

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

TWO STATES EQUAL RIGHTS

STOP THE BOMBING!

STOP THE ROCKETS

- » **End the occupation: for a fully independent Palestinian state!**
- » **Recognise Israel's right to exist**
- » **Democracy for all: stop discrimination against Palestinians in Israel**
- » **Jewish-Arab workers' unity**

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"A lot of threads came together... spontaneity, but.. with roots"

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Two states, equal rights!

6699 Editorial

On day nine of Israel's bombing of Gaza, the percentage of civilian casualties is inexorably rising. Hundreds are dead. 58,000 are displaced, according to the UN. The bombs increasingly shatter the social infrastructure of the blockaded, pauperised territory: hospitals, electricity, water.

The Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu, surprised at Hamas's ability to fire so many rockets, and as far as Jerusalem, is retaliating with overwhelming, brutal, vindictive military force, intent on wreaking maximum destruction before international pressure brings a ceasefire.

The immediate frame is rising right-wing Jewish-chauvinist mobilisation in Israel, expressed in new pressure to evict Palestinians in East Jerusalem and large-scale violent police actions against Palestinian youths in the Old City and the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem.

The Israeli authorities eventually retreated a step in the face of joint Palestinian-Jewish street protests inside Israel: postponing (but only postponing) court hearings on evictions, relaxing police restrictions, re-routing a provocative Jewish-chauvinist march. Then Hamas started firing rockets on 10 May; and Israel has bombed, bombed, and bombed.

The longer-term frame is Netanyahu's policy, since he became prime minister in 2009, of stalling and blocking all peace initiatives with the Palestinians. Instead, he has worked to "manage" the Palestinian populations inside Israel, in the West Bank, and in Gaza – to keep them beaten down while he extends Jewish settlements in the West Bank. He has backed off only temporarily from annexing up to 60% of the West Bank's land to Israel, which would leave the West Bank Palestinians with nominal autonomy in 160-odd distinct patches of land surrounded by Israeli sovereign territory.

Longer-term again, the frame is the stalling by Israeli governments since the Oslo Accords of 1993-5 on the promises in those accords to withdraw Israeli troops from the occupied terri-



Standing Together protest

ories and negotiate on the basis of the Palestinians' right to an independent Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel.

Israel withdrew troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but, together with Egypt, has maintained a blockade on the territory since Hamas took power there in 2007.

The Palestinians have a right to self-determination! The semi-quasi-autonomy in pockets of the West Bank (in effect, the "right" to have a bureaucracy of their "own" distribute aid money), and blockaded Gaza, are a taunting mockery of that right.

One result of the bloody horrors now is to give reprieve to Netanyahu. Attempts to form a coalition to displace him after Israel's 23 March general election (the fourth in two years) have collapsed.

Another result is to boost the standing of Hamas in the West Bank and even, it seems, among Palestinians in Israel. Hamas's rocket attacks are indiscriminately aimed against civilians in Israel, and cannot possibly help get a just peace. Amidst political impasse and desperation, they can give Hamas the shine of doing "something".

Netanyahu and Hamas reinforce each other. It serves Netanyahu to have the Palestinians corralled under the leadership of political Islamists, allies of Iran and pensionaries of Qatar, from whom there is no pressure for actual political outcomes. It serves Hamas to have an Israeli leadership guaranteed not to give secular and democratic political forces among the Palestinians a lifeline by opening doors towards justice and peace.

Many on the protests against Israel's bombing think that anger against Israel's bombing means backing Hamas. That makes no more sense than support for the Arab armies in the 1948 war in which the Jewish community in Palestine established Israel as a state and in which 750,000 Palestini-

ans fled or were driven out.

No socialist, or almost none, backed the Arab states then. Socialists saw those states were engaged in (as the Palestinian Trotskyists put it) a "racial war against the Jews of Palestine". (In the run-up to 1948, and in the decades after, almost all Jews would be forced out of Arab states, over 600,000 of them).

In 1948, it looked like the Arab states, with their large established armies, would win against the scrappy improvised Jewish militia. Now, Hamas's military chances are zero. The politics of its military action are no less reactionary. And they lock Palestinians into a perspective where no redress is possible other than hoping for a magical reversal of the military balance.

Hope

Immediately we have to add pressure for a ceasefire. Larger hope is for the long haul, but it exists.

It exists in movements like Standing Together, a joint Jewish-Arab movement in Israel, which has been active on social issues and equal rights inside Israel, and is now mobilising for a ceasefire.

It exists in other movements like WAC-Ma'an, or the Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre, which organise or help Palestinian and Jewish workers on a class basis.

Some leftists justify siding with Hamas by saying the answer must be "a single, secular, democratic, socialist state in all Palestine". That can make sense only if you think that a single theocratic-fascist state would, by virtue of being "single", be a good stepping stone towards secularism, democracy, socialism. In fact, pressure for an imaginary "single" state can serve only Netanyahu's "real" version of that: rule across all of pre-1948 Palestine with the Palestinians as a subjugated and parcelled-off minority.

We want whole regions, indeed the whole world, federated into a universal workers' republic without border guards. Socialist federations in regions and in sub-regions will be progress.

Socialist, or even minimally democratic, federations can be achieved only by free agreement between nations, and withering-away of national hostilities and fears through solid guarantees of rights.

That is the way in Israel-Palestine: self-determination for both peoples, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian Arab. Freedom for the Palestinians to gain their own independent state alongside Israel. Two nations, two states. No path to future socialist federation is possible other than through that way of mutual recognition.

"Two states" is part of a program, not a whole program. Achieving it will not automatically resolve the democratic questions within the states, let alone the social and class issues. It will open the way to the withering-away of national hostilities, fears, and barriers rather than immediately ending them.

It is a pivotal link in the program needed now to unite workers across the region for common aims; an urgent step to win peace and redress for the Palestinians; and a necessary basis for international solidarity geared to democracy, not revenge. □

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hinterland of East Jerusalem, cutting it off from the West Bank, and threatening the Palestinian aspiration to an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. East Jerusalem Palestinians have also suffered from the building of the "Separation Wall", which cuts through East Jerusalem and puts many of them on the wrong side of checkpoints.

75% of the East Jerusalem Palestinians live under the official poverty line, reliant on work in construction, trade, and education. Jerusalem's Jewish population is also poorer than the Israeli average (29% under the poverty line): 34% of it, much more than in any other Israeli city, is ultra-Orthodox.

Palestinians from Israel proper have joined protests in Sheikh Jarrah and become more assertive in recent years.

Netanyahu's policy has been to try to "manage" the Palestinian population of Israeli by economic concessions while blocking Palestinian national rights. Many more Palestinians get to Israeli universities, for example. Those changes have not reconciled Palestinians to inequalities, but rather increased their will to act against injustice and indignities.

• More online on reshaping Israel: bit.ly/s-jarr



Israel-Palestine: Arabs and Jews unite for equal rights



Standing Together (@omdimbeyachad) is a left-wing social movement in Israel, involving Palestinian Arab and Jewish citizens. In the past week, it has been organising cross-communal demonstrations across Israel, demanding an immediate ceasefire, opposing occupation, racism, and war, and supporting equality and solidarity between Arabs and Jews. Some of its protests have been attacked by far-right Jewish chauvinists. It issued this statement on 14 May.

These are dark days, full of violence and escalation, incitement and hatred. But something truly inspiring happened here yesterday, which showed that there can be light after all this darkness. In the early hours of the morning, we sent out a call for our supporters to hold joint Jewish-Arab protests and stands all across the country, and within hours we had received thousands of responses.

“So yesterday evening, in dozens of locations up and down Israel, thousands of Arabs and Jews stood together and proved that there is another

way and that a different future here is possible. We proved that, while our government is igniting a fire and taking us further and further away from peace, there is a huge Arab-Jewish majority in our society that opposes violence, that knows and insists that children in both Gaza and Sderot want to live full, secure lives. And we are not going to stop.

“At Standing Together, we understand that we need a critical mass of organised people who see the interconnectedness of their struggles. That’s why we don’t only demand a ceasefire; we protest against a right-wing govern-

ment and elitist settler groups that do not serve our interests. We don’t just want to go back to the situation before the escalation started; we’re demanding a much more fundamental change in our society.

“We organise day-in and day-out, so that precisely in these difficult moments, we are able to mobilise thousands to the streets and change the national conversation. We organise so that after this nightmare ends, we can continue our work towards a better reality for all of us” – from bit.ly/st-statement □

“We will not go to war for a nationalistic agenda”

The following statement was published by the Refuser Solidarity Network, which works to build support for Israelis refusing compulsory national service in the country’s military. (More: refuser.org)

What started a month ago with the ban on sitting at Damascus Gate [in Jerusalem] during Ramadan, continued with brawling in Jaffa, settlers rampaging in south Hebron mountain, the court decision to evict dozens of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah (backed by a racist law that

perpetuates the Israeli occupation), and the Israeli police’s extreme acts of violence have now deteriorated to an exchange of fire. It has brought the death of dozens of people between the river and the sea – most of which are in Gaza, some of which are children.

Our heart aches. This war could have been avoided. It could’ve ended before it had begun if only the Israeli government and military would have let the Palestinian people be. This is not only about the past month. If the heads of the state and army cared

about the people or, dare we imagine, about basic human rights – they would understand that there is no way to live with four hours of electricity a day and without clean drinking water. The people in Gaza are in survival mode – a way of living none of us can imagine. We are dealing with decision makers that are not interested in peace, justice, or in stopping the cycle of death. They are interested in political and economic power and this reality serves their interests.

Inside Israel there are riots and attacks on businesses,

homes, and people. Some local businesses in mixed cities have had no choice but to close down in fear of riots destroying their property; we are on the brink of a civil war. The Israeli media serves hatred and does nothing to report solidarity protests organized by Palestinians and Jewish people together. The police violently arrest Palestinians, including minors, while doing almost nothing to stop attacks by extreme right wingers.

We will not go on operations and wars that give us nothing but death in the name of an ar-

chaic nationalistic agenda. We will not hold a weapon, press a button, or wear a uniform that brings death and breaks a family apart. Not when we were eighteen, not ever. This land is drowning in blood.

We stand in solidarity with the citizens of southern Israel and with Gaza and Sheikh Jarrah. We oppose this pre-orchestrated war and call for the immediate end of the Israeli occupation and demand recognition of the Palestinian pain. Only then will we start to see anything different from this grim reality. □

“No winners in escalation”

Muhammad Shehada is a Palestinian from Gaza, who is a contributing columnist for Forward. The following is an excerpt from his latest article (bit.ly/muhammad-jdf)

If your home is destroyed, you will forever feel a sense of oppression and defeat, even if you get another one,” a childhood friend told me Friday afternoon while contemplating what would become of him if his house were next. Becoming homeless after an airstrike, losing everything in a glimpse of an eye, would still be a less grim fate than ending up under the rubble, like the Abu Hatab family, which lost ten members – eight of them children – when Israel attacked the al-Shati refugee camp overnight Friday. A five-month-old baby, now parentless, survived.

And there’s virtually no way to tell when the next air strike hits if my family and friends will be the spectators

watching the frightening smoke, the ones just rendered homeless, or the tragic casualties. Bombing towers and civilian infrastructure, rendering people homeless, inflicting traumas on Gaza’s entire population, deliberately or incidentally, might offer future campaign material for [Israeli defence minister Benny] Gantz or [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu to announce that they’d sent parts of Gaza “back to the Stone Age”. But it won’t make Israelis any safer.

It would only “punish, humiliate and terrorise” Gaza’s civilian population, as the famous Goldstone Report about Israel’s 2008-9 Operation Cast Lead put it. And that would only fuel more hate and vengeance, entrapping us and Israelis in an endless yet preventable cycle of pain and grief. There are no winners in this escalation, and civilians are certainly the ultimate bearers of the heaviest price. □

“Freedom for all of us”

Palestinian socialist-feminist activist Sally Abed, a leading activist in Standing Together, spoke at a demonstration outside the Tel Aviv HQ of Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party. This is an excerpt from her speech (bit.ly/sally-speech)

My name is Sally Abed... I’m a Palestinian, and I’m an Israeli citizen. I’m scared, and I’m hurting. The fact that we are all gathered here helps me remain hopeful. We have to struggle together. When I call for freedom, it’s not only that of the Palestinians, but freedom for all of us.

We all pay the horrible price of occupation – all of us are victims of a right-wing government, a government that serves settlers, a government that is filled with racist policies, a government that couldn’t care less about us. We are enslaved as Palestinians, and also as citizens, as women, as youth. The children in Sderot [an Israeli town near Gaza

which has been targeted by rocket attacks] are enslaved by this government. We are here to demand freedom, freedom for us all – especially for Palestinians, but not only for them. Freedom for all of us, Jews and Arabs... □



Standing Together

- Donate: bit.ly/donate-st
- UK solidarity campaign in support of Israel’s Jewish-Arab grassroots movement for peace, equality and social justice, on twitter: [@omdimbeyachadUK](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachadUK)

Early economic convulsions



Letter

Climate science predicts that different crises will unfold at different time scales and under different emissions scenarios. The purpose of my article ([Solidarity 589](#)) was to argue that economic convulsions will be an early rather than a late impact of climate change, and may well begin in anticipation of the major civilisation-rocking crises like sea-level rise.

Further, that these convulsions will occur at a time when the dawning realisation of climate change – that the future is one of escalating and multiple crises piling up and compounding each other – becomes hegemonic. I expect these initial climate related shocks (predicted by respectable bourgeois institutions) will appear to be the start of a seemingly intractable economic crisis, the end of smooth year-on-year GDP growth. The word “seemingly” here is important. Trotsky’s 1940 pro-



nouncement of the death agony of capitalism proved false and was profoundly disorientating for the post-war Trotskyist movement. The lesson here is that we cannot predict in advance what innovations the capitalist class might develop in the course of crises. But the crisis comes before the innovation.

Similarly, there is no evidence that capitalist rule can organise a reduction in CO2 emissions but it would be foolish to say that this will always be the case. As the economic shocks of climate change build, we will reach the point where world economic growth

will falter year on year and the future will look ever more catastrophic. I think within the next few decades the appearance of the end of growth will be convincing enough that it will radically alter the political reality.

Chris Reynolds ([Solidarity 590](#)) argues that social pessimism is already a big force in politics and mostly benefits the political right. However, so long as the world economy continues to grow, this pessimism does not impact the ruling class.

The triumphalism of the neoliberal age is still the overwhelmingly dom-

inant force in politics. I think we can expect that to change as the material reality changes. There is nothing automatic about this leading to a revival of mass socialist politics. But I never argued that there was. I merely suggested that in a world of escalating humanitarian crises, it may become increasingly difficult to defend the right of private individuals to own and control the means of production.

Chris says that capitalist crisis tend to be driven by overproduction rather than destruction. But capitalism has never had to cope with the generalised, escalating and multifaceted destruction that climate change will bring. Chris finds the end of growth scenario “dubious”. But that’s really just an assertion of his faith in capitalism’s resilience rather than an argument based on the evidence.

I’d be interested to know more about how Chris thinks climate shocks – those I have outlined and many more besides – will impact on an already crisis-prone system. □

Todd Hamer, London

More to condemn



Letter

I totally agree with Martin Thomas ([Solidarity 592](#)) that “Israel should withdraw from the West Bank, end its blockade of Gaza, and concede the right of Palestinians to an Independent state of their own alongside Israel.” But many on the socialist left see an independent Palestine alongside Israel as impossible, as they see Israel as a colonial and apartheid state that must come to an end for there to be peace.

Worryingly there has been little to no condemnation on the left for the actions of Hamas, indiscriminately firing rockets into Israel, killing and injuring innocent civilians. Hamas political bureau member and former minister of interior, Fathi Hammad said on 7 May on [Al-Aqsa TV](#): “People of Jerusalem, we want you to cut off the heads of the Jews with knives.” This is an incitement to kill Jews, yet many on the left are silent on this.



Even more worryingly on the Free Palestine protest on Saturday 15 May in London, men were filmed chanting “Khaybar Khaybar yehud Jaish Muhammad sauf Ya’ud” (Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, Muhammad’s army is returning) whilst wearing shirts with Saddam Hussein on them.

On Friday 14th a synagogue in Norwich was found to have antisemitic graffiti on it, alongside “Free Palestine”. In Germany, Israeli flags were burnt in front of two synagogues, and in Spain a synagogue had “Free Palestine” spray-painted

on it recently. And on Sunday 16th, a convoy of cars with Palestinian flags on them were filmed driving down Finchley Road in London screaming “F*** the Jews, rape their daughters!”

About all this, from Hamas terrorism and antisemitic chants to attacking synagogues, the majority on the left has been silent. We shouldn’t be silent about it all just because Israel commits serious crimes.

We should oppose the Kahanist far right in Israel in their efforts to create settlements and their targeting of Arabs within Israel. We should condemn the Israeli government for its aggression on Gaza, killing innocent civilians. But we should oppose Hamas terrorism, the Islamist ideology it propagates, and speak out against the antisemitism which seems embedded in the “Free Palestine” movement.

Solidarity to the working class of both Israel and Palestine! □

Mo Starke Hannon,
London

Communist for clampdown?



Letter

To add to Jim Denham’s article ([Solidarity 592](#)) on the intervention by the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) in May’s local elections, I’d like to highlight some of the radical “socialist solutions” on offer from one of their candidates in particular, Luton’s Markus Keaney.

The CPB promised candidates to put “leftward pressure” on Labour. From what I’ve understood, in Luton they wouldn’t need to be that left wing at all. But what would this leftward pressure look like in this ultra-safe Labour stronghold? Keaney gave us a glimpse in his exclusive pre-election [interview](#) with *Luton Today*:

“There are a couple of endemic problems in High Town, which several Labour administrations have failed to deal with. You only have to



Markus Keaney

walk or drive around to see the scale of the problem. If elected, I will put pressure on the council to allocate funding and police resources into High Town. My main priorities will be tackling street drug dealing and prostitution, and the renovation of empty units on High Town Road.”

That’s right: Vote Communist for more funding for the cops to crack down on sex workers and drug use!

Keaney convinced some 36 people to vote for him of the 6500-plus electorate. □

Lewis Joyes,
Hertfordshire

Israel-Palestine: a crisis of leadership is only part of it



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Over 80 years ago, Trotsky wrote that “the world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” I always thought that this was a rather audacious claim to make. After all, surely there were other things at play in the world, certainly back in 1938.

But I thought of those words again today as I read the *Observer* editorial on the renewal of violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

“Benjamin Netanyahu is not fit to be Israel’s prime minister,” stated the editorial, correctly describing him as someone who has undermined any possibility of a two-state solution. But the Palestinian leadership fared no better. The newspaper described Mahmoud Abbas as “a discredited figure” not fit to lead the Palestinian people, “especially without new elections.” And a third player, Hamas, was accurately described as “an oppressive, aggressive organisation that ... rejects Israel’s right to exist and evidently has no qualms about using its own people as human shields to advance its claim to Palestine’s leadership.”

In other words, writes the *Observer*, “issues of religion, ethnicity, race and

even land are not the main problem. The problem is that, politically speaking, both Israelis and Palestinians are shockingly badly led.”

Their solution is a simple one: “Both sides need fresh leaders, infused with a vision for peace, not war.”

The authors of that editorial are not wrong – but they don’t go far enough.

As with Trotsky’s formulation in 1938, the crisis of leadership is part of the problem. But it is not the whole problem.

Different leaderships

After all, at least on the Israeli side there have been many different leaders over the last few decades. The Netanyahu years have been particularly terrible ones, with the possibility of a two-state solution seeming ever more remote. But the previous Israeli prime ministers – including those from the Labour Party – also did not reach an agreement to end the conflict.

The Palestinians have been even less fortunate than the Israelis in this sense. Abbas is part of a gerontocracy founded by Yasser Arafat, old men utterly lacking in vision, ruling over a corrupt dictatorship that does not even bother to hold elections. The recent plan to hold such elections was cancelled well in advance of the eruption of the current fighting.

The *Observer* is right to say that both sides need new leaders. They do. But how do you get them?

In Israel, the parties with “a vision for peace” are now very small and getting smaller. Labour and Meretz, which three decades ago could form a government that was able to reach an agreement with the PLO, are now marginal.

On the Palestinian side, things are far worse – especially in Gaza, where a murderous and corrupt dictatorship has existed for more than a decade.

In both nations, we need more than a simple change in leadership, welcome though that would be. Both Israel and Palestine need political revolutions.

Without the emergence in both countries of a politics based on social class rather than tribal loyalties, the bloodshed will not stop. When workers see each other as workers, rather than as Jews or Arabs, racism does not thrive. The creation of powerful trade unions and robust social democratic parties linked to them would help create an entirely new discourse – and new hope for both peoples.

At the moment, there is little evidence that this is going to happen. But that does not mean that it will never happen. Without such far-reaching changes in the way Israelis and Palestinians do politics, without a fundamental transition to politics based on class, new “bad leaders” will simply replace the old ones. □

• Eric Lee is a founding editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal capacity.



Activist Agenda

On the 32nd anniversary of the Tienanmen Square massacre of 4 June 1989, Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and the Hong Kong campaign LMSHKUK will protest from 7pm, with a rally at 8pm, outside the Chinese Embassy in Portland Place, London W1B 1JL: “Democracy, freedom, workers’ rights for China, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Uyghurs”.

The Safe and Equal campaign is putting together a model Covid safety survey. It wants health and safety reps to conduct new workplace inspections and surveys of their workforces. The increased transmission rate from the B.1.167.2 variant of the virus, the new upturn in infections, and the Tories’ signalling that they may press ahead with return to workplaces regardless, make this more urgent. □

• Links and info for these and other campaigns, and suggested words for labour-movement motions on many issues, at workersliberty.org/agenda

Trans woman’s rights breached, rules judge



Women’s Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Requiring a trans woman to show she suffered from a “disorder” is an unnecessary affront to her dignity, the Northern Ireland High Court has ruled. The obligation required in order to secure official recognition of her preferred identity is incompatible with human rights, said the ruling.

Judicial review proceedings brought against the Government Equalities Office (GEO) focused on the terms of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The woman, who has chosen

to stay anonymous, began her transition more than 20 years ago, and took legal action in a bid to obtain a new birth certificate. In order to obtain the “Gender Recognition Certificate” (GRC) that allows a replacement birth certificate to be issued with the correct gender, she required a medical report to confirm a diagnosis of “gender dysphoria”. Her lawyers that amounted to unlawful stigmatisation.

Justice Scofield found that the specific requirement to prove she was suffering from a disorder was unjustified.

He described it as “an unnecessary affront to the dignity of a person applying for gender recognition through the legal process set out for that purpose by Parliament”.

The woman’s affidavit explained that the legal requirement caused her to feel shame and distress.

“It makes me feel that what I am, at the core of my being, in terms of my gender identity, is pathological and disordered,” she stated. “As the evidence before the court demonstrates, such feelings are not unique to me but, sadly, are all too common for trans people in the United Kingdom and, indeed, across the world.”

In his judgment Mr Justice Scofield concluded that it was proportionate to require medical reports as part of the GRC process. He held that the obligation for specialist input in support of an application strikes a fair balance between the individual’s interests and

those of the community.

However, he ruled that having to demonstrate suffering from a disorder to secure the certificate is now unnecessary and unjustified, particularly in light of diagnostic developments.

Solicitor Ciaran Moynagh of Phoenix Law, said: “We are delighted the court today has recognised that being trans is not a mental illness and the word disorder is now unjustified and stigmatising. We look forward to learning how the Government will remedy the Gender Recognition Act in light of this judgment.”

In 2017 the government announced that they would consider reforming the Gender Recognition Act. Several countries had made changes to

legislation that allowed trans people to self-identify, including Ireland. Since, under pressure from anti-trans activists, the UK government has announced it will make no significant reform to the legislation. It has introduced online applications, and reduced administration fees, but the spousal veto and the need for medical sign-off remain unchanged.

Workers’ Liberty support transgender rights and express our solidarity with trans people. We oppose prejudice, hostility and discrimination against trans people. As part of this approach, we recognise the flaws in current gender recognition law and support proposed changes to it, including self-declaration of gender. □

Left politics in Singapore

By Jamie Teo

Jamie Teo, a food courier and socialist activist in Singapore, spoke to Sara Lee, a Workers' Liberty activist.

When did you start being politically active?

I came across Marx around the age of 16 or 17 and started to awaken politically. I didn't start doing political activity until I went to Perth, Australia, for university and came across Socialist Alternative. I met them at an orientation event and was invited to attend their protest against Trump in the Central Business District. I went to their branch meetings and reading groups. I felt they were good politically, but what made me a little doubtful was that they seemed to do loud protests very often – somewhat excessively. They were protesting about important things like immigration, indigenous rights, anti-racism, and the Christmas Island detainees. The protests had educational value. But every week, the protest was about a different thing, and the approach just seemed scattered.

What was student politics like? What socialist organisations had a presence in the student movement and what did you think of them and the student movement in general?

There seemed to be increased interest in socialism because of Bernie Sanders' campaign in the US and Jeremy Corbyn's in the UK. Socialist Alternative did good work around the issues of student debt and international students' extortionate fees, arguing that free education had to be won back. Socialist Alternative had the strongest presence in student politics despite appearing to be a quite small organisation.

There was a high level of corruption in the student movement. If you wanted to launch a campaign and be elected as a student rep, you had to be loaded. Your parents had to be wealthy, so you could spend money on campaign stickers, badges, posters and leaflets. There was a grouping known as "the Inde-

pendents," and some of their members were Young Labour members. They were the ones waging these sorts of campaigns, making student politics a popularity contest more than a political one.

Seeing the sheer level of corruption in the student movement in Australia was eye-opening for me. I grew up in Singapore which has a more repressive political environment, but it was clear that even in more liberal democracies, there are real problems in terms of democracy on the left and in the student movement.

When you came home to Singapore, you volunteered with the Singapore Democratic Party, one of the bigger Opposition parties. Why did you volunteer with them, and why did stop volunteering with them?

I wanted to continue doing political activity and the SDP seemed like the most left-wing political party in Singapore. They were, of course, liberal social democrats, but they did acts of civil disobedience. Their leader Chee Soon Juan did some one-man campaigns that I felt were meaningful – making arguments against the IMF, for example. He seemed to have a coherent-enough worldview that was rather anti-capitalist.

I stopped volunteering with the SDP because of how racist they were. They are very anti-migrant and that is their ammunition against the ruling party. I would say that, over time, the SDP has generally moved backwards politically. In the late 1990s, they were into radical civil disobedience. They had protests and hunger strikes. They were against the ban on gay sex (Section 377A of the Penal Code) even before it became a mainstream issue in Singapore. But when the Workers' Party made big electoral gains in 2011 and there was a greater Opposition presence in Parliament, SDP took a leaf out of their book and started moderating their politics in order to achieve the same results.

Now Chee Soon Juan is incredibly interested in municipal affairs in the constituency he's hoping to get elected in (Bukit Batok). He criticises the PAP MP for that constituency for not being a good enough estate-manager for the residents, constantly posting on social media about maintenance issues in that ward.

Do you think there will one day be an independent party of the working class in Singapore – one with open membership and a democratic structure?

Yes but not until the People's Action Party ceases to rule and there is greater space for democratic action.



Protestors at the SG Climate Rally, 2019

What do you think of the succession crisis in the PAP? Some say it will compel them to become more authoritarian.

The succession crisis in the PAP can only be a good thing. The Party has shown fissures for a while now. I don't think that they will resort to being more coercive and authoritarian simply because they are on the decline. I doubt, for example, that they will go back to being as authoritarian as they were in the 1960s. The PAP is mainly composed of political careerists and military generals, none of whom are competent enough to pull it off. It's also just not empirically true that the ruling party tends to be more coercive when support for them is waning. They suffered big losses in the 2011 election but no new restrictions on free speech were introduced. They won big in 2015, and quickly enacted new restrictions on free speech in the form of POFMA [providing for government controls over internet and social-media content].

Why did you join SG [Singapore] Climate Rally (the youth-led environmentalist group)?

They seemed like the only independent, left-wing political force in Singapore. At the very least, they are conscious that building mass support around environmentalist demands requires the support of the working class. Again, because of Corbyn and Sanders, there is increased interest in anti-capitalist politics.

What is it about the organisation or its members that they've got good politics?

SG Climate Rally was founded because a group of young people wanted to organise Singapore's first-ever public rally on climate change, despite the fear of state repression. Naturally, the people that it brought together were brave, militant people who had a certain level of conviction. Since its inception, SG Climate Rally has had an emphasis on collective action.

Of course, identity politics has a real influence on people in SG Climate Rally. The theories of change that a lot of its members subscribe to are probably variants of poststructuralist thought. For a while, there was a great deal of talk about having a decentralised organisation or a flat structure. But we've moved away from that now, which goes to show that people aren't necessarily wedded to such ideas.

They can be convinced of better politics.

The reason people are taken by identity politics is that they are awakening politically and have an appetite for seemingly radical ideas. That awakening, that appetite for ideas, is only to be encouraged. Socialist activists must find a way to win the battle of ideas and increase the level of political clarity. But for this we need to have a more democratic structure, and a democratic culture of debate when we discuss political ideas. □



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Unite the Union: a more critical approach



By Dale Street

Sharon Graham is a very well-paid unelected trade-union bureaucrat standing as “The Workers’ Candidate” in the Unite the Union General Secretary election now underway. (Nominations close Wednesday 9 June. Voting 5 July to 23 August). That doesn’t rule out supporting her. Two of her competitors (Steve Turner and Howard Beckett) are also very well-paid unelected trade union bureaucrats, and the very right-wing Gerard Coyne isn’t one only because he was sacked after standing against Len McCluskey in the 2017 General Secretary election.

It does suggest a more critical approach than that of Matt Dunn in [Solidarity 592](#).

Matt describes Steve Turner as “the bureaucracy’s man”. But by the same token, Graham could be described as “the woman of another part of the bureaucracy”.

The backbone of Graham’s campaign – for years past, as she prepared her election bid – is her own staff: the Organising Department bureaucracy.

Matt lauds the record of Graham and the Organising Department in supporting workers “against very real resistance from many officials, including ‘left’ officials and Regional Secretaries.” But he is silent on the actual record of, for example, the Scottish Region Organising Department.

When the Scottish Regional Secre-

tary and the rest of the Scottish Unite bureaucracy created the Progressive United Left Scotland (PULS) in order to destroy the United Left Scotland (too independent-minded, too critical of McCluskey), the Scottish Organising Department backed PULS.

They joined PULS. They encouraged Unite members to join it. They turned up to its meetings. They campaigned for its candidates. The then head of the Department – directly line-managed by Graham – boasted openly of all this.

Maybe the Scottish Organising Department is unrepresentative and exceptionally bad? Its record remains an issue to be factored into an assessment of Graham.

Turner can point to his selection as a candidate by an organisation consisting primarily of Unite members (the United Left). By contrast, although Graham’s “Workers Unite” grouping claims to have been created by “a broad base of Unite shop stewards and reps”, it is a top-down creation of her own staff.

“Graham has been accused of being a syndicalist. It is not true,” writes Matt. In fact, Graham has been accused of “syndicalism from above” and there is a lot of truth in the accusation.

Breaking with Labour

Her election material is awash with caricatures of Unite’s relation with the Labour Party. It is effectively a plea for apolitical trade unionism. This is not an aberrant add-on to an otherwise healthy focus on the need to organise in the workplace.

Her manifesto criticises Unite for “losing ourselves in the internal world of the Labour Party.” It claims that “many of us have felt that Unite has focussed far too much on the Westminster bubble and not enough on the workplace.”

Graham will not “dress up a shopping list of political demands as a meaningful plan” but, instead, ensure that “our union will return to the workplace.” Graham will “take Unite out of Westminster and back to the workplace.”

Westminster is bad because “the bright lights of Westminster have too often left what really matters to members in the shade.” And it is a diversion: “A focus on Westminster politics is not a substitute for putting our weight behind any kind of strategy for the workplace.”

Graham is “not interested in internal game-playing within a political party.” Throwing a bone in the direction of the Socialist Party and the SWP, she writes: “There will be no more blank cheques for the Labour Party.”

Matt himself claims that Unite is now “more concerned with Westminster chatter” than the workplace, and that Graham’s focus on the workplace is better than “seeing the union as a prism through which to view the Labour Party and Westminster.”

All this is an insult to Unite activists fighting for Unite policies in their Constituency Labour Parties.

Graham says she will only support future candidates in the political arena “who have been union shop stewards or reps.” At a Westminster level this would preclude support for many left candidates. At Labour Party leadership level it would have precluded support for Corbyn (a former union official, but never a workplace rep).

Nothing that Graham writes indicates support for Unite’s continued affiliation to the Labour Party. Much of what she writes is entirely consistent with disaffiliation. Her support only for candidates who have been union reps, for example, is not restricted to Labour candidates.

Unite’s current but outdated Political Strategy – written in 2013 – is vastly superior. Its slogan is “Winning Labour for working people, and winning working people for Labour.” Its focus is on building Unite’s role and influence in the Labour Party at grassroots level.

The irony here is that it is Graham, not Unite’s Political Strategy, who is incapable of understanding politics other than as the bright lights of Westminster, the Westminster bubble, Westminster chat, and blank cheques to the Labour Party.

None of these criticisms, and many other criticisms which could be made, preclude support for Graham, if we look at her competitors in the race to be General Secretary.

For a start, she is a woman. Matt pours scorn on the idea that Turner should be supported because “it’s his turn”. But there is a case for saying: “It’s her turn”.

Unite has never had a female General Secretary. You would need to go back to the 1980s to find a female General Secretary of one of the myriad of unions which merged over the years to create Unite. And although Graham’s workplace focus and strategy is steeped in apolitical workerism, syndicalism-from-above, and backslapping boasts of the supposed glories of her

employees, there are elements within it worthy of support. But in terms of computing all the pros and cons, it is difficult to come down on one side or the other in the choice between Graham and Turner. Matt puts his finger on it when he refers to Turner’s “lack of work ethic” (currently manifested in his lacklustre election campaign) and Graham’s “highly ‘command’ leadership style.” Correct on both counts, but hardly an inspiring choice.

Not rank-and-file

The mainstream left in Unite since its creation has been the United Left. Matt criticises its Stalinoid politics and its Broad-Left obsession with elections.

But in the last two years conflicts have opened up in the United Left about lay-member control against full-timer control, transparency and accountability, democratisation of General Secretary elections, and challenging sex discrimination in Unite.

Graham and her team have played no role whatsoever in these disputes (other than the bad role in Scotland mentioned above). Hence Matt’s one-sided and only partially accurate portrayal of the United Left.

Matt now re-defines as rank-and-file militants some leaders of the very organisation which he damns – simply because they have switched support to Graham. The United Left has now broken up, probably irretrievably, with different sections backing different candidates – the “mainstream left” candidate Turner, the syndicalist-from-above Graham, or the demagogic Corbynista poseur Beckett.

All three candidates – even Beckett – represent different currents of left (or “left”) politics as it now exists. In that context, socialists should have a lot more to say than virtually uncritical support for any one of those candidates. □

• More from this debate, including a new contribution from Mark Simon: bit.ly/unite-gs

Howard Beckett and Priti Patel

Unite general secretary candidate Howard Beckett has been suspended from the Labour Party after tweeting – in the context of denouncing the Tories’ anti-migrant policies and supporting the resistance to them in Glasgow – that home secretary “Priti Patel should be deported, not refugees”. This episode, demonstrating Beckett’s populist opportunism and lack of solid socialist political principles and judgement, has reinforced our view that the left should not support him. After a bit of doubling-down, however, Beckett deleted the tweet and apologised. He is right to be vocal about the Tories’ attacks on migrants. His suspension by a Labour Party that is deeply inconsistent about dealing with complaints and fails to stand up for migrants’ rights looks opportunistic and cynical. □

• More: bit.ly/bkt-ptl



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Wednesday 19 May, 7-8.45pm: Shapurji Saklatvala and John Archer – pioneering working class & black representation

Monday 24 May, 6-7pm: Workers’ Liberty students – Solidarity with Deliveroo and other platform workers

Sunday 20 June 12:00-1.30pm: Socialist Feminist Reading Group – Transgender Marxism by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O’Rourke

Weekend of 10-11 July: Ideas for Freedom 2021 festival of socialist ideas. Online or in person – buy tickets now!

Thursdays 8-9.30pm: Lenin’s *What is to be done?* reading group

Mondays, 6-7pm: AWL Students’ discussions

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US battles over voting rights and union rights

By Sacha Ismail

The Republicans want to reduce the number of people voting; strengthen the US political system's existing biases towards allowing them to rule with minority support; and shift the country further towards an authoritarian regime.

Following the Trumpist campaign to claim the 2020 Presidential election was "stolen", Republican-controlled states in the USA have enacted 25 new laws restricting voting in 2021, compared to 14 in 2019 and 2020 combined. They build on past measures. US election turnout is famously low not just because of voters being unmotivated, but because it is harder than in Europe to get registered as a voter, and often harder to vote once registered.

I covered this in [Solidarity 590](#) (and in [592](#) we reported that the Tories are pushing a small version of a similar policy here.)

On 7 May Florida became the latest of eleven states that have enacted laws this year. With 21 million people it is by far the largest. Many more have laws under consideration. About 200 are "live" in state legislatures, in addition to 180 that have expired.

Among other things, Florida's SB90 law makes it harder to get an absentee ballot, limits the right to have someone else hand in your ballot, restricts the use of drop-off voting boxes and widens the already very large area within which people are not allowed to offer food or drink to those queueing to vote.

The impact is to (further) limit the number of people who can exercise their right to vote – particularly young people, people on low incomes, people with disabilities, and people with dark skin. SB90 also increases the governor's powers to appoint people to local election boards.

Florida governor Ron DeSantis, a new favourite on the Republican radical right – whose response to the Black Lives Matter struggle has, like Johnson and Patel's, been to strengthen police powers to crack down on "civil unrest" – signed the bill live in a ceremony broadcast exclusively on Fox News.

Florida is a long-standing voting rights battleground. It accounts for a quarter of all US citizens disenfranchised as result of the widespread practice of denying the vote to people with criminal convictions, with one in ten Floridians and one in five black Floridians barred.

In 2018, 64.5% of Florida voters approved state constitutional amendments to end this disenfranchisement. The changes were gutted and re-enfranchisement largely blocked by the same Republican politicians who have now introduced these new attacks on the right to vote.



Another legislative voting rights battle is coming up in the key swing state of Michigan (ten million people), which has a Democratic governor but a Republican legislature – and an insurgent far right that has repeatedly attempted to terrorise the governor. A sweeping voter suppression bill has already passed in the lower house and will now go to the state senate in Texas (population 30 million).

The Democrats push back

400-odd state bills to limit voting rights seems startling, but there have been twice that many to expand them. Virginia, now completely controlled by the Democrats, has made election day a state holiday, repealed a voter ID law and introduced no-excuse absentee voting. Earlier this year it reinstated election rules required until 2013 by federal law to prevent discrimination in voting rights (see below).

The Democratic bills are generally the mirror image of the Republican ones. A majority focus on making absentee voting easier; some would make it easier to register, and some expand the number of polling places and use of drop boxes. A number of bills restore voting rights to those with convictions.

Like anti-voting bills, pro-voting ones have now been introduced in the great majority of state legislatures. But the Republicans control most legislatures: 61.5 lower and upper chambers to the Democrats' 37.5 (they improved this margin in the 2020 elections). They are also ahead on governors, 27 to 23 (again, slightly gaining last year).

Much of the Democrats' focus is therefore on federal measures, through Congress. There are two main pieces of legislation under discussion.

A bill named for liberal civil rights

icon and Georgia congressman John Lewis, who died last year, is designed to restore the provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act which the Supreme Court invalidated in 2013. The Court declared unconstitutional a formula for determining which state and local governments could be required to get federal "pre-clearance" for changes to election rules, based on their history of discrimination in voting rights. At least on paper, the grounds were that it was decades out of date.

The Court made the pre-clearance system inoperative, but did not rule it unconstitutional as such. The "John Lewis Voting Rights Act" has not yet been voted on by the House of Representatives, where the Democrats have a clear majority, apparently because they want to try to create a new formula that they think would survive scrutiny by a Supreme Court that is even more right-wing than in 2013.

"For the People"?

More immediately important is HR1, the "For the People Act", which has already passed the House 220-210 (with one Democrat and every Republican voting against).

HR1 contains a very wide variety of "good government" measures. In terms of voting rights, these include: requiring state officials to automatically register eligible voters, with an opt-out; prohibiting states from restricting voters' access to mail-in ballots; requiring early voting sites for federal elections to stay open for at least 15 consecutive days, for ten hours a day; allowing a sworn affidavit in place of voter ID where required; allowing voters to designate a third party to drop off a sealed-and-signed ballot; and restoring voting rights to former convicts.

(The bill would also create independent commissions, one third from each party and one third independent, to redraw congressional districts, to prevent the kind of partisan gerrymandering that Republican state legislatures are expected to ramp up for the 2022 elections.)

In the Senate, where HR1 is due to come up imminently, the Democrats have an effective majority of one, with Vice President Kamala Harris able to break a 50-50 tie. However, current rules mean the bill would need 60 out of 100 votes to get past a Republican "filibuster".

By a simple majority the Democrats could abolish the filibuster system or carve out exemptions. However, a number of conservative Democratic Senators – most prominently Joe Manchin of West Virginia – aggressively oppose such a move.

The 50 Republican senators able to block the passage of most Democratic bills mostly represent smaller states, and thus only 43.5% of the US population. Republicans have not represented a majority in Senate voting since 1996, but have won a majority in eight of the 13 elections since then. This bias is likely to grow further.

In any case, Manchin opposes HR1, as well as wanting to keep the "filibuster". All other Democratic Senators have signed HR1, but some are said to be unenthusiastic. HR51, which would allow the people of the District of Columbia to vote in Congressional elections, also looks like being blocked by the Senate.

By the people

The Biden administration has been able to pass extensive measures regarded as budgetary, because these are not subject to the filibuster. But a Senate official ruled that a \$15 minimum wage could not be included.

As Traven Leyshon discussed in [Solidarity 592](#) the Protecting the Right to Organise (PRO) Act, a pro-trade union bill that, while inadequate, in some ways goes significantly further than what Jeremy Corbyn's Labour proposed, looks doomed by the "filibuster" too. The top Democrat leadership may of course find it quite agreeable to indicate support for left-wing measures but declare itself powerless to pass them.

As Traven said of the PRO Act: "The bill will not pass without a mass mobilisation of unions and allies which would have to include protests, rallies and workplace actions." The same general idea applies to HR1.

On extensive police reform, US public support peaked during the big Black Lives Matter mobilisations of summer 2020 and has declined a bit since. Grassroots struggles for voting rights may be important in that battle, too. □

Glasgow: how protest blocked deportations

Paul, a socialist activist in Glasgow, was on the 13 May demonstration which blocked deportations. He spoke to Solidarity.

At some point that morning a Home Office van appeared in Kenmure St in Pollokshields, and took two men out of their flat and bundled them into a van. I don't know who saw it first, but a lot of the activist community in the South Side is clued into issues around the Home Office and asylum seekers. There's a tradition in recent years of resistance to the eviction of asylum seekers.

Someone made Facebook posts to tell their friends to spread the news. Two organisations: the Unity Centre, a refugee advocacy group based near the Home Office building in Glasgow; and the No Evictions Network, formed to fight evictions of asylum seekers in 2018, got involved. People got down there. One man crawled under the van, and his friends kept him company down there, giving him blankets and stuff to keep him as comfortable as one can be while under a van. He was under the van for eight hours. I arrived at about 12 or 1pm.

By that point a sizeable crowd had gathered and there were lots of people handing around supplies. The bus stop at the north end of Kenmure street was a hub for water, oranges, bananas and so on. Someone overheard a policeman saying, "they have enough supplies for a month".

It was a long stand-off because they couldn't forcibly remove the guy under the van, and at one point they got a paramedic to go and talk to him. And under the pretext of getting a paramedic over to him, they attempted to clear the street behind the van. But that didn't work.

While the stand-off was going on, and the police had lined up riot vans, ambulances, horse boxes, at either end of the street. Friends living nearby were telling me what equipment was being brought up. There was a three-way wrangle going on between the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and the Home Office. Apparently the Secretary for Justice Hamza Yousaf and Nicola Sturgeon were talking to the Home Office but discussions broke down. The Scottish Government is not supportive of the Home Office's dawn raids policy.

In the end, the Scottish Government spoke to Police Scotland about

how to resolve this. The human rights lawyer Aamer Anwar was there. He is quite prominent in Glasgow refugee circles. In the evening, eventually he announced to the crowd that he had agreement in writing from Police Scotland to go to the opening of the van and walk with the two men to a mosque.

No-one knew anything about the men and it was assumed they were Muslim. It turned out that the men were Sikhs. So there was some delay while the route was re-worked to take them to the Singh Sabha Association.

The agreement was that the police would make a cordon around the two men, Aamer, and a local activist named Mohammed Asif, and that the crowd would disperse at that point, but the crowd made an impromptu victory march through the streets of Pollokshields with the two men, shouting and singing. People were hanging out of their windows; it was lovely. The men addressed us from the steps of the building when we got there and they thanked us in Punjabi, it was very nice.

Serco

In 2018, Serco, who had the contract for housing asylum seekers in Glasgow, started evicting asylum seekers from their housing. Hundreds of evictions were imminent. A campaign was formed between Living Rent, the Unity Centre, a group called Migrants Organising for Rights and Empowerment (MORE) to raise awareness, and resist evictions. Back then I went to Royston in the north of the city, ready to resist an eviction. But at that moment a postponement was granted in the courts. That gave us more time and eventually no evictions happened.

Serco lost the contract to Mears and the whole thing started again with more protests against Mears and their inability to help people in 2019. In the pandemic there have been some woeful moments when asylum seekers were shoved into hotels en masse, evicted from their homes. It turned out that the food they were being given was mouldy. One asylum seeker died in Glasgow. There were scenes of the loyalist "statue protectors" of George Square attacking an asylum seeker demonstration against these conditions.

The No Evictions Network was formed out of the Serco protests of 2018. There have been other moments of struggle against the Home Office. In

2018 a Kurdish family went on hunger strike outside the Home Office building. They were unable to get passports due to Home Office bureaucracy that had lasted for years. They won the speeding-up of their process through that hunger strike. and many of us were there with them.

In 2017 the Glasgow Pride arrests took place with the arrest of three transgender activists, a young queer minor, and a person who had been trying to tell the minor his rights. That saw many courthouse mobilisations. That brought together many angry queer people and got people talking and working together. And good friends of mine, who have been through Living Rent and movements like these...

Queer

The queer community in Glasgow has an anarchistic and direct-action-y bent. I certainly saw myself as an anarchist in 2017 when I came out of the closet. I don't know why the Glasgow scene is so politicised. There is something in the way that trans existence is so policed and forced into marginal existence. Trans people are often homeless, often need to do sex work to get by: that would explain why there is such radical politics here. The guy who shoved himself under the van is part of the queer scene here.

The South Side has become something of a hub for the queer scene. There's a queer bookshop and a queer Yiddish café opening up soon. So Govanhill and Pollokshields is important for that scene.

I don't want to say that it's the queer scene that did it all. Everyone showed up from all works of life, and I'm sure there were many groups of friends who turned up who all have their own stories, but people from the Glasgow queer scene were among the first to arrive. I got there late, of course.

I recognised people from the left and labour movement yesterday but it was all rather low-key. People weren't selling papers or waving banners, but I did see a Unite flag. Paul Sweeney, Labour MSP, has advocated for asylum seekers for a long time. He helped and spoke at public appearances by the Kurdish hunger strikers. I know Paul was supportive.

I saw Matt Kerr, a Labour Councillor, who I think spoke briefly. There was support announced from various MPs and MSPs over the megaphone but I

didn't catch many names. Alison Thewliss, the SNP MP for Glasgow Central, was supportive. Various politicians had been trying to contact the Home Office about this but they were being stonewalled.

The attitude of the SNP? I don't want to sound like a Scottish exceptionalist. I think the SNP is more socially liberal than the Tory party. I won't trust liberals to follow through on their policies. But they are more socially liberal on issues like this. And they're not in control of issues like immigration.

Were Scotland independent I wouldn't be very hopeful about having a particularly liberal Scottish Home Office. But issues like this show the fault lines between the Scottish and UK Governments. These fault lines give activists potential to exploit. You can play on these kinds of contradictions.

Three people were arrested at one point. A car was obstructing the police and some people attempted to stop the car being towed. Those three arrestees have since been released but I don't know if they have been charged.

I want to stress the tradition, the roots that this event had. It didn't come from nowhere and it takes a lot of organising. There are a lot of threads that came together to make yesterday happen: queer activism, housing activism, migrant solidarity activism. That's what I want to emphasise. It's spontaneity but spontaneity with roots. □

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Might-have-been m

By Sean Matgamna

Memories of Cliff Slaughter, who has died at the age of 93:

1: A school of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), Manchester, 1961 or 62. Slaughter is a leading writer of the SLL. He has written a couple of articles on the theory of the revolutionary party, which many people (me included) think very highly of. He has been talking about the iniquities of the Stalinist movement, in which he had spent over a decade of his youth. Someone asks him how he could have failed for so long to see through Stalinism. He explains it as his failure to think through his sometimes critical ideas to the necessary conclusion.

2: A Sunday morning, early in 1963, a meeting of the Manchester SLL branch committee, which includes Slaughter, in the front room of the Povah family home in Salford. A car rolls up – in my memory, it is a red car – and parks outside the house. We can see the street, and the narrow footpath plainly through the front window, and the car attracts our attention.

The car door opens, Gerry Healy steps out, comes across the pavement and seems to loom outside the window. He waddles in, a very short, pudgy-rotund man, with a large bald head, features disproportionately small in the big head.

When we see Healy get out of the car, Cliff Slaughter turns very white. The blood drains out of his face. For a moment, I think he is going to faint.

Healy likes the effect he is producing and the tension. He scowls at everyone and sits down, immediately taking over the meeting.

It is early in the Profumo affair. The press and TV are wallowing in the scandal that a Russian embassy attaché and a British Tory minister had a paid lover in common. Healy says, very quietly, "Whaddaya think, Cliff?" Slaughter hastily says it is very like a scandal in Italy, I can't recall which one. Healy nods his satisfaction to Slaughter.

3: Seven years later, 1970. Slaughter has recently written a 12-episode series of articles analysing a wodge of IS minutes which the SLL have got hold of: *Who are the International Socialists?* (IS, forerunner of the SWP) They have been collected into a sizeable pamphlet.

It is low-grade political hackery, what the Americans call grunt work – not work for a self-respecting political grown-up. Slaughter's name on it gives it some weight.

A couple of instalments deal with the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS, predecessor of Workers' Liberty. A picture show-



ing a Northern Ireland civilian with his hands up being searched at gunpoint by British soldiers has a caption on it that makes IS, the Trotskyist Tendency, and me, by name, responsible for it.

At a public meeting in Teesside, Phil Semp, who had been Slaughter's pupil at Leeds University, demands an explanation for that bit of political excrescence. Oh, Slaughter tells the meeting, he himself wasn't responsible, not at all. No. It was "a cock up in the printshop".

He was never "responsible". He surrendered his political responsibilities and his political soul to Healy and the Banda brothers.

4: It is 1986, a quarter of a century after the Manchester school of 1961-2. Through those 25 years Slaughter has been a supporter and enabler of Gerry Healy in the SLL (now called WRP), an intellectual hack-scribbler, working to order.

The WRP has imploded. Gerry Healy has been exposed as a coercive predator on women comrades. Slaughter has sided against Healy, perhaps for the first time ever. Writing in *Workers' Press*, paper of one of the subgroups produced in the scatterings of the WRP, Slaughter needs to explain his long political and intellectual subservience as a political bag-carrier for Gerry Healy.

His fault, says Slaughter, lay in a failure to think through his critical ideas to the necessary, logical, conclusions....

-2-

There is no shortage of tragedies of varying sorts in the 20th century left and ostensible left. Slaughter's political fate was the tragedy of a politically educated Marxist who was committed to the war for working-class emancipation from wage slavery and capitalism, and tried to work for it, but who in his teens got drawn into the Young Communist League and the Communist Party, in the wake of his father, Fred Slaughter.

Breaking out of that in his late 20s, he let himself get trapped in a vicious little cult. He spent the best years of his life, over 25 years, helping to poison parts of the labour movement and the osten-

sibly Trotskyist movement with lies and the habit of lies, political craziness and the habit of tolerating craziness and smothering unreason.

But the story is not only a story of Cliff Slaughter's personal tragedy. It is also a story of his crimes in backing and boosting Healy. Slaughter was an academic sociologist with a high reputation. He co-authored a famous study of miners, *Coal is Our Lives*. He put that academic reputation at the service of Healy.

Healy surrounded himself with a group of enablers, protectors, heralds and sycophants. Slaughter was one of those. Without them, Healy could not have functioned and survived. Without them he could not have committed his personal-political crimes against his comrades and his political crimes against the working class and the Marxist movement.

The WRP imploded when it did (1985) because the Healy apparatus split. Healy, in his 70s, with his health broken down, could no longer rule by personal force and the terror he had been able to inspire.

The organisation was going bankrupt. The mercenary alliances and the get-rich-quick projects to "build the party" had failed, and failed badly. The organisation had become dependent on money from Libya – Healy got over a million pounds from Gaddafi – and other Arab regimes

Slaughter could not but have known that Libya and other states were financing the WRP. He would have read in its paper the WRP supporting and justifying the killing of Iraqi Communist Party members by the Saddam Hussein regime, with which at that point the WRP was also involved.

On a visit to Libya, Slaughter was repelled by the "anti-imperialist" Islamic mumbo-jumbo of Gaddafi. In an interview available on the [Splits and Fusions website](#) he tells a story about a WRP delegation to Libya:

"To my shame, I was almost silent. The relationship with Saddam was for money, also Gaddafi. I went to a Tripoli conference on Gaddafi's 'Green Book' and took a plane back after a day and a half, unable to stomach any more."

Almost? Disgusted, he left early. And then what did he do?

Give others who were following Healy in his mercenary lunacies about Libya, Iraq and other Middle East powers, the benefit of his own understanding? Start a fight against Healy, Corin and Vanessa Redgrave, and the Banda brothers, inside the organisation? Or, when they expelled him, as they surely would, raise a hue and cry outside the organisation?

He didn't do any of that. Again, Cliff Slaughter was "not responsible". Clare Cowen quotes Slaughter making a good speech in support of the anti-Healy wing when the WRP was breaking-up in 1985. But he waited until the central apparatus split, until the Bandas struck at Healy.

Slaughter said in the same interview that the philosopher Healy "knew nothing about philosophy". Yet Slaughter the prestigious academic for decades buttressed Healy's claim to be a Marxist philosopher, and a great one. He lent his endorsement, tacit or vocal, to Healy's ridiculous "dialectical" rigmaroles. He helped Healy back up his claims to knowledge that Slaughter knew he didn't have, and he recommended Healy's gobbledegook as good Marxism to people who wouldn't know any better.

-3-

Slaughter went to work full time for the SLL in 1965. They made a fuss about it. Slaughter wrote that now was not the time to cling to "soft jobs". He lasted maybe a year. Then he went back to academe, at Bradford University, up the road from Leeds, which he had left to be a serious revolutionary.

Slaughter tried many times in his SLL-

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an: Cliff Slaughter

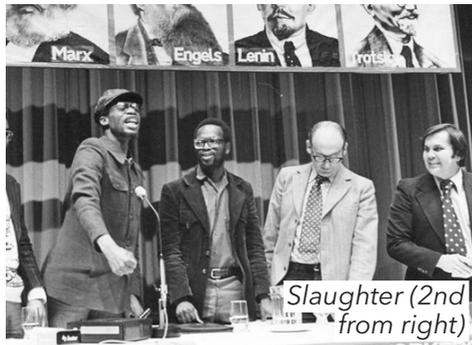
WRP years to run away from the Healy group. Healy always caught up with him and got him to come back. Slaughter was one of a number of national leaders frequently pilloried, insulted, denounced. There was a layer of such people: Cyril Smith, Jack Gale, Bill Hunter, Geoff Pilling, Robin Blick, Bob Shaw, Tom Kemp, Cliff Slaughter...

The Healy organisation was, at its core, a sado-masochistic cult with its own rites and rituals of accusation, denunciation and chastisement, followed by public self-abasement, abject confession, sometimes tearful, and then, submissive reconciliation and last-minute reprieves on earlier threats of expulsion. Everything was a matter of right and wrong, of sinfulness or being in a state of revolutionary virtue. Healy decided which; he had the power to loose and bind, exclude, damn or absolve.

The audience at such things was made complicit in it by approval, support for Healy or ashamed silence. The audience for it was part of the ceremony.

On one level, it was, though gruesome, laughable, like the hammy pseudo-dramas that wrestling matches project – good guys and bad guys, virtue and vice. But it was not laughable to those, especially the young people, caught up in it, believing that the Healyites embodied Marxism and Bolshevism and socialism.

It was not laughable for youngsters who internalised the signals and compulsions towards conformity, learning that it was a revolutionary duty to submit, learning to see “the party” (in fact Gerry Healy) as everything and themselves as nothing. Who internalised the fear of heresy and ideological sinfulness, identifying it with speaking



out of turn; of using their own mind and judgement, of getting something wrong, of thinking for themselves. Learning that “the leadership” is always right: don’t think, don’t question “The Party” and “The Cause” embodied in the leader.

–4–

Slaughter spent over a quarter of a century in that game as target, supporter, and ammunition-boy for Healy, sometimes hammer and sometimes anvil. The man who let that happen to himself, who took part in Healy’s brutal rituals for 25 years, must have had in him a fearsome load of self-doubt, guilt and self-hatred.

Someone, E P Thompson maybe, described Healy’s system as “a machine for maiming militants”. That was to understate it. Slaughter was both its victim and an auxiliary victimiser.

The Healy group sued me in 1981 for publishing this description of their system: “The WRP is no laughing matter. It is a pseudo-Marxist gobbledegook-spouting cross between the Moonies, the Scientologists, and the Jones Cult (which committed mass suicide in the Guyana jungle three years ago). It recruits and exploits mainly raw, inexperienced, politically, socially and psychologically defenceless young people. It employs psychological terror

and physical violence against its own members (and occasionally against others)”.

–5–

Slaughter was in his mid 50s when the WRP collapsed. What did he do afterwards? Politically, very little. He wrote a few texts, amongst them a small book a few years ago entitled *Bonfire of the Certainties*. In that he adapted the title of a novel of the 1990s, derived from an event in Florence in the mid 15th century when, under the influence of a religious lunatic, Girolamo Savonarola, people threw books and things that were important or comforting or satisfying, or precious to them, on a public “bonfire of the vanities”.

In fact, the original title would have fitted Slaughter and his story almost perfectly. Most of what the Healyites did in Slaughter’s day was pointless, worthless, harmful, diversionary, a cul de sac in relation to socialism. The daily paper with its miniscule readership, the maintenance of which ate up the lives of the members of the organisation. The raving polemics empty of real, not to speak of worthwhile, content. The colourful pageants, and the big rallies, mostly of kids persuaded to attend, almost all of whom would go away and soon forget it all. The theorising that sanctified whatever the party leader decided to do. The sacrifice of basic socialist propaganda and education to free-wheeling shallow “party-building” agitation.

For Gerry Healy’s organisation in most of its existence, “all was vanity, vanity”

Watching what they did to the young people they involved, and the way they polluted and poisoned the political world in which we all lived, I grew to have a bitter hatred of the leaders of

the SLL and the WRP, but I could never build up a real head of hostility against Cliff Slaughter. It was a bit like Queen Victoria. I had loathed her as the “Famine Queen”, who had presided over the murder of over a million people in Ireland by avoidable famine and cholera, and as one whose name meant 19th century sexual repressions, small children in factories and child brothels, and all the other “Victorian” horrors, brutalities and moral hypocrisies. Then I read in a review what the 20 year old Victoria wrote, to her prime minister, Lord Melbourne, about her wedding night. It was, she told the prime minister, a foretaste of heaven.

After that I could never feel quite the same about Vicky again, a poor, small, human creature locked inside her royal carapaces.

After watching Cliff Slaughter nearly faint at the apparition of Healy at the window that Sunday morning long ago, I could never feel the same hostility to Slaughter as I did to Healy and others – to poor Cliff Slaughter, locked inside whatever it was that allowed Gerry Healy to keep him imprisoned for a quarter of a century. Rest in peace... comrade. □

“” 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 □

Covid: no time to ease off



By Martin Thomas

Several scientists have warned that the lockdown-easing on 17 May, allowing pubs and cafés to reopen indoors, risks new spikes and should have been postponed. Even the Tories hint that the 21 June date for further and almost total eas-

ing may be put back.

With good cause. The *Economist* magazine has just made the first attempt at a comprehensive count of worldwide excess deaths. Ten million. The official figure of Covid deaths, 3.4 million, undercounts the toll especially in countries with poor recording of deaths.

The weekly world Covid death rate is still almost at its highest ever. Chile and the Seychelles have had new infection spikes despite higher

vaccination rates than Britain.

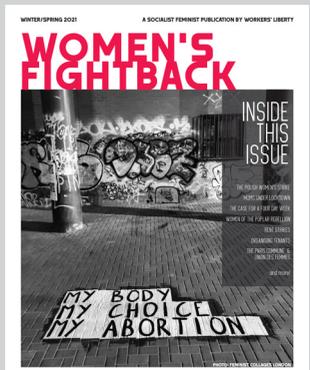
A panel of the WHO has concluded that with better preparation, information, and international coordination very early in 2020, the Covid outbreak could have been blocked from being a full pandemic. We still need covid-distancing and quarantines. To make those effective, and reduce their social costs, the labour movement must fight for social measures:

- No rushed return to workplaces. Reworking of all work-

place safety plans in the light of more-transmissible new variants. Workers’ control. Full isolation pay for all; continued furlough.

- Requisition the assets of Big Pharma, especially the vaccine patents and the know-how to expand new vaccine-production facilities. Vaccinate worldwide!

- Take social care into the public sector, and give care workers NHS-level pay and conditions. □



Women’s Fightback is a socialist feminist publication by Workers’ Liberty. Order issue 25, Spring 2021, for £1 – or cheaper in bulk! □

workersliberty.org/publications

Two occupations end, student protests continue

By Abel Harvie-Clark

The student occupations at Sheffield Hallam and Manchester Universities have ended, due to heavy-handed attempts by university management to criminalise the protests, and a refusal to engage with their demands.

The students leave with their heads held high, however, as their three week long protest has demonstrated how to militantly oppose the marketised higher education system. The fact that universities still remain able to resist these immediate demands does not deter students from promising to continue with radical tactics.

The campaigns that have emerged around fee and rent strikes this year have adopted encouraging wide-ranging politics, pledging solidarity with struggles both on campus and beyond. The hundreds of millions of pounds invested by UK universities in Israel's denial of Palestinians' human rights through weaponry, surveillance and occupation have rightly been called out by the student campaigns that have gained a platform this year. The invest-



ments are indicative of the deeply neoliberal machines that universities have become, but student action and divestment campaigns could change this.

Student campaign group Apartheid Off Campus organised protests on Saturday 15 May with other youth groups such as Global Majority vs UK Gov, connecting the struggle against oppression from Colombia to Palestine. Internationalism is a great strength of this young generation of protestors, which has taken inspiration from the climate and BLM movements to demand

international, anti-racist and anti-capitalist solutions to climate breakdown and national oppressions.

The new Police Bill seeks to attack this spirit of protesting, but universities have already been cracking down on student organising long before the most recent occupation evictions. The Prevent agenda has been thought-policing student campaigns, notably those connecting with Palestinian solidarity.

Charity status

The charity status of student unions has been used, foremostly by the officers of those unions, to limit their political action, negating the right for students to democratically pursue political positions and action. Student unions' abandonment of campaigns this year when in negotiation with management has been a barrier to winning rent strike demands, and points to the need for left-wing students to engage with and take over their union's democratic structures.

Activist groups and energetic campaigns are also necessary, but the dem-

ocratic mandate and accountability of student unions are needed to stand up to bullying managements and mobilise more students.

Campaigns such as Preventing Prevent and Unis Resist Border Controls have been educating and organising on campus to oppose the stifling of dissent and the racist border regime that hinders international students from organising. Continuing big student mobilisations for ongoing demonstrations is important to strengthen campus organising.

In the upcoming weeks, students will be attending Myanmar general strike solidarity action (20-21 May), Kill the Bill protests (29 May), and Uyghur solidarity protests (4 June).

On 22-23 May there will be two youth sessions at the Asia-Europe People's Forum, an open networking session for student campaigners to share their campaigns and make international connections; and a webinar with student campaigners from across Europe and Asia discussing "academic freedom as a democratising factor". □



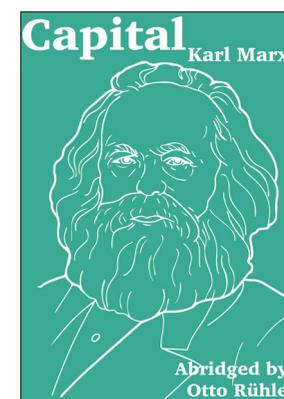
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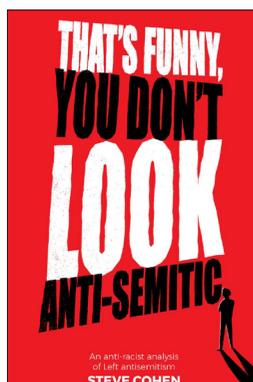
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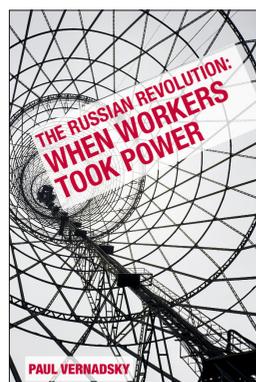
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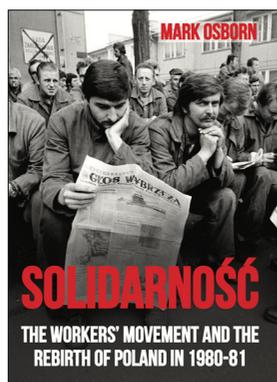
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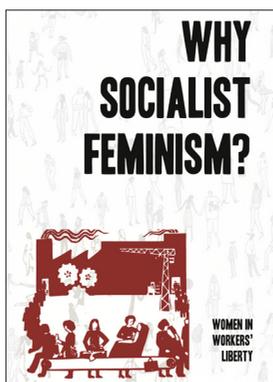
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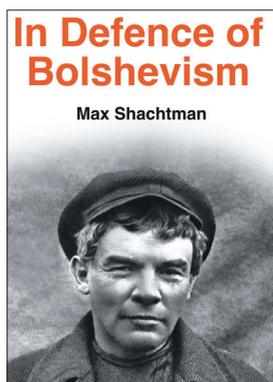
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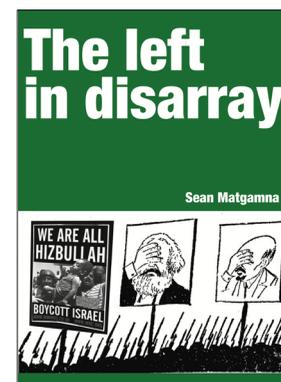
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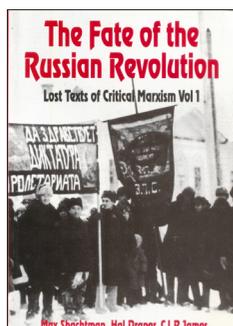
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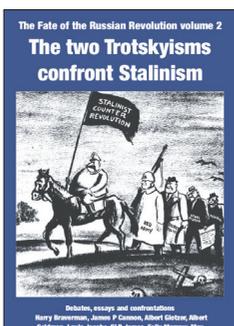
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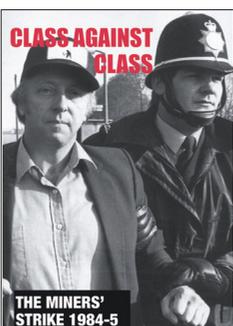
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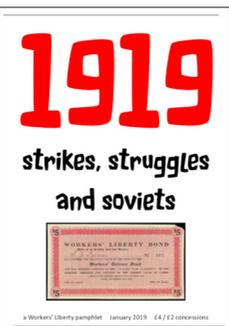
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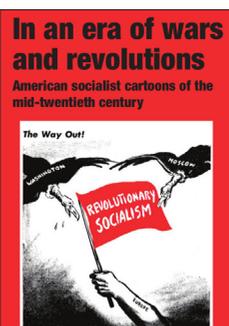
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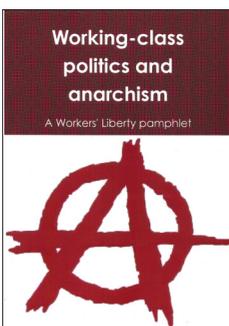
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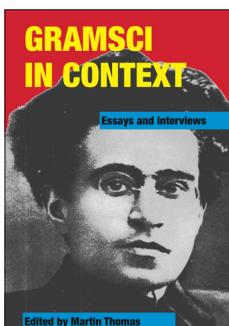
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Marching for Moulsecoomb

By Janine Booth

Hundreds of parents, kids, workers and supporters braved the rain to march from Moulsecoomb primary school to a rally at The Level in Brighton on Saturday 15 May, demanding that the school remain in local authority control.

Despite overwhelming opposition, the Department for Education is persisting in trying to force Moulsecoomb to become an Academy. Under Tory laws building on New Labour's Acade-

mies policy, it does not matter if workers, students, parents, the local council and community all oppose Academy status – as they do in the case of Moulsecoomb – it can still go ahead so long as there is an Academy trust willing to take over. And given the rich financial rewards for doing so, it is not hard to find one who will.

The strength of opposition has already frightened off several interested Trusts, but now the Pioneer Trust has its sights on taking over. The CEO has vis-

ited the school to sniff around, driving his Merc past the local council estate to get there.

This was the second march for Moulsecoomb, and follows three days of strike action in March and April, which featured large and lively picket lines.

Speakers at the rally included trade union reps and parents, and victimised rep Tracy McGuire, who brought a small delegation and banner all the way from Darlington NEU. Local Labour MP

Lloyd Russell-Moyle spoke of his strong support for the campaign, before proceedings were rounded off with a performance from singer-songwriter (and primary school teacher) Robb Johnson.

For updates on the Moulsecoomb campaign, follow [HandsOffMoulsecoomb](https://www.facebook.com/HandsOffMoulsecoomb) on Facebook. Staff at Peacehaven Heights school will strike against academisation on Tuesday 25 May, and supporters will protest at East Sussex Council's County Hall in Lewes after picketing in the morning. □

A strike against bullying

Maintenance workers at housing charity St. Mungo's have been on indefinite strike since 22 April. They are striking against management bullying and the suspension of a union rep. Unite union officer Steve O'Donnell spoke to Solidarity.

The company is refusing to agree to an independent investigation into bullying in the workplace, and our rep remains suspended, so the strike continues.

The management culture in the company is intimidating and overbearing. Workers report being given unrealistic deadlines and unmanageable workloads. One worker, who has breast cancer, missed a chemotherapy appointment because she was so worried about workload and missing deadlines.

The number of workers involved in the dispute, which is concentrated in one department at St. Mungo's, is small, but the union density is very high, which means the strike is totally solid. The bullying culture has been ongoing for years, and for many workers the suspension and threat of disciplinary action against a rep who submitted a formal grievance about the bullying was the final straw.

The workers discussed striking on selected strategic dates, but the consensus was that management would be able to ride out the impact of a few days of strikes, and would just increase pressure on workers to catch up when they came back in. They felt they needed to take the maximum action for the maximum impact, so they decide to launch an indefinite strike. We know it's having an effect, there are significant backlogs of work that management can't clear.

Strategy

There is a strategy in place for escalating and spreading the dispute. Reps are conducting phone banks to speak to union members in other departments in the company to discuss their situation, and whether they'd be prepared to take action over the issues of management bullying and targeting of reps.

We have a large membership in St. Mungo's, and we want to have these conversations with every member individually. One of the managers immediately implicated in the bullying to which the strike is a response also manages workers in another department, so one immediately obvious strategy for escalation is bringing

those workers into the dispute as well.

Currently, 44% of our reps are involved in formal processes of some kind – either disciplinaries, grievances, or capability procedures. We believe this shows there is a clear culture of targetting union reps.

As well as the industrial action, we're also talking to local authorities which commission St. Mungo's' services, including the Greater London Assembly, to ask them to pressure the company. Our demands are extremely clear: an independent investigation into bullying, and the lifting of the suspension and threat of disciplinary action against our rep. If the employer conceded those demands, the strike would end tomorrow. Until those demands are met, the strike will continue.

Workers are holding physical picket lines, details of which are posted on the union branch's website. There is also a strike fund supporters can donate to. Workers are receiving the standard strike pay from the union, but as the strike is indefinite, additional donations are certainly welcome. □

• Strike fund and more: bit.ly/hw-br

Battling biscuit closure

By Dale Street

Members of the GMB Union will be demonstrating outside of the McVitie's factory in Glasgow on Saturday 22 May (from 10am, at Tollcross Park) in protest at an announcement that it is to close.

The factory has a workforce of nearly 500, with union membership split 3:1 between the GMB and Unite. Although the protest was initiated by the GMB, Unite members will also be supporting it.

McVitie's is owned by the Pladis company, which is part of the Turkish investment firm Yildiz Holdings. According to Pladis, it needs to close the plant and shift all production to English plants because of "excess capacity".

But McVitie's and Pladis, which owns a number of other biscuit companies, enjoyed a boom in their business during the lockdown. Working at home, or being

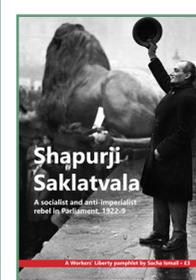
furloughed at home, boosted demand for biscuits

And even before the lockdown Pladis was notching up increased profits. Its most recent accounts (2019) show a revenue of over £2 billion, an operating profit of £154 million, and an increased share of the UK biscuit market.

Throughout the lockdown McVitie's workers were classed as key workers and maintained production, and profits, to meet increased demand. Now the workforce is no longer "key", but supposedly surplus to requirements.

The bulk of the workforce lives in the East End of Glasgow, where the factory is based. The East End already includes areas with some of the highest levels of social deprivation in Scotland.

The 22 May protest should be not a one-off but the start of an ongoing GMB-Unite campaign which also reaches out to local communities to force Pladis to back down. □



A socialist and anti-imperialist

Shapurji Saklatvala was Labour's first BAME MP, and a revolutionary socialist and anti-imperialist. Learn about his life and struggles in this pamphlet, replete with lessons for today. £3. □

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669 What we stand for

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

Capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, blighting of lives by overwork; imperialism, environmental destruction and much else.

The working class must unite to struggle against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, in the workplace and wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses, to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement
- A workers' charter of trade union rights – to organise, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

If you agree with us, take copies of *Solidarity* to sell – and join us! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

“Why not just tell us the info?”



Diary of a tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

“Red means stop. Yellow means slow down and green means proceed. Really it's as simple as that... Now some signals you need to do a certain speed for them to clear and some will almost always clear as you approach them but they might not so you need to be ready to stop. If you are motoring into a red signal, you've got a problem”

“Hit a platform at a certain speed and you'll be fine, you can crawl in for now but once out on the road you'll want to keep to time. Then the routes will just become second nature and you'll get



used to driving in different weather conditions and then you'll be fine”.

I'm growing in confidence but still get frustrated by mistakes. “Don't dwell, you move on, next signal, next station and just apply what you know”. The radio flashes, the line controller is calling, my eyes flash towards the handset. “Bring the train to a stop first. They can

wait, treat us like kids sometimes anyway”.

“Driver 224, hold the train at next station for 3 minutes”. The line clicks as soon as I repeat it back. “Did they say why?” My instructor asks. “No”. I reply and go back to checking my speed as I accelerate away trying to remember what the next station definitely is. “They do this. Why not just tell us the info and keep us informed? We might even be able to help. But there you go, that's what driving is like.

“We'll just keep going without question for now. But once you've been in the job a while don't be afraid to ask questions. Some drivers really give it back to them. You'll find what works for you. Just remember it's a recorded line”. □

• “Jay Dawkey” is a Tube worker, training to be a driver.

Liverpool strikes on uni job cuts

By a UCU activist

Staff at Liverpool University are set to strike for three weeks over a management threat to cut 32 posts in Health and Life Sciences.

The action, organised by the University and College Union (UCU), will run from 24 May to 11 June and fol-

lows an 84% vote for strikes in a ballot last month. It is timed to hit end-of-year exams so as to put maximum pressure on management. Campaigning has already reduced the number of posts under threat from 47.

Meanwhile, staff at Leicester University have begun action short of a strike, also

over job cuts and restructuring that has targeted multiple union activists on the ideological grounds that their research is too critical of management to suit a Business School. 145 staff at Leicester were informed in January that they were at risk of compulsory redundancy, across five academic

departments as well as professional services.

Leicester UCU members have also voted for strikes, but dates have yet to be announced. Academics have been asked to observe a global boycott of the institution. □

A film from the GDR



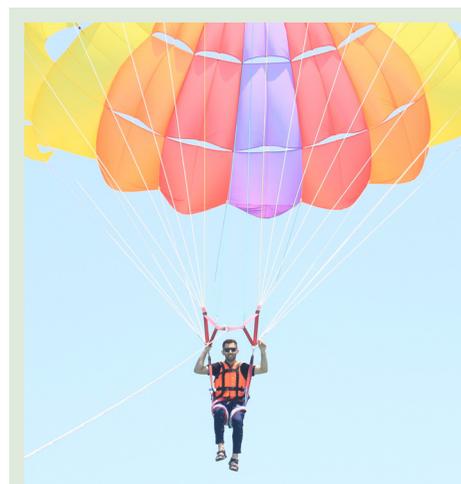
Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Making a – very loose – connection to Bruce Robinson's review of the *Deutschland* series (*Solidarity 592*), and jumping back a few years, the GDR (which acquired the great UFA film studio when Germany was divided) once made some interesting films, even though much of this output now lies neglected and relatively unknown. My selection is a 1957 film, *Berlin: Schoenhauser Corner*, directed by Gerhard Klein. The 'corner' in question is a series of railway arches at Schoenhauser station on the Berlin overhead railway. Here disaffected teenagers, rebels and misfits congregate to look for some relief from the grind, boredom and drabness of life in the Soviet sector of Berlin.



Some of them engage in petty criminality or deal on the black market, while for many the name of the game is just loafing about. Although the film sometimes portrays them as if they are just dying for a member of the Communist Youth League to come along and recruit them, it is generally an intelligent depiction of what was sometimes referred to as “youth disaffection”, which was seen in the GDR as a major problem. *Berlin: Schoenhauser Corner* can be found on Icestorm/network DVD, which has also released other films from the GDR period. □



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A slow week, with only a further £110 towards sponsoring Tim Cooper's parachute jump, but another donation of £500 takes us to a total of £6720.94. Please keep donations coming in towards our target of £20,000 by 11 July: workersliberty.org/donate2021. Or to sponsor Tim: bit.ly/tim-jump □

DVLA bosses back off for now



John Moloney

Bosses at the Swansea Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), where our members have struck twice against a lack of workplace safety, threatened to increase the number of workers on site even further from 17 May. Under the threat of a week-long strike starting the 17th, though, they have backed off.

They have this week to reach a deal with us; if they don't, then we have served notice for another strike for the entire week beginning Monday 24 May. Previously our strikes have only involved those workers who were being made to work from the physical workplace. This time it'll involve everyone, those working at home too.

We've received positive legal advice in our parallel campaign in DVLA concerning its sick trigger point, which is more punitive than other part of Department for Transport and disproportionately impacts women workers. We want to start legal action as soon as possible.

In the Department for Work and Pensions, indicative ballots on workplace action over Covid safety are due back on Monday 24 May. The department has upped the ante by demanding everyone must return to the workplace at least one day per week. We have to resist that kind of compulsion. The return to the workplace must be voluntary and under strict safety conditions, overseen by elected union reps.

The ongoing dangers are shown already by a mass Covid outbreak at a large job centre in the north east. They made it through the last spike without a significant level of infections, but as things are opening up now the virus is spreading again.

PCS has pledged £5,000 to sup-

port the United Voices of the World union (UVW)'s legal costs in their case around the discriminatory impact of outsourcing. I'm pushing for further financial support on top of that. We're also integrating UVW members in Royal Parks, who work as outsourced cleaners, into the PCS as part of dual-card arrangements between our unions. They are facing mass staffing cuts later this year. If the outsourcing company, who are following the orders of the Royal Parks, don't back off from this we'll ballot our new members for strikes and support any action with full strike pay.

I have asked our representative on the London and South East TUC to raise with other unions that should be a joint campaign to get Sadiq Khan to begin insourcing work. The board of Transport for London, for example, is chaired by Mr Khan; he can bring work in-house by just raising a finger. There should be no outsourcing by TfL or any of its subsidiary companies.

Mr Khan and other local Labour politicians say they're pro-union, but they need to back that up with action. They need to implement union policies, and ensure unions have full access to workplaces and the right to organise properly. Unions should also demand as much non-compliance with anti-union legislation as possible.

I want to push this approach with the Scottish and Welsh governments. The Scottish National Party claims to be pro-union, and the Welsh government is Labour-led. We'll be making demands of them: we don't just want a union notice case in the corner of government offices, we want those governments to place themselves and their power on the side of workers and unions. □

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



NHS pay after Scotland

By Alice Hazel

As expected, the majority of NHS Union members and trade unions in Scotland have voted in consultative ballots to accept the 4% pay offer. Members of Unison, Unite, and the smaller profession-based unions such as the RCM and CSP voted to accept. 85% of those voting in Unison, the biggest union, accepted.

GMB and RCN members rejected in line with their leaderships' recommendations. The Scottish government quickly announced it would be implementing the deal with no further negotiation, and it looks unlikely that the rejecting unions will seriously oppose this.

Although not quite meeting the threshold of 50% turnout required for

industrial action under the Trade Union Act 2016, the GMB vote of 82% with a 49% turnout shows that it is possible for a union (in this case, a smaller union in the sector) to get a legal ballot result for strike action. The RCN result, with 68.5% rejecting on a 26.9% turnout, was way below the industrial-action threshold.

The NHS pay campaign in England and Wales still faces a government policy of only 1% pay rise, a wait for the Pay Review Board recommendation some time in June, and then the government verdict on that. The Scottish results show how important it is to examine our strategies, taking into account restrictions on strike action in the law. Workers' Liberty healthworkers have organised a Zoom meeting for 19 May on "Organising to Strike for NHS Pay" to discuss these issues. □

Metroline strike 25-26 May

By Ollie Moore

Bus drivers working for Metroline, one of London's largest bus companies, will strike on 25-26 May and 7-9 June. Metroline employs around 16% of all bus drivers across London.

The workers, who are members of Unite, want the company to scrap plans to impose a "remote sign-on" policy. Currently, workers book on for duty at a bus depot; under the new system, drivers would pick up their bus at a location along its route.

Unite says the scheme has no benefit for passengers, and could lead to disruption and delays. It says the measure is designed to cut costs for Metroline.

Workers scored a victory last month



when London mayor Sadiq Khan ordered a moratorium on the imposition of remote sign-on policies, but Metroline bosses have said they see Khan's moratorium as only a pause, and have refused union demands to ditch the policy altogether. Unite gave Metroline a 10 May deadline to abandon the plan, and called strikes when this was not met. □

Rick Sumner, 1933-2021

By John Cunningham

Sadly, Rick Sumner of the National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign has died. Once a miner at Shuttle Eye Colliery in West Yorkshire, in the aftermath of the 1984-5 strike he, along with his wife, Christine, organised the Justice campaign to help the many miners who were victimised and unable to find work. I met him a few times at various functions such as the Chesterfield May Day Rally and the Durham Miners' Gala, where he was a regular presence with his stall of miners' memorabilia and publications. A few years ago he stood down and the work of the campaign is being continued by others. Hardworking, cheerful, always finding time for a friendly chat, he will be sorely missed. A full tribute to Rick can be found on the National Justice for Mineworkers' Campaign website. □

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know, with Prof. George Davey Smith

»Thursday 8th: film screening and discussion
Dear Comrades!

»Friday 9th: walking tour "Battersea vs the Brit-
ish Empire" □



By Martin Thomas

On Tuesday 18 May there was a Palestinian general strike across Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Since the bombs and rockets started, some Palestinian mobilisation in Israel has been turned to reactionary mirror-images of the Jewish-chauvinist outrages, with attacks on synagogues. But also there, dominant before, and with chances of being dominant in future, is mobilisation for democratic rights, jointly with Jewish protesters.

There have been Jewish-Arab protests against evictions or threats of eviction in the Jerusalem district of Sheikh Jarrah for many years, and with increasing tempo in the weeks before the rockets and bombs.

Sheikh Jarrah is a district of East Jerusalem near the Old City in which many Arab grandees built their houses in the 19th century. Some of those houses are now luxury hotels or the like.

Within the district is an area around the ancient Jewish tomb of Shimon haTzadik. That land was bought by Jewish rabbis in 1876, and they built some houses in it (before Zionist colonisation as such started).

Jerusalem was a Jewish-majority city from the early 20th century. In the 1948 war which established Israel, Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled from many areas won by the Jewish forces. There were smaller areas won by Arab armies where Jews fled or were expelled, including East Jerusalem.

The Jordanian government's "Custodian of Absentee Property" took over the area round the tomb, and housed Palestinian refugees there.

In the 1967 war Israel took East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Israeli government immediately annexed East Jerusalem to Israel, but not the West Bank. The Palestinian population of East Jerusalem were not granted Israeli citizenship, unlike the 20% or so Arab minority in pre-1967 Israel. Their status is "permanent residents", with

access to public services (in fact poorer than in West Jerusalem) and only municipal voting rights. They can apply for Israeli citizenship, but few do, and fewer are accepted.

From the start there were channels for Jews to "reclaim" East Jerusalem properties lost in 1948, yet none for Palestinians to "reclaim" West Jerusalem properties lost then. Israeli authorities were cautious about reclamations.

In 1972 two Jewish religious trusts bought the tomb area. In 1982 they started attempts to evict the Palestinian tenants from the houses. The bemused tenants accepted an out-of-court agreement which recognised the trusts' ownership but "protected" their tenancies.

Formally, the moves for eviction since then have been on grounds of the tenants breaching the agreement, by building additions or such. In 2003, the land was bought by a Jewish-settler organisation, Nahalat Shimon, headquartered in the USA.

Families were evicted in 1999, 2008, and 2009. Some 13 families now face immediate threat of eviction. Court hearings have been postponed.

The background here is a growth of the chauvinist far right in Israeli Jewish society. Avigdor Lieberman, one of the leaders of the anti-Netanyahu opposition in Israeli politics, and by no means the most right-wing of them, has long advocated forcible transfer of Arab-majority of northern Israel to a (hypothetical) Palestinian state and making "loyalty oath" a condition of citizenship for remaining Arabs. Further-right politicians talk crudely of expelling Arabs.

There was quick Jewish settlement (by new-build) in East Jerusalem after 1967, and by the early 1990s East Jerusalem was almost half-Jewish. Since then the Palestinian majority in East Jerusalem has increased, and the Jewish-Arab proportion in Jerusalem is now little different from what it was in the 1920s.

Jewish settlements have been built round the

continued page 2 →



Solidarity

For a workers' government

MYANMAR SOLIDARITY TARGETS BRANDS

By Michael Elms

Following a meeting called by Momentum Internationalists between UK labour movement activists and Myanmar trade union leaders, there will be a series of protests directed at UK brands from this weekend.

Sheffield: Saturday 22 May
11am H&M on Fargate

Newcastle: Friday 21 May,
2pm, H&M on Northumberland
Street

North London: Sunday 23
May, 11am H&M in Wood
Green

Lambeth and Lewisham, both
to be confirmed.

Trade unionists in Myanmar and around the world are demanding that global brands work with their suppliers to safeguard the jobs of workers who are unable to attend work due to the political situation. So far, some brands like H&M, Next, C&A, Primark and Benetton have suspended new orders. But they have not yet taken steps to ensure that wages and severance are being paid.

The military in Myanmar carried out a coup in February and abolished the elected government. Since then, millions of people have taken to the streets to demand an end to dictatorship and democracy for Myanmar. This street move-



ment, calling itself the Civil Disobedience Movement, has been led by trade unions and workers' organisations.

Many workers in Myanmar's garment factories, especially Yangon, have been out on strike. The army and police has met these protests with violence and live bullets. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners said that as of 17 May, 802 people had been killed by the military for participating in the movement, 4,120 detained and 20 sentenced to death.

Many UK clothing brands use garment factories in Myanmar. In April, trade union leader Khaing Zar Aung described the situation for workers in garment factories:

"Many workers are afraid to go back to work, because of the total lack of security in the industrial zones. Thousands of workers have returned to their home villages during the violent crackdown taken place in Hlaing Thar Yar on 14-15 March, when military killed over 100 people in that industrial area.

Many trade union leaders had to go into hiding, because military started searching for them at factory level and at their homes. For many of them it is now difficult to return to work, due to lack of transportation and due to the many military checkpoints on the roads, where people are checked and arbitrarily detained or shot.

"In Hlaing Thar Yar, the military is arbitrarily stopping workers on the streets demanding that they hand their phones to soldiers or under threat of arrest they obliging workers, if they do not have phones, to pay 20,000 MMK. During the 14-15 March crackdown, around 37 Chinese owned factories were burned or damaged. Two more garment factories in Hlaing Thar Yar were burned on April 7, leaving 16 people dead at the hands of the military.

"Also due to these events, many workers are afraid to go back to work, fearing that their factories may also get burned in the future. The military regime cut phone lines and mobile internet, so it is nearly impossible for workers to inform their employers if they cannot return to work. Due to the cut-off of communication, even union members cannot contact their union representatives and inform the employers." □