fascists burned down the offices of the Socialist Party's *Avanti* newspaper in Milan. In January 1920, Gramsci warned that "the bourgeoisie cannot avoid the fate that awaits it other than by recourse to a reactionary and military dictatorship, and sooner or later this is what it will do".

In August 1920, over half a million workers seized facto-

ries throughout Italy. Workers organised production and in places formed red guards. At the height of the factory occupations, the CGL union leadership repudiated the movement. It was isolated and withered.

In November 1920, fascists in Bologna deposed the Socialist-led council and destroyed the offices of working-class organisations. The reign of terror by fascist militias continued. Angelo Tasca, in *The Rise of Italian Fascism* (1938), collected an incomplete list of 726 fascist attacks for the first half of 1921. These included the destruction of 17 newspapers and printing works, 119 Chambers of Labour and 151 socialist or communist clubs. Between January and May 1921, more than 200 workers were killed and over a thousand wounded by the fascists.

Gramsci excoriated the Giolitti government, which demobilised officers on condition that they join the fascists, giving them arms and ammunition. By mid-1921, the fascists had built their paramilitary base, marching on Rome in October 1922.

In June 1923, Clara Zetkin authored the first Comintern assessment of the fascist seizure of power. She wrote: "The fascist groups for terrorist subjugation of the working class in Italy are the so-called squadrons... The squadrons developed over time into a purely military force, one that carried out the coup and underpins Mussolini's dictatorial power... At the time of the fascist coup, they numbered between 100,000 and 300,000."

Between 1918 and 1923, the German labour movement was militant and powerful. Despite the Versailles treaty, there were still hundreds of thousands of paramilitaries. The Nazi party's stormtroopers (SA) were founded in November 1920. In 1926 SA leader Franz von Pfeffer stated: "Unquestionably, it is first and foremost the SA that sets us apart from the ordinary parties in parliament. The SA will guarantee our victory once the parliamentary system and its 'means' collapse."

According to Daniel Siemens' book, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler's Brownshirts* (2017), after the Nazi electoral breakthrough in September 1930, the SA grew from 77,000 in January 1931 to 221,000 in November 1931. It had more than 400,000 fighters by August 1932.

The SA savagely attacked the labour movement. Official nationwide statistics for 1931 counted more than 8,000 people injured or killed as a result of political violence. In June and July 1932 alone, politically linked riots, brawls and assassinations in Germany caused the deaths of more than 300 people and injured more than a thousand.

In December 1931, Trotsky warned the German Communists that "should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank". In January 1932, Trotsky argued that "the gist of fascism and its task consist in a complete suppression of all workers' organisations and in the prevention of their revival". When

t, but not a fascist

a state turns fascist “it means first of all for the most part that the workers’ organisations are annihilated”.

Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933. The Nazis interned at least 80,000 socialists and trade unionists during their first year in power. The Nazi repression of the Communist Party alone saw 150,000 arrested and ultimately 20,000 party members killed.

There are 75,000-100,000 people affiliated to white supremacist groups in the United States, according to Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* (2020). Even the Department for Homeland Security says that white supremacists remain “the most persistent and lethal threat”.

A Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, *The War Comes Home* (October 2020) found that white supremacists conducted 41 attacks in the United States between January and August 2020. It stated that four people had been killed in four incidents by white supremacists. The CSIS report points to “a handful of groups—such as The Base, the Atomwaffen Division (including rebranded versions such as the National Socialist Order), and the Feuerkrieg Division—with some leadership structure and command-and-control arrangements”. There are also looser groups, including the Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, Boogalooos and QAnon,

A Southern Poverty Law Center report, *Far-Right Political Rallies in the Trump Era* (August 2020), found that between 2016 and 2018, there was a major upswing in street mobilisation by far-right groups, with 125 rallies, marches and protests nationwide organised and attended by white supremacists, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, the “alt-right” and right-wing reactionaries. There were 74 of these events in 2017 alone. Between 2014 and 2018, men influenced by the far-right in the United States killed 81 people. At least 40 of those killings happened in 2018.

This violence is serious, but needs to be understood in historical context. The threat is real. It could become the basis of a mass fascist movement. But the number of rallies and fatalities are still relatively limited. The far right remains fragmented. Sections of it are now disillusioned with Trump.

Trump is undoubtedly a right wing authoritarian – not an ordinary bourgeois politician. He has certainly encouraged and amplified fascists and militias in the US. But Carolan and Thomas never explain when, how or why Trump became a fascist. They don’t explain what is distinctive about Trump that makes him a fascist, compared with other reactionary, far-right politicians globally.

Carolan and Thomas don’t explain why, when Trump had majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate, he did not shut down bourgeois democracy and actively repress the labour movement. They don’t explain why having been in power as a ‘fascist’, he then gave it up, rather than be overthrown or die in office – as fascists



Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg on their way to the SPD Congress, 1910

have tended to do.

Carolan and Thomas don’t address why Trump lacks his own militia or explain how far he actually controls the amorphous far right. They do not assess the social weight and direction of the militias’ violence.

Even if Trump were a proto-fascist, it would not lead to the central political conclusions drawn by Carolan and Thomas – vote for and orientate to the Democrats. The shrill use of “fascist” functions to lever their desired change of political orientation. They mischaracterise Trump in order to shoe-horn their political conclusion: to vote for and work inside the Democratic Party.

The Democrats are a bourgeois party by their history, programme, structure, personnel and funding. Under Clinton they made workers’ pay for economic dislocation in the 1990s. Under Obama (and Biden) they made workers pay for the crisis of 2008. The Democrats helped hollow out bourgeois democracy in the US and kept the labour movement quiescent. They helped create the conditions for the rise of the far right.

Marxist assessments of fascism, starting with Zetkin and Trotsky, concluded that the labour movement cannot rely on the bourgeois parties to fight fascism. In reality, bourgeois parties and their governments facilitate the rise of fascism. If US workers now have to fight a burgeoning fascist movement, then they cannot trust or have any confidence in the Democratic Party. □

Send in the commissioners?

By Tom Harrison

Despite Thatcher being Prime Minister, the BBC still managed to get away with making socially relevant dramas in the 1980s. A particularly memorable one was *United Kingdom*, a play by Jim Allen, which imagined a Tory government sending in Commissioners to take over a town in the north of England after its local council refused to implement spending cuts. Major civil unrest ensued, as police were sent in to impose the central government's will on the working class community.

Such a scenario is extremely unlikely soon in the case of the City of Liverpool though, following Robert Jenrick, Tory Housing and Local Government Minister, sending in commissioners to help run the council whilst former mayor Joe Anderson helps Merseyside Police on corruption inquiries.

The main reason why this intervention won't spark mass protests from outraged citizenry is that the council has not only been carrying out Westminster imposed austerity cuts, but has also been wasting upwards of £100 million on various failed development projects. Additionally, Commissioners will not take over the total running of the Council, but only areas such as property and urban regeneration.

A call by the local trade union movement to oppose the commissioners has gained little traction so far, with a very small protest held in the city on 3 April. Matters might change if the commissioners' actions result in increased outsourcing of council services and further privatisations.

Another cause for concern is the proposal to drastically reduce the number of elected councillors from the current 90 to 30. There is an overall Tory drive to reduce elected representatives elsewhere, although plans to bring the number of Westminster MPs down from 650 to 600 have apparently been shelved.

Fewer councillors would mean less exercise of democratic oversight as well as increasing the case load of those councillors remaining. In practice backbench councillors have very little power in a council run by a directly elected mayor, with powers to overrule elected councillors. There are good grounds for suggesting that such a system creates an environment where allegations of corruption can flourish in the first place.

That Jenrick and his fellow Tories are on a crusade against corruption is frankly laughable considering his unlawful approval of a £1 billion luxury housing development for Tory party donor Richard Desmond. And all those Covid-related contracts given out to ministers' mates with no competitive tendering or scrutiny...

If a closer look were taken, you'd probably find plenty of instances of corruption in quite a few councils up and down the land. It was the police investigation that made the difference in Liverpool.

Liverpool is red wall on steroids. An electoral defeat for Labour here would be a big embarrassment for the party,

as has all the coverage to date about how badly run the Labour council is.

Labour won't lose overall control of the council in May, but odds on retaining city mayor have narrowed considerably. The entire process of selecting the Labour candidate has been farcical. Initially there was the North West Regional Office tearing up the original shortlist and declaring those on it "unsuitable". Following that, few wished to put themselves forward to take up what was regarded as a poisoned chalice. The result was a shortlist of two very inexperienced candidates, the winner being Joanne Anderson (no relation).

Joanne Anderson is a twice-declared bankrupt and as such has a big credibility problem in the eyes of those who will bother to turn out to vote in May, given that the council she intends to run is accused of gross financial mismanagement.

The post of elected mayor has always been up for independent candidates to grab should voters become disillusioned with established parties. In Hartlepool one such was elected on his record of dressing up in a monkey costume. Charity worker Stephen Yip is a worthier candidate than that, and as a squeaky clean individual is widely predicted to be the winner by many across the political spectrum.

The mayoral election is conducted by Supplementary Vote. If no candidate gets above 50% then all but the top two get eliminated and their second preferences reallocated. Roger Bannister, a much respected trade unionist who has consistently opposed the cuts, is standing for mayor again for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), run by the Socialist Party. When he last stood, he got enough votes to save his deposit – a rare outcome for anyone deemed "far left".

Some voters might want to show their displeasure with Labour and the bureaucratic way it has handled things by giving Bannister their first preference then marking the Labour candidate 2nd. It is doubtful such actions will be enough to save the Labour Party from a big electoral drubbing when 6 May comes around! □



Activist agenda

With lockdown eased, the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign restarted its regular 5th-of-the-month protests outside the Chinese Embassy in London on 5 April. There were many police there, unlike last September, but they didn't try to stop the protest. The main street activity for Workers' Liberty people has been "Kill the Bill" protests. Follow [#killthebill](#) on Instagram for the latest. We have also restarted street stalls to sell *Solidarity* and our books and pamphlets. □

Abuse in football: more reckoning to come

By Janine Booth

On 17 March, Clive Sheldon QC reported on the investigation he chaired into the sexual abuse of boys in football between 1970 and 2005. Five days later, the BBC began broadcasting its three-part documentary on the subject. Both the report and the documentary revealed the horrifying extent of abuse, the authorities' failure to protect the boys, and the long struggle for justice.

Many working-class lads dream of becoming footballers. They love the beautiful game, they know they are good at it while doubting they are good at anything else, and they aspire to be the heroes they cheer from the terraces (or, these days, the seats). Prolific abusers exploited that craving for success on the field, aided by a football establishment that could not – or would not – see what was going on in the dressing room, the coach's car or back at his house.

Barry Bennell, Bob Higgins, Eddie Heath and others systematically molested and raped young footballers, abusing the power they held over them. Their victims – now survivors – have waged a courageous battle which, after far too long, saw perpetrators jailed and now the Sheldon Report revealing how the system failed them.

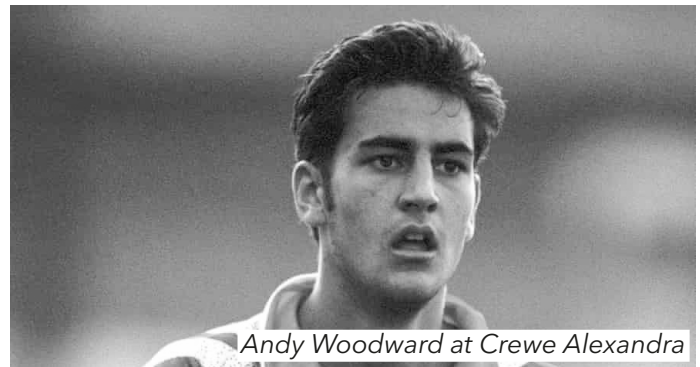
In November 2016, former footballer Andy Woodward gave interviews to journalist Daniel Taylor and TV presenter Victoria Derbyshire, giving his account of being abused as a boy. The floodgates opened, with many footballers coming forward to tell their stories.

The report and documentary show why the boys did not speak out at the time. They were in awe of their coaches. They saw boys who managed to repel the abusers' attentions find their career prospects suddenly ended. One survivor explained that he didn't tell anyone because he knew that his dad would have attacked the abuser and gone to jail, and he couldn't face losing his dad. Parents – perhaps especially fathers – often say that if they found out that their kid was being sexually abused, they would deal with it like this. But, understandable though that may be, it makes it harder for victims to speak out.

In the 1980s and 90s, we cheered players like David White and Paul Stewart, then wondered why their careers burned out and their lives spun out of control. Now we know. The report and documentary show the wreckage that the abuse caused. They spoke of drug and alcohol abuse, damaged relationships, and inability to show affection and trust. One man told how the abuse had made him a strident homophobe for years before seeing the error of his ways.

Some of those speaking to the camera were captioned "former footballer", with the name of the club/s they played for; but some were captioned "former youth player", suggesting that they never went on to the professional success that they wanted so much.

Sheldon's report states that the Football Association (FA) "could and should have done more to keep children safe". The FA delayed significantly before launching a comprehensive child protection programme in May 2000, and made mistakes even after that. Where abuse was re-



Andy Woodward at Crewe Alexandra

ported to football club authorities, the responses were "rarely competent or appropriate". Clubs brushed aside suspicions about youth coaches who were "delivering the goods", i.e. producing skilful young footballers who bring revenue to the club.

Much has changed in the last two decades, in football and in wider society. Concepts such as "grooming" have entered the vocabulary as child sexual abuse has become better understood, and "safeguarding" has become the expected practice of organisations. Child sexual abuse still happens, but the scale of the change is very significant.

Last month, a report commissioned by the Scottish Football Association revealed similar evidence of child sexual abuse and institutional failure. Last year, a BBC documentary told the story of serial abuser Peter Ball, former Bishop of Lewes, revealing how he had been protected by people as high up in the British establishment as Prince Charles and the then Archbishop of Canterbury. That documentary exposed "the Church's darkest secret", just as the late-March documentary exposed "football's darkest secret". Maybe we will see more documentaries exposing the "darkest secret" of other public institutions.

Things may be better now, but we cannot afford to be complacent. And there is still a reckoning to be had with the crimes of the past. □

Our pamphlets

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

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

More: workersliberty.org/publications

Bessie's blues are current

By Jim Denham

If you're looking for a "straight" biography of Bessie Smith, then Jackie Kay's *Bessie Smith*, published by Faber, is not for you.

Although Jackie Kay (Scotland's maker, or poet laureate) has clearly done her research into Bessie Smith's extraordinary life and gives credit to Chris Albertson's definitive 1971 *Bessie* for much of the factual information she uses, this is not a conventional account of a life, but a semi-poetic description of the author's identification and imagined relationship, with her subject.

Kay writes: "I don't know what gave me the idea ... to write about my life and write about her life together. How odd to try and do both at the same time."

The book was written in the mid-90's and first published in 1997, but has now been republished with a new introduction touching on Black Lives Matter, the Me Too movement, and the refugee crisis: as Kay notes, "Bessie's blues are current."

The fact that the author is a black woman who seems to have experienced a lonely childhood in Scotland (albeit in a loving white adoptive family) gives her an intensely personal relationship with her subject: having been given a CBS Bessie Smith double album by her communist adoptive dad in the early 70's, Kay was first struck by the artwork: "I am the same colour as Bessie Smith ... I'd look at her nose then I'd look at my own nose. Perhaps she is related after all."

The nuances of a complex life

This is not a "straight" biography in another – important – sense: it puts Bessie's sexuality and her physical relations with women (as well as men), at the centre of the story. Bessie's bi-sexual voraciousness has been well documented and her own lyrics ("I'm always like a tiger, I'm ready to jump") celebrate her appetites.

Nor does Kay shy away from Bessie's alcoholism, extreme temper outbursts and predilection for physical violence (sometimes meted out to other women, especially real or imagined love rivals): but, she points out, Bessie's willingness to resort to fisticuffs could be admirable, as it was when (legend has it) she single-handedly drove the Klu Klux Klan away from one of her shows in Concord, North Carolina in July 1927.

Throughout, Kay traces the history of other blues women, from the nineteenth century voodoo queens to the 1920's "race records" of Ma Rainey, Clara Smith (no relation) and Victoria Spivey, when Bessie was making \$2,000 per week and her Columbia recording of *Down-hearted Blues* sold a record-breaking 780,000 copies in six months (but when the depression set in and her record sales declined to the hundreds, Columbia dropped her: Kay reckons Bessie foresaw this when she sang *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out*).

There are also passages in which Kay imagines Bessie's innermost thoughts, written in southern black vernacular.

These are, in my opinion, the least successful elements of the book, but as they are italicised, the reader is made aware that these are the author's imaginings and not intended to be taken literally.

One of these italicised passages, however, is important and relates to a true incident: in the late forties the jazz critic and promoter Rudi Blesh intended to write a biography of Bessie and made contact with her sisters Tinnie and Viola, who told him they had a trunk full of photos, sheet music and letters that had belonged to Bessie. This treasure trove disappeared for ever because Bessie's no-good bum of a husband Jack Gee claimed he had the rights to it and made typically unreasonable financial demands that Blesh could not (or would not) meet. Kay imagines the contents: unpublished lyrics, "ostrich plumes" and a lock of hair from Smith's closest (and probably platonic) friend, Ruby Walker. There are also old costumes and "a giant pot of chicken stew, still steaming", "a jar of Harlem night air" and the Tennessee River, with sheet music "made into tiny boats". This is, of course, Kay the poet in full, fantastic flow, but telling an essentially true story.

Kay – perhaps surprisingly – resists the temptation to simply repeat the widely believed myth that Bessie died because a white hospital refused her admission following a serious accident. What we know for sure (and Kay recounts this accurately, basing herself upon Chris Albertson's research) is that on September 26, 1937 Bessie and her lover Richard Morgan were driving down Route 61 between Memphis and Clarksdale on the way to a show, when their car hit a truck and Bessie was very badly injured. The myth has it that she was turned away from a white hospital and died as a result.

Kay cites Albertson's research which has convincingly debunked this story. Bessie was taken to the G.T. Thomas Afro-American Hospital in Clarksdale, where she died without regaining consciousness – although Kay, confusingly, then proceeds to cast doubt upon Albertson's account, saying "my temptation is to hesitate": perhaps, she implies, racism was a factor after all?

What is certainly a fact is that Bessie lay in an unmarked grave for thirty three years until 1970, when a couple of donations (one from Juanita Green of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a former cleaner of Bessie's house, the other from singer Janis Joplin) purchased a headstone. Kay speculates that Bessie would have written a blues about this. By the way, the belated headstone is engraved: "The Greatest Blues Singer In The World Will Never Stop Singing".

Kay's book is not for everyone: some people will find it too political, some will recoil from its frank discussion of sex, and some will object to the elements of fantasy and poetic make-believe. For myself, I found it a gripping read and – perhaps most importantly – it drove me back to Bessie's records, most of which (I realised, to my shame) I hadn't listen to properly for decades. □

Student campaigns make links

By Abel Harvie-Clark

On 1 April student organisers from five London universities met to reflect on lessons and steps forwards for fee strike action. Over 200 students remain on fee strike across Goldsmiths and SOAS, whilst UAL (University of the Arts, London) and LSE (London School of Economics) students are building support among international and postgraduate students, who remain the only groups capable of withholding fees. The strike at RCA (Royal College of Art) is somewhat diminished due to management bullying and threats of border controls against visa-dependent students, but some students are still on strike.

Online university makes organising difficult. The same crisis that makes students not want to pay fees makes them unlikely to turn up to organising meetings. More personal engagement is needed from organising committees.

A useful precedent from last academic year's fee strike at UAL was shared: then, an incremental fee payment plan beyond graduation was negotiated by the strike. It is figured that universities who barely have sufficient admin to enrol new students are unlikely to chase outstanding debt of alumni.

Negotiated graduation without fee payment would be a solid victory for fee strikes and a particularly crucial one for international students, who make up a large proportion of strikers. Research from Unis Resist Border controls in 2020 reported 56% of international students at risk of destitution due to the combination of extraordinarily high fees, NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds), and of course Covid-19.

The chance of in-person action as lockdown eases is encouraging for student struggles, as different campaigns are making links with one another. The UCU (University and College Union) branches at both SOAS and Goldsmiths have passed solidarity motions with the fee strikes.

Rent strikes go on, with students at Queen Mary University of London fighting evictions with the support of London Renters' Union as well as university staff unions. The Warwick University rent strike has teamed up with Protect Warwick Women's sit-in, which has passed 400 hours, and is calling on students to withhold term 3's rent in solidarity with the sit-in's demands. □

• Weblinks: see bit.ly/st-lk

NEU: defend reps, act against "exam factories"

By Pat Markey

Delegates to the National Education Union (NEU) Conference will meet online on 7-9 April, 9.30am to 3pm each day. A "[Defend NEU Reps](#)" fringe meeting, Thursday 7pm, provides an opportunity to show solidarity and build the campaign to defend NEU Reps who are facing victimisation. The fringe meeting will hear from Louise Lewis (Huddersfield NEU), John Boken (Shrewsbury College NEU), Tracy McGuire (Darlington NEU and Executive), Kirstie Paton (Greenwich NEU and Executive), and Kieran Mahon (Redbridge NEU).

An early test at the conference is a motion on Wednesday 7 April to abolish statutory testing in primary schools and to "mount a vigorous campaign" for the abolition of GCSEs, the radical transformation of A Levels and other post-16 qualifications, and the abolition of UCAS in favour of enabling students to proceed to any university whose grade offer a student meets.

One of the key action points in the motion is to ballot all primary school members to boycott statutory high stakes testing in their schools for the school year 2021/22. A weakening amendment seeks to delete this key action point with a mañana formula which puts off a vague ballot reference to the dim future.

Thursday 8 April begins with a motion on supporting school "leadership" (management) members in the NEU. It is perfectly reasonable to support school "leaders" against the hierarchy above them, but an amendment makes the case that sometimes leadership members can make members feel guarded about speaking out in

school union group meeting.

Thursday's discussions also include motions from the Equalities sections, Black Lives Matter, Child Poverty, and PSHE, RSE, and LGBT+ and Inclusive Education.

A key motion on Friday morning is "Standing Up for Support Staff". This motion recognises the significant increase in support staff members and states the belief that the NEU "needs to be a union for education workers that fully represents all members, including support staff". Crucially, the motion instructs the NEU executive to "seek, as a matter of urgency, a way to end the undertaking not to actively or knowingly recruit support staff". □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/neu-c. Pat Markey is Secretary of Northampton District NEU and a conference delegate, writing here in a personal capacity.

Working-class politics and anarchism

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet



Featured book

How do the revolutionary anticapitalist traditions of Marxism and of anarchism differ, and how do they overlap? Articles and debates between members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and writers and activists from different strands of anarchism. 140 pages, £5 workersliberty.org/publications

Battles in three bus companies

By Ollie Moore

Bus drivers at Manchester's Go North West firm are continuing an indefinite strike against worsening conditions imposed via "fire and rehire".

The strike entered its sixth week on 4 April. The drivers' union, Unite, says the new contracts represent an additional 130 hours of work, equivalent to a pay cut of £2,500.

At talks at conciliation service Acas, Unite submitted a counterproposal detailing how the company could save £1.3 million to avoid the contractual changes. Go North West has refused, and has told Unite that, unless workers accept new contracts, it may close down the Queens Road depot entirely. Bosses have given workers an 8 May deadline for acceptance of the new terms.

Andy Burnham, the Labour "Metro Mayor" of Greater Manchester, recently announced plans to integrate bus services under local authority control. However, the move, which mirrors the model used by the publicly-owned Transport for London, integrates fares, timetables, and routes under public ownership, but leaves the actual operation of the routes, and the employment of bus workers, in the hands of private companies like Go North West. As ongoing disputes in London show, this model is no guarantee of better treatment for workers.

Bus drivers at London United, a subsidiary of French firm RATP, struck again on 31 March and 1 April, with fur-

ther strikes planned on 7 and 14 April. The drivers are aiming to win an improved pay settlement, as their employer seeks to cut wages.

A statement from Unite said: "Following four days of negotiations... RATP made an offer for the outstanding pay increases for 2019 and 2020 and also sought to introduce new contract clauses. The pay offer fell well below the expectations of members and the proposed changes to conditions had not been previously discussed, and as such Unite was unable to propose the offer to members at this stage."

RATP's latest accounts, from 2019, show in annual turnover in excess of €5 billion. Christine Chardon, the chief executive of RATP's London operations, has seen her pay increase from £196,000 to £363,000.

Meanwhile, a ballot of Unite members working for Metroline, one of London's biggest bus companies, is due to close on 9 April. The dispute centres on Metroline's plan to introduce a remote signing on procedure. In response to a call from London mayor Sadiq Khan for a "moratorium" on the introduction of such procedures, Metroline has paused its plan. Unite said the company needed to "not just pause its remote sign on plans but discard them into the dustbin of history." □

BT workers gear up to ballot

By Stew Ward

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has been holding online meetings for members around the country, as it prepares to launch an industrial action ballot in BT Group. The union's "Count Me In" campaign has seen well-attended meetings take place throughout recent weeks, with union reps and officers discussing how to resist BT bosses' plans for job cuts and attacks on terms and conditions.

In late March, BT announced plans to give its workers a non-consolidated "pandemic bonus" of £1,000 in cash, and £500 worth of shares, a move which the CWU denounced as a bribe, calling attention to the fact that the company has not offered any consolidated pay increase.

CWU is yet to announce the timetable for a formal ballot. In late 2020, BT workers voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in an indicative ballot. Over 4,000 people have taken part in a union email-writing campaign in support of BT workers' demands.

On 24 March, engineers working for Openreach, part of the BT Group, struck again in their dispute over re-grading. □

Heathrow pushed back

By Ollie Moore

Unite called off a series of 41 strikes planned by workers at Heathrow Airport, after Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL), the central employer at the airport, made a new offer on pay and conditions.

Unite says the offer "includes the potential for pay increases over the next two years (depending on airport traffic and inflation), the insourcing of work... and a commitment to review working hours of some sectors to improve work/life balance."

The strikes, planned to take place across a 24-day period, were due to begin on 2 April. Instead, Unite will ballot members on HAL's new offer, with the union recommending acceptance.

The dispute over pay and conditions was a sequel to an earlier dispute over contractual changes imposed via "fire and rehire". Although strikes were not able to stave off the "fire and rehire" plan, continuing action has forced at least some concessions on the substantive issues. This shows the benefits of fighting on even after "fire and rehire" has been imposed. □

“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! □

Deliveroo strikes on 7 April

By Michael Elms

Deliveroo workers across the UK are set to strike and demonstrate against low pay on 7 April.

Earlier this month the Bureau of Investigative Journalism analysed payslips from 318 Deliveroo couriers which covered 34,000 hours of time spent logged into the app. They report: "Half (56%) of the riders who took part earned less than an average of £10 an hour for all the time they were logged in. Some took home far less, with one in six (17%) getting less than £6.45 per hour – the lowest possible minimum wage – and one in three (41%) receiving below £8.72, the legal minimum wage for workers over 25."

Deliveroo have made various claims about rider pay in recent times, claiming that all riders were earning over £10/hour; or that they were "averaging" £13/hour or £11/hour. In any case, the company's claims do not tally with the experience of workers, who on top of low hourly earnings are denied sick pay, holiday pay or pension contributions. Workers also have to cover the costs of buying, running and insuring the vehicles they use for work.

Record worst

After this damning report there followed an Initial Public Offering on the London Stock Exchange which was described by the Financial Times as the worst on record. The value of the shares fell by a third almost as soon as they were floated. The FT explains this poor performance by pointing to the two-tier share system designed to allow Will Shu and his friends to maintain maximum control over the company despite going public; tinny hype and over-valuation; and some concern over the treatment of workers. A source at Deliveroo said that the concern about workers' rights expressed by the firm's billionaire financier critics is hypocritical: they are probably right.

Deliveroo's workers will pile on the pressure with a wave of strikes around the UK on 7 April. In the run-up to the action, branches have been becoming more active, recruiting large numbers of workers who have signed up to the app in the last few months as jobs dry up in other sectors of the economy. □

Scotrail Sunday strikes to 2 May

From Off the Rails

The ScotRail conductors' strike got off to a cracking start on 28 March. Solid action saw every train cancelled other than a few Driver Only Operated trains in the central belt.

Guards are angry that the company has taken away their enhanced pay rates for rest day working, especially as drivers are still being paid £365 to work their rest days. ScotRail's excuse is that this had to continue because drivers would not work their rest days. Now the company is finding out that conductors won't either!

It took a determined fight a few years back to keep guards on (most of) Scotland's trains. Having been beaten on this, management now seem to want to wage a long war of putting the grade down. With ScotRail's days in private ownership probably numbered, its management seem to want to save every penny while they still can.

Strikes continue every Sunday until 2 May inclusive, along with an accompanying ban on overtime and higher-grade duties. If that doesn't make the company see sense, we will have to escalate. □

• More online: DOO on South Western Railway bit.ly/doo-sw



Our audio!

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

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

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

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:

- *Working Smart: A Union Guide to Participation Programs and Reengineering*, by Mike Parker
- *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept*, by Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter
- *The History of American Trotskyism*, by James P Cannon
- *The Socialist Workers Party in World War 2*, by James P Cannon
- *The Third international After Lenin*, by Leon Trotsky

Red, blue, and talking



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

The maintenance engineers are all back in the building, on normal hours. It's fantastic being able to have breakfast at home, and commuting in at seven instead of five. The days seem indulgently short, and my free evenings are long and sunny.

I'm with the electricians, so the week is filled with small jobs – changing light fittings, replacing a flow sensor, installing security cameras in the workshop, and deep-cleaning it the next day. We're not used to working in teams; we communicate badly and make stupid errors. J sends the wrong calibration certificate to a manager; A routes the camera cables the wrong way; I confuse a jig-saw with a grinder – but we backtrack and make it work.

P, who I've not seen for six months, has bipolar. His mood is high, and he has his mind set on workshop improvement projects that no-one wants to do. He pursues each electrician and fitter individually, trying to persuade us to cut a hole in the wall and install a fan. When that fails, he tries convincing us as a group, which turns into a joke at his expense. Towards the end of the week his mood starts to come down, and he gives up on the fan.

P seeks me out in the workshop and we chat about the Me Too movement. He says his daughters have been in abusive relationships and Sarah Everard's murder affected his family very deeply. He felt desperate to do something, so he made connections with some software engineers and is designing an app to link "safe people" together by GPS tracking. From what I can gather, he wants to encourage women to share our location with families, friends, "good" strangers, and the police at all times.

But arguing with P when he's high is like trying to nail jelly to the wall. I explain that it was the police that killed Everard, then broke up the vigil; that GPS tracking is an invasion of privacy; that suggesting more policing of women is degrading and misleading. P agrees completely – and so do his daughters! We need a culture change in society, men need to educate each other, we need men to stop abusing women. But P still thinks that his GPS app will bring "the good people" together and create a more equal culture, he doesn't see the contradiction.

P: "So do you want to be on the whatsapp group for this? If you agree with the principles of it?"

Me: "I don't agree with the principles of it. I'm not on board with it."

P: "But you could see how it develops? We really need – it's really valuable – to have criticisms like this, it helps us make it work right."

P starts talking about his daughters and the BLM demonstrations. He says he went on the streets during

the miners' strike, but has been really scared of crowds during the pandemic. He becomes tearful:

P: "I can't go to a demo and stand there – I just can't do that – but I need to do something about this, and this is what I do, I build and develop things with technical engineering people."

Me: "I know you do – you're brilliant at it. And you're a really decent person P, of course you want to help."

We put some chill hop on, and talk about his bi-polar.

P: "There are red people – like my wife," he smiles "who bring me up, make me hyper – she's like a bundle of energy and positivity. But red people can make me too high, and then I crash down hard. The blue people – people like you – listen to me and calm me down. So I've got to seek you out sometimes to level me out, because I know I can talk to you."

Me: "Thanks P, that's really sweet of you. I'm glad I can help – talking to you helps me a lot too."

P: "Thanks pal." □

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

Turkey in the 80s



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Yılmaz Güney (1937-1984) was a Kurdish actor and then director who dedicated himself to making films depicting the struggle of the poor and oppressed in Turkey. Persecuted by the authorities, he was sentenced to prison allegedly for sheltering anarchists in his flat. On his release he accidentally encountered the judge who had previously sentenced him; the details are obscure and disputed but a brawl of some kind ensued and the judge died. Güney always denied responsibility but was convicted of murder. He escaped from prison in 1981 and sought refuge in France. It was there that he made his last film, *The Wall* (*Duvar* in Turkish), in 1983. Set in a prison for young male offenders, *The Wall* tells of the brutal treatment they receive from sadistic prison staff and of their fight to survive. Their dream is to be transferred to another prison where conditions will be better. Eventually, this comes to pass but to their horror the boys discover that their new detention facility is even worse than the previous one. Güney died of cancer on 9 September 1984 and is buried in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. *The Wall* was banned in Turkey for 17 years. □

DVLA strikes 6-9 April



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

Workers at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea will strike from 6-9 April. It's clear from last-ditch talks that the bosses aren't budging, so strikes will go ahead. The issue is workplace safety; far more workers than strictly necessary have been made to come into the workplace, leading to numerous Covid outbreaks. Our demand is for all workers to be sent home, and for an emergency working arrangement, overseen by union reps, to be agreed which ensures only emergency and essential work is done on-site. Longer term we want investment in equipment and software to ensure this scenario never takes place again, and workers are fully equipped to work from home if necessary.

Outsourced workers in Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), part of the Ministry of Justice, employed by the contractor OCS, will strike from 13-15 and 20-22 April. These workers are paid minimum wage, and are striking to win a real living wage. We're calling for donations to their strike fund (bit.ly/ocs-pcs), as we want to ensure these low-paid workers are able to take sustained action.

Directly-employed HMCTS workers were due to strike in two locations, but the relevant reps' committee has agreed a deal around Covid working arrangements. It doesn't meet our central demand, which was for everyone to work from home and all work apart from emergency and essential work to be done remotely. However, it does tighten up the policing of distancing arrangements in the workplace.

Our members working in passport control at Heathrow Airport voted to suspend a planned strike, as a proposal has been made in their dispute around rostering arrangements. It's important to stress that although the strike has been suspended, the dispute remains live. If the new proposal is tested out and members feel it doesn't address the issues in practice, action can be reinstated.

In the Department for Work and Pensions, I believe we may be heading back into dispute over workplace safety. Managers continue to push for more work to be done in person, and to bring increasing numbers of workers back into offices from 12 April onwards. The issue is workplace safety; far more workers than strictly necessary have been made to come into the workplace, leading to numerous Covid outbreaks. Our demand is for all workers to be sent home, and for an emergency working arrangement, overseen by union reps, to be agreed which ensures only emergency and essential work is done on-site. Longer term we want investment in equipment and software to ensure this scenario never takes place again, and workers are fully equipped to work from home if necessary. □

Council pay cuts

By Stew Ward

Council workers in the Unite union in Thurrock, Essex, will strike from 13 April to 7 May, excluding 3 May. The workers, including refuse workers, highway maintenance, and street cleaners, face pay cuts of between £2,000 and £3,500 per year. □

Defend Gary Carney

From Tubeworker

Central Line drivers in RMT on the London Underground are balloting for industrial action to win reinstatement for unjustly sacked rep Gary Carney. Gary was sacked for allegedly avoiding a Drugs & Alcohol test he was never informed about. The ballot opened on 15 March, and closes on 13 April. Tubeworker encourages all Central line drivers to vote yes. Gary never failed a D&A test; he legitimately booked off sick, as any of us would if we were unwell. It is outrageous to sack someone for avoiding a test they knew nothing about. □

£20,000 by 11 July

We've had an additional £100 in donations (thanks to David, John and Stuart), and a further £255.89 in second-hand book sales, bringing our total to £1,870.24. *Solidarity* sellers report a good response at the recent Kill the Bill demonstrations and we hope to continue the pace of sales as lockdown starts to ease. We still need to accelerate to reach our target by July. Donate at workersliberty.org/donate2021

Get our paper every week!

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

Visit workersliberty.org/sub to subscribe

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

Contact us



020 7394 8923



solidarity@workersliberty.org



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



Production: George Wheeler, Martin Thomas (ed.), Sacha Ismail, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle

Solidarity



For a workers' government



BT strikers (Credit: GMB)

BRITISH GAS: SACKINGS AND STRIKE ON 14 APRIL

By Ollie Moore

British Gas engineers in the GMB union will strike for the 43rd time on 14 April, the latest date British Gas has set for the imposition of new contracts. Engineers who have not agreed to the new terms by that date face dismissal, as British Gas uses “fire and rehire” tactics to force through changes.

The new contracts were due to be imposed on 1 April, but workers were informed by letter of the extension to 14 April. No reason was given for the change. British Gas says workers who do not accept the new contracts will be dismissed, with pay in lieu of notice, but no redundancy package.

Justin Bowden, the GMB’s National Secretary, said: “Sacking his own highly skilled, qualified and experienced workers on April 14, because they would not submit to his reckless corporate bullying is the ultimate measure of failure from [British Gas CEO] Mr O’Shea. There are no legal checks on this forcing of signatures under duress. The British Gas workforce is united in utter disgust and anger against the Centrica [British Gas’s parent company] senior management team led by Mr

O’Shea. This disgust and anger will be manifest across the country on April 14. This dispute is far from over.”

The union says that “an official national lockout dispute between British Gas and GMB will become effective from April 14”, and that it will pursue “further strike action and action short of a strike.”

The resolve shown by the British Gas strikers in taking repeated and sustained action in a period of very few prolonged strikes is inspiring. It is a dispute that deserves more than noble defeat.

For GMB to call only a one-day strike at this stage seems a token gesture, and is a step back from the pattern of four-day strikes the union has been organising.

Thus far, the dispute has focused on the method of imposition of the new contracts (i.e., fire and rehire). To force concessions, the focus must be put on the substantive issues – pay cuts, longer hours, productivity monitoring, and more.

An escalation of action is also needed. British Gas has not budged significantly despite the sustained pressure of numerous four-day strikes. An indefinite strike must be considered, funded with adequate strike pay. □