

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

# GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AGAINST G7



- » Requisition Big Pharma to vaccinate the world
- » Expand green and public service jobs
- » Block the fossil fuel rebound

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A starving polar bear hunts from dwindling ice

# Their G7, our global solidarity

## 6699 Editorial

To the picturesque seaside resort of Carbis Bay, Cornwall, on the weekend of 11-13 June, the leaders of the “G7” group of seven of the world’s richest states flock. Fossil-fuelled reboot to an even more unequal, exploitative, violent and destructive world continues. It’s building back bleaker, as vaccine nationalism and pursuit of private profit permit this pandemic to tear onwards through societies, and to compound the evils of pre-Covid capitalism.

Cornwall is seen as central to the UK’s green tech sector, so the choice of location is an attempt to flaunt green credentials. But a thin one. Homeless people are [losing their beds](#) in Carbis Bay, so that thousands of police, and the politicians they protect, can put on a show.

The G7 – the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the USA, Japan, and Canada – house 10% of the world’s population but 60% of global net wealth. The G7 can trace its roots back to “unofficial” meetings of the leaders of select rich western countries in the 1970s, dealing with the “first oil shock”, among other things. Through a series of metamorphoses the G7 (with invited guest representatives from the EU, India, South Korea, and Australia this time) remains important to calibrating the wheels of global economies premised on greater and yet greater fossil fuel use and environmental destruction.

[New research](#) demonstrates the widening gap between pledges to “build back better” and the reality of a fossil fuelled reboot that *Solidarity* has long [warned of](#).

The report narrows in on the particularly polluting G7 member and participant states. It shows that the majority of new support to “energy-intensive sectors” approved between January 2020 and March 2021 went to fossil-intensive activities: “more than US\$189 billion to support coal, oil and gas, while clean forms of energy received only \$147 billion”.

“G7 nations also missed major opportunities to make their response to Covid-19 greener. More than eight in every ten dollars committed to fossil fuels came with no ‘green strings’ attached: they benefited fossil-fuel intensive activities without requirements for any climate targets or reductions in pollution. Meanwhile only one in every ten dollars committed to the Covid-19 response benefited the ‘cleanest’ energies measures, like renewables or energy efficiency.”

### Building back badly

Seven of the 11 countries’ Covid recovery plans are likely to cause more environmental harm than good, compared with no recovery plan! None of the plans meet their stated climate commitments, let alone what is needed to limit serious climate catastrophe.

Arctic sea ice is thinning nearly twice as fast in key coastal regions than previously calculated, [new research](#) published 4 June argues. Through considerably improved methods and modelling, they believe they are more accurately able to interpret satellite data.

Polar Bears risk drowning or starving as a result. And the ice-thinning has serious knock-on effects for the whole world. The ice, and the snow that can settle upon it, acts as a blanket that slows down the flow of heat between the ocean and the atmosphere: influencing weather patterns around the northern hemisphere. Heatwaves, floods, storms, erosion, and other extreme weather will likely become more frequent and severe.

The disappearance of sea ice also accelerates global warming. White ice and snow reflects most of the sun’s rays, whereas the darker ocean absorbs almost all of them. This increased warming causes more ice to melt in turn, and the vicious cycle goes on.

For capital, however, there are boons. The thinning ice opens up or makes cheaper a northern shipping route from China to Europe, around Siberia. And it opens up wider areas to new oil and gas extraction, and thus yet another climatic vicious cycle, this time

directly mediated by capital.

A rational and democratic global social and economic system would respond by taking bold action to limit, halt, and reverse the global warming behind this ice melting and protecting those most impacted by the destruction and extreme weather it is already causing and is sure to cause in coming years.

But we don’t live in a rational or democratic world. The working class, the great majority now in many societies, survive by selling our ability to work to our bosses and the capitalist ruling class. Of the work we do for them, the work which makes society function, they give us back just enough to live by, to allow us to return and do yet more work for them. They take the rest, and consolidating, and pursue a relentless drive for profit – competing against other capitalists and corporations. Their amassed wealth gives them an immense social power not just over economy but politics. Their governments and states in turn pursue a relentless drive for economic growth, competing against other states in this and to be as attractive as possible to footloose capital.

### Profit is paramount

The environment, workers’ rights and well-being, economic equality and global health, democracy and freedom, peace and pandemic preparedness – all this must be secondary to insatiable imperatives for profit and growth.

Our “age of pandemics”, with an increasing rate of pathogens spilling over from animals to humans fuelled by climate change, environmental destruction, and intensive global animal agriculture. Our vulnerability to such spill-over is heightened by insufficient funding for scientific research, pharmaceutical development, and robust healthcare – in a world where these sectors are primarily driven by short-term profit seeking.

Covid-19 is far from the first recent spill-over, and the necessary lessons were not learned previously. Indeed, they still are resolutely not being learnt. While few deny that this pandemic

must be tackled globally, vaccine nationalism and the right of pharmaceutical corporations and their owners to continue rake in billions of dollars take precedence.

### Capitalist clique

The G7 is an undemocratic elite clique without even the limited and one-dimensional political accountability that elected governments have.

It remains legitimate and at times necessary for working-class and social movements to make demands of “G7”, via demands on governments represented there – waiving vaccine patents, expanding vaccine production and donating to poorer countries, countering corporate tax evasion, and more. If nothing else, we do that to counter their greenwashing, their spin, and their bad policies. We counterpose our own positive vision.

And even the G7 are not immune to pressure – direct or indirect – from the working-class and social movements.

The G7 as such is little more than another forum for the representatives of a some of the richer capitalist states to come together, discuss and make deals, and seize the PR opportunities. The problems are with the system, not with this or that individual, groups of individuals, or institution. A narrow focus on the G7 as if it were a conspiracy secretly blighting an otherwise good system would be to miss the point.

Workers’ Liberty activists and *Solidarity* supporters are participating in the “Resist G7” protests in Carbis Bay and beyond. We raise the need for class struggle, for workplace and labour movement organising, in the fight against climate crises, the pandemic, inequality, and capitalism – and for international socialism.

We must organise – at work, UK-wide, and globally – to win public ownership and democratic control of major industries and finance: for an adequately funded and as rapid as possible transition away from fossil fuels, for an expansion of green jobs and public services, to win social equality globally, to vaccinate the world and take steps to pandemic-proof it going forward. □



# 4 June protests show solidarity

By Ralph Peters

Over 600 protesters gathered outside the Chinese Embassy in London on 4 June to mark the 32nd anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

The commemoration was a far more left-wing and consistent one this year than previously. John Moloney of the civil service union PCS; Vicky Blake, president of the University and College Union (UCU); Pete Radcliff from the Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong campaign; and other socialists spoke.

The message was quite clear: this is not a battle against "China" as a whole, but one against the repression of the Chinese state and in solidarity with workers and oppressed peoples worldwide.

In fighting against the Chinese state, we are not fighting the Chinese people, we are fighting the Chinese ruling class. And fighting the capitalist governments and corporations in the West who support the repression in China and Hong Kong behind (or sometimes in front of) the scenes.

There were a number of other protests to mark the anniversary. They are an indicator of the growing size and militancy of the Hong Kong diaspora and of a growing interconnectedness of the HK diaspora with Uyghurs, Tibetans and those from Myanmar.

In the past 32 years the biggest Tiananmen anniversary protests have been in Hong Kong. The biggest was in 2019, when 1.7 million people attended the vigil and march. Now the Chinese state has jailed people from the Hong Kong Alliance who organised the 2020 vigil

and banned the 2021 one.

7,000 Hong Kong police were sent in to surround Victoria Park, the traditional venue for the vigils. HK Secretary for Security John Lee announced that anyone trying to attend or organise a vigil would face a five-year prison sentence.

Yet the day before, one of the few leaders of the Hong Kong Alliance not already in prison, Chow Hang Tung declared she was going to commemorate the anniversary. She was arrested at dawn. Another democracy protester, Grandma Wong, was also arrested for holding a single-person vigil.

During the day, many followed their example. Students went ahead with a protest at Hong Kong University. Thousands of people, went out into the streets, often singly but joining up with others when it was safe, using the "be water" tactic popularised in 2019.

There were arrests, but most protestors could avoid the police.

Hong Kong is still far from the terrified, uninformed condition that many other Chinese cities have been reduced to for now.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign followed up the 4 June protest with another on 5 June outside the offices of the giant HK-British corporation Swire. They voiced support for workers on strike in Hong Kong at the Swire-run Coca Cola bottling plant there, and for workers in Swire-owned Cathay Pacific Airways, which sacked cabin-crew union leader Rebecca Sy in 2019 for her support for democracy protests. □

- For info on Labour Movement Solidarity With Hong Kong and the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, see [workersliberty.org/agenda](http://workersliberty.org/agenda)

# Hedge funds drive food price rises

By Martin Thomas

World prices for basic food commodities (grains, soybeans, vegetable oils) were up 40% in May 2021 on their level in May 2020, and the trend is accelerating.

The impact on food prices in shops is high at present in Nigeria and West Africa. It has been low in Britain, Europe, the USA, and China. Food prices are now moderating in India, after about 10% inflation in 2020. Shop food prices depend on processing costs as well as world basic-commodity prices, and those may filter through into shop prices only with delay.

Still, the rise in the underlying index is comparable in size to the food-commodity price spike of 2009-2011 which triggered the "Arab Spring". It

comes after some years of falling or moderate prices.

Drought in Brazil, huge soybean buying by China, which is rebuilding its pig population after swine flu, and higher transport costs, are factors. But [Indian economists](#) reckon that speculation is key. According to [Global Justice Now](#), between 1996 and 2014 "the share of the markets for basic foods like wheat held by speculators [banks, hedge funds, pension funds] increased from 12% to 61%".

Speculators buy up stocks if they reckon prices will rise (because of post-pandemic booms and re-stocking?). When enough speculators do that, the reckoning becomes fact. Prices do rise.

Eventually, prices will ease off again. But how do the hungry eat in the meantime? The

United Nations World Food Program [reports](#) on other drivers of food insecurity. 100 million people were in acute food insecurity in 2020 because of wars and conflicts (as in Yemen, for example), according to the WFP.

Economic shocks, often due to the pandemic, were another driver, hitting 40 million people, up from 24 million. For once, weather extremes had less impact year-on-year, hitting 16 million, down from 34 million in 2019.

In Britain, Tory cuts have had the impact (on a milder scale) that high prices, wars, pandemic disruptions, and storms have had elsewhere.

The biggest food-bank operator, the Trussell Trust, reported a [33% rise](#) in distribution in the year April 2020 to March 2021 compared to

2019-20; a level 128% higher than 2015-6.

A basic tenet of socialism, and one entirely practical with

current technology, is to make adequate food freely available to all, not just to the well-off. □



## Upcoming meetings

**Monday 14 June, 7.30-9pm**, Trumpism, Where does it come from?

**Sunday 20 June**: Environmental study group – details tbc

**Sunday 27 June, 12.00-1.30pm**: Socialist Feminist Reading Group – *Transgender Marxism* by Jules J. Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke

**Friday 9 July, 6-8pm**: Battersea vs the British Empire walking tour

### Plus

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

**Mondays, 6-7pm**: AWL Students' discussions

For **our calendars** of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings – open to all! – and resources, see [workersliberty.org/events](http://workersliberty.org/events) □

# Don't even investigate, says Morning Star



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

As matters stand the balance of scientific opinion is that the Covid-19 pandemic probably started by a virus jumping from an animal host to humans in the Wuhan wet market or elsewhere. But we don't know and may never know.

The Biden administration in the USA is launching an investigation, which includes considering the idea that the virus leaked from a lab. Of course the Biden administration will have political motives in including that idea, just as the Chinese authorities had their motives for promoting the theory that the virus came from outside China.

But it is not pursuing Donald Trump's crazed conspiracy theory that China re-

leased the virus deliberately, and it has freely admitted that two US intelligence agencies lean towards the theory that the virus jumped from an animal species to humans, while only one "leans more toward" the lab theory.

This is hardly evidence to back up the claim by the *Morning Star* that this is all a conspiracy to "pretend that Covid-19 was a dastardly plot which reflects badly only on the country it struck first."

The theory that the novel coronavirus originated in a lab (there are two near the first reported outbreaks: the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention) was at first tainted by association with Trump's agitation. But recently credible evidence has emerged, first reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, that three unnamed staff at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) were hospitalised in November 2019 with symptoms that *might* have been coronavirus. Worthy of investigation, at least.

The *Morning Star* does not agree: for them the matter is settled and any suggestion of a "lab leak" can only be a continuation of Trump's anti-China campaign. An editorial (1 June) declares: "Scientists who were on [the] World Health Organisation mission like British zoologist Peter Daszak and Australian microbiologist Dominic Dwyer are in no doubt that the return of the 'lab leak' theory is political... there is no more evidence to support a lab leak than in February when the WHO team deemed it 'extremely unlikely'."

Leaving aside the fact that "extremely unlikely" is not quite the same as "impossible", it is worth noting that the WHO mission to Wuhan was restricted to investigating the potential animal origins of coronavirus and did not include an audit of either Wuhan laboratory. WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the investigation was "not extensive enough" and made it clear that the authorities

did not provide all the information the WHO had hoped for, including full epidemiological data on 174 early cases. Another senior WHO official, Larry Gostin, went further, saying "it was more like a Disneyland tour."

It is also worth noting that the zoologist Peter Daszak, whose opinion the *Morning Star* sets such store by, is also president of the EcoHealth Alliance, a US-based organisation that has worked with, and funds, the WIV. Daszak has worked closely with the WIV's leading researcher Shi Zhengli (the so-called "Bat Lady"), leading to what would appear to be a major conflict of interest.

It would seem that not only is the *Morning Star* acting as a crude propaganda mouthpiece for the Chinese ruling class. It is now opposed to scientific investigation into the origins of the pandemic that has killed millions of people and infected hundreds of millions. □



## Against Covid: requisition Big Pharma!



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

The G7 meeting on 11-13 June will probably come up with *some* promise to speed vaccinations worldwide. It will surely fall short of the comprehensive public requisitioning of Big Pharma, and emergency world job plan with priority to old or frail people and to health and care workers, that we need.

Pfizer expects \$26 billion in revenues from its Covid vaccine this year. For Big Pharma bosses, holding on to their patents and profits comes before saving lives.

The quick spread of the Delta virus-variant in Britain, and the Covid spike in Taiwan, which thanks to its strict island-border quarantine, had had only 12 Covid

deaths up to 14 May 2021, show us that the pandemic will not fade until it fades *worldwide*. World Covid death rates have dipped down again since the curve turned in India, but are still about 50% higher than they were at the first peak in April 2020.

An optimistic [calculation](#) by International Monetary Fund people reckons another year at quickest to get the necessary vaccination done. It may be possible to keep new "surges" in that year at low levels, but only with effort.

In Britain, identified Covid infections are up 61% week-on-week on the latest figures as *Solidarity* goes to press. They have been rising since early May.

Numbers in hospital with Covid have started to rise again too – though much less steeply, thanks to vaccinations. Even death rates are edging up again. Drop-

ping Covid rules on 21 June would be foolish. But there is more to it.

To keep those rules to the minimum, to make them effective against the virus, and to limit their social costs, the labour movement must fight for:

- Full isolation pay for all
- Ample re-funding of the NHS, integration of private health-care facilities into a single publicly-owned service, a 15% pay rise for NHS workers
- Taking social care into the public sector and giving its staff NHS-level pay and conditions
- Publicly-provided quarantine accommodation at borders and for people otherwise "self-isolating" in crowded housing
- Workers' control of workplace safety, with special attention to ventilation and increased risk from more transmissible variants. □

## Tony Blair's new manifesto

By Sarah Morgan

I have just got round to reading Blair's latest piece of [writing](#) in the *New Statesman*, partly because I really didn't want to read any more of what he had to say. However, in the spirit of an open mind I read through the three pages of Blair philosophy.

I can't say I found anything in it to bring joy or hope to my heart. He seems determined to trash all the ground that the left has built up and is completely unwilling to see older left-wing philosophy as something to be cherished and fought for.

He rightly speaks of free education in quotation marks, as everything ultimately needs to be paid for, but he is utterly wrong in saying that the old model would adversely affect social mobility. In fact, I would argue that the philosophy that he has lumbered us with is in itself regressive and a barrier to social mobility and a strong, flourishing economy.

If we all pay into higher education, we can all reap its fruits to whichever degree they are given to us. Imagine if Oxford's vaccine effort had British tax-payers' money going directly into it in advance. It would not just be a prestige project for a privileged Uni spun out in an emergency fashion, but a breakthrough sponsored by and for the benefit of us all that wouldn't require special funding.

He does not even have the courage to take on the left's argu-

ments, he merely dismisses them as an irrelevance. They are not an irrelevance, Corbyn has shown that they are as relevant now to all sections of British society as they have ever been. Perhaps it is true that Corbyn couldn't bring the party together, and sure he made mistakes, but at least he put up a good fight for things the left used to believe in.

### Rail

Nationalising a rail network is as relevant to the future as the technological revolution, partly because of it. In a shifting world where you can be put out of work by a new computer, why not have a bigger stake in the running of the train service or educational institution through tax and transparent public ownership?

Privatisation, which he has also championed, has not brought the sparkling future that he promised. It has brought division and inequality and some stagnant social mobility. People are being forgotten. Where is that on his agenda?

On reading *The Third Way* I was angered at the tender age of 17 about Labour's new vision for women. This time I have a more considered reaction. But the gut feeling is the same. The right of Labour needs to listen to the left and not just side-line them as an awkward irrelevance, just because they have a difficult corner to fight. Those arguments have a history of successes he conveniently forgets. □

# The strange case of Malcolm Bidali



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Last summer, the international trade union movement was celebrating the news from Qatar. The country which is slated to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup had come under enormous pressure to respect the rights of workers, especially migrant workers, who were getting the country ready for such a high profile event.

The headline on the website of the Brussels-based International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) could not have been more gushing: "A new dawn for migrant workers in Qatar". The article went on to say that "new laws adopted today by the State of Qatar are a game changer in the protection of workers' rights." And just to be clear: the focus was on the rights of *migrant* workers.

The ITUC's general secretary was quoted as saying that "these changes are a break with the past and offer a future for migrant workers in Qatar underpinned by laws which respect workers, along with grievance and remedy systems."

But events in recent weeks in the Gulf state have raised questions about how much has really changed.

On 4 May, Qatari security services arrested a 28-year-old Kenyan man employed as a security guard by GSS. His name is Malcolm Bidali and at first no one would confirm that he was being

held and under what charge. Bidali has become known in recent months as an outspoken proponent of migrant workers' rights in Qatar, writing regularly – under a pseudonym – for various blogs, but also speaking publicly at events.

A few days after his disappearance, a number of global civil society organisations stepped forward demanding to know his whereabouts. These included Migrant-Rights.org, FairSquare, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. No unions were in the group sending that message. The Qatari government was forced to confirm that Bidali was being held on the charge of violating Qatar's security laws and regulations.

Several days later, on 21 May, one of the global union federations – UNI Global Union – which represents security guards, announced that it had sent a letter to the Qatari government. UNI demanded Bidali's immediate and unconditional release. "We believe that Mr. Bidali is imprisoned for his documentation of inhumane housing and working conditions, such as crowding ten people into a room, gruelling schedules, and cuts to income," wrote Christy Hoffman, UNI's General Secretary.

Finally, a few days ago, word got out that Bidali had been released. But the threat of imprisonment still hangs over him. According to the Qatari government, Bidali was "formally charged with offences related to payments received by a foreign agent for the creation and

distribution of disinformation within the State of Qatar."

As in similar cases in other countries, the message being sent by the Qatari government could not be clearer: the arrest of Malcolm Bidali, who spent nearly a month in solitary confinement, was designed to strike fear into the hearts of other migrant workers in Qatar.

It's great that organisations like Amnesty International put pressure on the Qatari regime to release Bidali. But – with the notable exception of UNI – where were the unions?

The last reference to Qatar on the website of the ITUC is from August last year, hailing the "new dawn for migrant workers" in the country.

Migrant workers are workers, and they have the same rights as all workers – including the right to speak out about their working conditions and their lack of rights. Even if they are not formally members of a registered trade union, they deserve the support of trade unionists everywhere.

The ITUC, as well as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have been involved in a years-long dialogue with the Qatari regime. Having invested so much in that dialogue, perhaps they hesitated to speak out publicly on behalf of Malcolm Bidali.

Whatever their reasons, at a time when groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty came to defence of this brave young workers' rights defender, the main institutions of the global labour movement were nowhere to be seen. □



## Activist Agenda

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 rise of the more transmissible Delta variant of the virus, plus increased pressure from many bosses for returns to workplaces, make this more urgent. Safe and Equal is also working to hold the government and contractors to their promises that Test Centre workers will get isolation pay. □

• Links and info for Safe and Equal and other campaigns, and wording for labour movement motions on many issues, at [workersliberty.org/agenda](http://workersliberty.org/agenda)

## Osime Brown: stop the deportation!

Saturday, 12 June: assemble noon at the Home Office 2 Marsham St London SW1P 4DF, march to Parliament Square. Campaigners have already stopped Osime Brown, an autistic young man jailed under the Joint Enterprise law, from being deported to Jamaica (where he has no support or connections), immediately on release from jail. Now they aim to block the deportation altogether at the Judicial Review. [bit.ly/ob-12j](http://bit.ly/ob-12j) □

# Sport: don't trust the "ethics committees"



## Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar



Rogério Caboclo

cueled" her. However, Caboclo called her back in again, and this time she recorded the exchange.

In the recording the football boss talks about his sex life before quizzing her about her sexual relationships. When he asks: "Do you masturbate?" the employee says she doesn't want to talk about the topic and leaves the room...

This is the latest sexual misconduct case to hit football in the Americas. A number of high ranking women football-

ers in Argentina have made allegations to Fifa of bullying and sexual harassment against a youth-team coach working for the country's Football Association. The independent Fifa ethics committee has announced it is looking into the allegation.

The players, many of whom were teenagers when the alleged incidents took place, have accused the coach of threatening them with sexual violence following poor performances; of asking inappropriate questions about players' sexual preferences and habits while one-on-one; of using sexist and homophobic language, including description of women's football in the country as "puterio"; saying homosexuality is holding back women's football; and claiming that players need to be "feminine" rather than just

talented. Last November Fifa banned Yves Jean-Bart, the president of the Haiti Football Federation, finding him guilty of having abused his position and sexually harassed and abused female players, including minors.

Sexual harassment and abuse occur in women's, men's and mixed sports, and at all levels, with research indicating an increased risk at the elite level. Sports where there is early specialisation, especially sports where intensive talent identification happens around

puberty, present particular dangers as young athletes' success is dependent on their coaches and peers.

Fifa is a self-serving and corrupt organisation which has been forced into suspensions, investigations and bans because of brave victims speaking out. As well as calls for justice for victims of sexual abuse, there are increasingly demands for measures to protect players and junior staff.

Future action cannot be trusted to their "ethics committees". □

## Second hand books!

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit [bit.ly/2h-books](http://bit.ly/2h-books) for the current stock and prices, and to order.



# Scotland and the “second referendum”

By Dale Street

The SNP victory – or SNP-Green victory – in the Holyrood election of 6 May 2021 was a mandate for a second referendum on Scottish independence.

The fact that the SNP did not get an absolute majority of seats or an absolute majority of the popular vote is irrelevant.

The Holyrood voting system is designed to stop one party gaining an absolute majority of seats (and the SNP fell only one seat short of that). And no-one ever argued that the 1945 Labour government had no mandate because it failed to win 50% of the popular vote.

The elections held on 6 May also strengthened Sturgeon’s position in three other respects:

- Alex Salmond’s Alba Party tanked. This relieved Sturgeon of the pressure of the pro-independence “hardliners” who want a second referendum tomorrow.

- The Tories beat Labour to remain the official Opposition in Holyrood. Hampered by the dead weight of Boris Johnson – so unpopular in Scotland that the Tories kept him out of their campaign – the Tories are the SNP’s desired opponents.

- On 6 May England again voted Tory. Or, given Labour’s losses, that is certainly the popular perception cultivated by the SNP, ever anxious to stress how “different” Scotland is from England.

## Covid-19

In the short to medium term Sturgeon will not push for a second referendum. Her immediate focus will remain that of post-pandemic recovery. It would be a tactical mistake of the first order to do otherwise. And Sturgeon is not stupid.

But at some point in time the SNP will introduce legislation in Holyrood for a second referendum. The Tories, Labour and the Lib Dems will all oppose this, arguing that it is not the right time and a diversion from more pressing priorities. Then they will lose the vote.

The SNP will demand a Section 30 Order from Westminster, authorising a second referendum. The Tories will refuse. The SNP fight this through the courts, and lose.

You don’t need to be a High Court judge to understand the meaning of “reserved powers”. And calling a referendum is a reserved power.

What the SNP will do then – apart from, as usual, complain a lot, albeit with a lot more justification than usual – is unclear. It is probably unclear to the SNP itself. If the SNP has a game plan for what to do then, they are certainly keeping their cards close to their chest.

The SNP will not stage a Catalonia-style illegal referendum and issue a Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Or there would need to be an



astonishing about-turn for it to do so.

Although around a third of SNP voters voted “Leave” in 2016, the SNP is committed to independence in the EU. But the EU, and especially member-states such as Spain and Italy, will not recognise a constitutionally illegal referendum and breakaway declaration of independence.

## Brexit

The more thoughtful sections of the pro-independence camp have also taken on board another aspect of the impact of Brexit: An independent-Scotland-in-the-EU and an England-not-in-the-EU would mean a hard border. And that would not be good.

Writing in the *Sunday Herald*, Iain Macwhirter now advocates “independence in UK”, an expression first coined by the late Labour First Minister Donald Dewar, which Macwhirter variously defines as “asymmetrical federalism” and “full fiscal autonomy”.

But this is really going round in circles. As Macwhirter himself writes, “independence in the UK” is pretty much what was proposed in the SNP’s “Independence White Paper” of 2013. The independence on offer in the 2014 referendum was a very modest form of independence.

The SNP are therefore confronted by two problems. What to do when the Tories say “No” to a second referendum? And what do they – or anyone else – actually mean by independence?

Insofar as the Scottish Labour left has developed – or is in the process of developing – an alternative position, it is the recently launched “Third Option Campaign” (TOC).

As the name indicates, TOC advocates a third option on the ballot paper in a second referendum. This has the backing of the Scottish TUC. Labour, argues TOC, should propose an amendment to this effect when a second referendum is debated at Holyrood.

But what that third option should be is unclear. And its rationale is rooted in a rampant *Morning Star* EU-phobia.

According to TOC, Scotland in Britain is subject to the dictates of EU neo-liberalism (in the form of the Tories’ Single Market Act). And an independent Scot-

land in the EU would be directly subject to EU neo-liberalism.

The “real issue” is therefore not (nominal) state independence but “real” sovereign power, unshackled by EU neo-liberalism.

Like the proverbial Japanese soldier lost in the jungle, TOC hasn’t noticed that the UK really has left the EU (save that whereas the Japanese soldier is still fighting the US, TOC is still at war with Germany).

## Scottish Labour

Scottish Labour’s own policy is a mixture of prevarication, more devolution/federalism, and right-wing Unionism. According to the section “Our Approach to Democratic Renewal”, tucked away in the “National Recovery Plan” (but not part of the Plan itself) on which it fought the Holyrood election:

- Labour has “taken the initiative to establish a Constitutional Commission and we support a renegotiation of the Fiscal Framework.”

- Labour “supports further devolution of powers to Holyrood”, including employment law and borrowing powers, “an immigration system which works for all the nations of the UK”, and the creation of UK Councils of Ministers and of Parliaments and Assemblies “as a step towards a much more federal approach in the UK”.

- Labour is against a referendum in the next five years. And, although not included in “Our Approach to Democratic Renewal”, Labour is also opposed to Holyrood having the right to call a

referendum without Westminster approval.

Under the autocratic control of Anas Sarwar, for whom the party is merely a vehicle for his own ego, Scottish Labour could easily degenerate into the Scottish equivalent of the old Northern Irish Labour Party: a rump Unionist party with an ever-dwindling core vote.

Most of the non-Labour Scottish left backs independence, hailing it as a blow against British imperialism (although in fact Scotland has historically been an integral part of the imperial centre of British imperialism) and a chance to implement radical socialist policies (despite minimal support for candidates who contest elections on the basis of those policies).

Large sections of the broad English left are soft on Sturgeon – yes, she is better than Starmer, but that is not the decisive criterion – and substantial sections of it also share the illusions about the “socialist potential” of an independent Scotland.

Apart from basic questions of principle, this position is also pragmatically problematic. Six Scottish Westminster constituencies are Tory-held. 53 are non-Tory-held. Removing all of them from the UK would massively add to the obstacles to the election of a Westminster Labour government.

Socialists should advocate a democratic federal republic in Britain within a democratic federal Europe. But this general stance immediately raises a number of questions:

- Like independence, or “independence in the UK”, devo max, a “much more federal approach”, or “real” sovereign power, just what exactly does this mean? Which powers would lie where?

- How would, or could, a federal Britain function when one of its constituent elements (i.e. England) dwarfs the other parts?

- How could a federal Britain not cut across working-class unity? The experience of devolution, exemplified by the current NHS pay dispute (involving different employers in the different nations), is that it has been at the expense of united class struggle. □

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# An easy excuse for anti-leftist clampdowns in Russia

From Loretta Marie Perera in Moscow

"This whole story feels as if suddenly, a truck drove into you on the street," said Svetlana Gordienko, a resident of Russia's far-eastern Khabarovsk. "Except imagine if it turned out that having a truck driven into you was something totally normal, and legal."

The situation Svetlana is now in began in May 2021, when a squad of 11 officials swarmed her apartment, where she lives with her partner Maksim Smolnikov, and her two children. "They had already started to break down the door, but I managed to open it," Svetlana recalled. "The riot policemen burst into the house and pushed Max up against the wall."

The group – a combination which included police, riot squad, and FSB security service officers – had come for Maksim. A popular local street artist who goes by the name of Xadad, Maksim has been charged with a charge of justifying terrorism, punishable with a fine of up to 1,000,000 rubles (almost £10,000) or imprisonment of 5 to 7 years. He is now in a pre-trial detention centre where he will remain until July 10.

His crime was a message he had written about 17-year-old Mikhail Zhlobitsky on social networking site VKontakte. Zhlobitsky, a student and anarchist, set off a bomb in an FSB building in Arkhangelsk in 2018. The explosion, declared an act of terror, resulted in the youth's own death while injuring three officers. In his post, Maksim pointed to state repression as the motivation for the suicide, and expressed sympathy for the deceased youth's family and



Featuring his iconic cloaked figures, the art of Xadad often highlights issues such as repression, persecution, freedom, and self-organisation.

friends.

Nothing was said of Maksim's post from 2018 until much later, and in February this year, officers visited Maksim at work with orders to begin interrogation into the Zhlobitsky case. At the time, no more came of the matter.

"But since then, Max seemed to be waiting for all this to develop, waiting for the next summons for interrogation, and wondering what was happening – but there was definitely no arrest, pre-trial detention or charges of justifying terrorism," Svetlana said.

Herself identifying as a leftist-socialist, Svetlana believes that while Maxim became the target of his "terrorist" views in support of the 2018 explosion, the real reason lies in his personal and political views – leftist and anarchist – and his support for liberation and self-organisation.

"He is very interested in the concepts of freedom, justice, violence is abhorrent to him. Politically, of course, he is more of a leftist, with anarchist views," said Svetlana. "In anarchism, the most beloved idea is self-organisation, and independent thinking in general."

With a crackdown on anarchism and leftism seen in Russia through recent years, and in particular after the bombing, Russian watchdog OVD Info has recorded more than 20 criminal investigations launched for purported "justification of terrorism" – all linked to the 2018 Arkhangelsk explosion.

"Perhaps they want to prohibit people from calling themselves anarchists," Svetlana said.

"I think that the explosion in Arkhangelsk was a fatal event that untied the hands of the authorities to pursue those whom

they wanted to pursue."

## A Bigger Problem

Anastasia, a resident of Khabarovsk who enjoys exploring the city discovering all Maksim's artwork, was shocked when she read the news on Facebook.

"I think it was an act of intimidation," she said. "The case – in my opinion – was Maksim's participation in last year's rallies related to the arrest of the Governor Sergei Furgal," she said, referring to the arrest of popular politician Furgal who was arrested on murder charges which he denies. "Some other activists present have also been arrested since then; I guess they are all links of the same chain," she added.

In times both current and past, terrorism, or the justification of, remains an arbitrary crime and a powerful word widely dealt out for any number of charges.

Evgenia Shamina, an activist with recently formed leftist collective Только сами (Tolko Sami or Only Yourself) explained the persecution that left-leaning activists face in Russia.

"The basic principles of our collective are: the absence of any hierarchy, feminism, veganism and animal protection, equality and mutual assistance," she said. "We opened on March 7, and since then, the police have already visited us twice – both at events dedicated to political prisoners."

Her own involvement began with providing legal assistance to political prisoners in 2018. "There is an incredibly huge number of political prisoners in Russia," she said. "I have no legal education," she said. "But one day my friend disappeared, and then he was found. He was taken by police from a bus stop and later charged with justifying terrorism – an incident similar to what happened with the artist Maksim Smolnikov."

And through her own observation

and political research, Evgenia has come to learn the persecution does not stop after time has been done.

"Even after prison," she said, "the problems of anarchists do not end."

## Spreading the Word

Having set up fundraising efforts and awareness groups for Maksim, Svetlana now awaits news on the verdict which will be delivered in July.

"I feel kind of strange. I am scared, indignant, and ashamed at the same time," she said, "It is scary because there is no understanding of how to behave in this situation – what defence strategy to choose, or what future lies ahead."

For now, she hopes to continue to spread the word as she waits for more news.

"I hope they will not delay the investigation and this will really end," said Svetlana, who has since set up groups of support for her partner online and in person. "But, there have been no acquittals in such cases yet. These are Russian realities."

Anastasia tries to stay hopeful, but remains unoptimistic. "Guilty, but with a suspended sentence – it's the only possible happy ending for this case," she said. "It's so damn unfair, and I hope my predictions are wrong."

Whatever the result of the case, an uneasy, underlying truth is impossible to ignore: as rarely as these cases make international headlines, anti-leftist clampdowns continue to rage rampant throughout the country.

"It's absolutely common for Russia," Anastasia said. "Publicity, naming and shaming are the only peaceful weapons we have for now. We need to spread the word, we need to tell the world about the situation, again and again. Like the saying goes, 'drops of water can pierce rocks.'" □



"It seems to me that such excessive detention is due to the fact we were on vacation all April, travelling around central Russia – our hungry investigators were scared Max would move" – Svetlana, Instagram

# The first time planes bom

By Sacha Ismail

Second of a series of articles on the Tulsa Massacre of June 1921

"The night of the massacre, I was awakened by my family. My parents and five siblings were there. I was told we had to leave and that was it.

"I will never forget the violence of the white mob when we left our home. I still see black men being shot, black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams. I have lived through the massacre every day."

That was Viola Fletcher, 107, the oldest survivor of the May-June 1921 massacre of African Americans by whites in Tulsa, Oklahoma, speaking to the US Congress last month.

Tulsa 1921 was the among the worst violent outrages against black people (and other minorities) in the US's bloody post-slavery history. Though particularly horrifying, it was not an isolated incident, either in the sweep of American history or in the post-First World War period. As explained in the [Solidarity 595](#) article setting out the background to the massacre, post-war US politics and society were polarised, with the rise of both radical and violently reactionary forces. Racism was at the cutting edge of both state repression and right-wing popular movements.

We will return to these wider struggles in a third article. This one will look at the Tulsa massacre itself.

## The non-events which sparked the massacre

The events which led to the dizzying violence of the Tulsa massacre were, in themselves, shockingly minor.

On 30 May 1921 a 19-year-old black man, Dick Rowland, entered the lift of Tulsa's city-centre Drexel Building, to go and use the "coloured" toilet on the top floor (this was the South at the high point of racial segregation). Rowland worked as a shoe-shiner nearby, and his employer had arranged for black workers to be able to use the Drexel Building toilet. The lift operator was a 17-year-old white woman, Sarah Page.

There has been much speculation about Rowland and Page's previous relationship and what happened in the lift. She is reported to have cried out. The consensus is that he tripped and stepped on her toe or grabbed her arm as he fell. A white worker heard Page's shout and saw Rowland rushing from the building. Assuming – with Page's encouragement or not is not unclear – that she'd been sexually assaulted, he called the authorities.



Greenwood ablaze

It seems Page told the police that nothing very serious had happened and she did not want to press charges. They initiated a low-key investigation. However, knowing that the very suggestion of having assaulted a white woman put him at risk of violence, Rowland took refuge at his adopted mother's house in the black neighbourhood of Greenwood.

The next morning (31 May) he was arrested by two police officers, but things remained low-key; one of the arresting officers was black, one of two black policemen in Tulsa. After an anonymous call to the city's police commissioner threatening Rowland's life, he was moved to a more secure jail at the county courthouse.

There is a strange subplot, which is that Rowland's court-appointed defence lawyer was Wash Hudson, a leading state Democratic politician and active white supremacist who not much later would found and lead the Tulsa branch of Ku Klux Klan. Was someone's intention to ensure Rowland's conviction if a trial had gone ahead?

In fact the case against him was dropped later that year, after Page wrote categorically that she did not want to press any charges. By then, however, hundreds of Tulsans had been murdered and Greenwood lay in ruins.

Immediately after Rowland's arrest, sections of the press launched a racist agitation about the supposed case. The *Tulsa Tribune*, owned and edited by Richard Lloyd Jones, a virulent racist and KKK-sympathiser who in his old age would aggressively support McCarthyism, broke the "story" with a headline "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator". His paper had previously called Tulsa's black community "N---town" and "a veritable human cesspool that needed to be cleaned up". Now Jones published a fire-starting editorial about Rowland and Page, apparently under the headline "To Lynch

Negro Tonight?" (the editorial does not survive, having been removed from all surviving copies of the paper).

Tulsa's chief detective at the time commented: "If the facts in the story as told the police had only been printed I do not think there would have been any riot whatsoever." Recent historian of the massacre Tim Madigan argued that "it was Jones and his editorial – Jones more than any other single person – whose actions precipitated" what unfolded.

The afternoon edition of the *Tribune* was out at 3pm. By sunset at 7.30pm on 31 May, several hundred white people had assembled outside the courthouse to demand Rowland was handed over to them for a lynching. The Tulsa sheriff refused; numbers outside the courthouse continued to grow.

## Black self-defence

In Greenwood, members of Tulsa's black community gathered to discuss the situation. There was agreement on taking action to prevent the lynching of Dick Rowland, but disagreement about tactics. As elsewhere in America in that period, many young black First World War veterans advocated armed action to stop the racists. At the same time, Greenwood was an extremely prosperous place, famous throughout the US as the "black Wall Street". Many of its leading figures were much more negative or nervous about confrontation and urged caution.

Such arguments were made by O W Gurley, a wealthy landowner and businessman who owned the hotel where the discussion took place. Gurley, until these events worth about \$3 million in today's money, had been made a sheriff's deputy, to protect or police the people of Greenwood, depending on how you looked at it. His role would do them no good in what was about to take place.

On the other hand, the town had a strong tradition of black self-defence

and self-assertion. Andrew J Smitherman, editor of leading Greenwood newspaper the *Tulsa Star*, was famous not only for denouncing racism and injustice in print but for personally leading actions to stop racist attacks and lynchings elsewhere in the state. The *Star's* philosophy was summed up by an early front page headline: "You Push Me And I'll Push You!"

Sixty armed black men went to the courthouse to defend Rowland from the white mob. It is widely stated that, for whatever reason, the sheriff had asked them to come, though he later denied this.

By this point more than 1,000 white racists were outside, and more and more were getting armed. Hundreds tried to invade a National Guard armoury to seize the weapons there, though this plan failed. It was not long before the courthouse crowd grew to 2,000, mostly with guns.

Then even more than now, such people think it is their God- and constitution-given right to bear arms – but not black people's. One of the white men at the courthouse tried to force one of the black men to surrender his pistol. The man refused and an exchange of gunfire between the two sides resulted.

## The invasion of Greenwood

The black men retreated toward Greenwood, with a rolling gunfight now taking place. As the much larger number of whites followed, they looted shops for additional weapons and ammunition and fired at many black bystanders they encountered.

As events unfolded, many of the whites were deputised by the police and provided with weapons.

From about 1am on 1 June, groups of whites began to enter Greenwood, indiscriminately shooting into businesses and homes and in some cases throwing lighted oil-rags into buildings, setting them on fire. By 4am about two dozen black-owned businesses had been torched. As crew from Tulsa Fire Department arrived to put out fires, they were turned away at gunpoint.

With sunrise, about 5am, an all-out assault began. Greenwood's black defenders were overwhelmed by the sheer number of white invaders and had to fall back to the edge of the area. The "rioters" broke into and looted houses and premises, killing many people and driving the rest to detention centres that had been set up.

Multiple eyewitnesses described planes carrying white attackers, who gunned people down from above and dropped firebombs. We now know that these aircraft were privately-owned, but authorised by law enforcement; some of them carried law enforcement per-



# bed a US city: Tulsa, 1921

sonnel. This seems to have been the first aerial attack on a US city.

State National Guard troops arrived about at about 9am, but paused for breakfast while their commander contacted various local authorities – many of whom were complicit in what was taking place. Although the violence was brought to an end, it was not at all the case that the National Guard defended black Tulsans against the white killers. Instead they helped arrest and detain over 6,000 black people.

In the final “battle” of the massacre, the National Guard used a heavy machine gun to demolish Mount Zion Baptist Church, which the white rioters claimed had been turned into a fortress and armoury.

Black people were also attacked elsewhere in Tulsa. Many middle-class white families turned over their employees to be taken to detention centres; those who refused were subjected to vandalism and violence in turn. At least a few white Tulsans did provide refuge to black people during the massacre.

## The results

Soon afterwards, Oklahoma’s Department of Vital Statistics claimed that 36 people had been killed, 26 black and ten white. The Red Cross and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, a little later, and an official commission, in 2001, estimated about 2-300. Very few of the deaths resulted from the fires that raged in Greenwood during the massacre; they were direct murders. 800-1,000 were injured.

Forty highly prosperous square blocks of 1,265 African American homes and businesses, worth many tens of millions in today’s money – not to mention hospitals, schools and churches – were burned down or otherwise demolished. Many thousands of black people were detained and only released upon being vouched for by a white citizen, usually an employer.

Nine thousand were left homeless and lived in tents into the winter of 1921-2. The rebuilding of Greenwood was painfully slow, with white capitalists and politicians intervening to gain control of land and real estate and prevent

the area from being rebuilt in anything like its old form.

One of the most flourishing black communities in the US had been physically destroyed and economically and psychologically traumatised, with consequences that continue today.

Historian of the massacre Tim Magdigan, quoted above, noted that “in the immediate months and years afterward, postcards depicting burning Negro homes and businesses and charred Negro corpses were bought and sold on Tulsa’s downtown streets, and white participants openly boasted about notches on their guns, earned during Greenwood’s obliteration, which initially was a widespread source of civic pride.”

There were some charges – against black people as well as white – but no convictions for anything relating to the killings, injuries and destruction of property. An all-white Grand Jury criticised the role of law enforcement but blamed black people for what had occurred.

Fairly quickly gloating turned to silence. By the 1930s discussion of the massacre had largely been suppressed. As late as 2017, a report on the history of the Tulsa Fire Department from 1897 made no mention of the 1921 events!

In my final article I will discuss the struggle of black Tulsans and their allies to break decades of silence surrounding the massacre and win measures of reparation and justice. However it is also important to understand, historically, how these insane horrors could take place.

## How could this happen?

As explained in [Solidarity 595](#), the US-wide context was a national surge of white supremacist violence, intertwined with violent repression against the left and labour movement.

1919 saw a great wave of pogroms, with “race riots” in at least two dozen cities. Fuelled by deep-rooted white supremacist ideas and sentiments – which grew stronger decade by decade as the revolutionary anti-racist movement which followed the Civil War and the abolition of slavery was defeated – a kind of ongoing hysteria gripped millions of white Americans.

Black people migrating and “taking jobs” by joining industry, black men in relationships with white women, black people despite everything making a success of life and prospering – all these things were seen as intolerable... Even “worse” was the spirit of self-assertion which



The ruins of Greenwood after the bombing and massacre

began to inspire many African Americans in the post-war years, particularly when it involved men in uniform and with guns. This period was in many ways the high-point of white supremacy, but it saw the first stirrings of movements which would eventually slash it down.

In the heavy pressure of this racist atmosphere, the smallest things could set off an apocalypse – even a non-event like Sarah Page and Dick Rowland in a lift (particularly since it involved a white woman and a black man).

Greenwood was an ideal target for the mob because it so vividly symbolised black success, which as historian James Hirsch puts it:

“...was an intolerable affront to the social order of white supremacy, so taking their possessions not only stripped Blacks of their material status, but also tipped the social scales back to their proper alignment. This reassertion of authority, expressed through ransacked homes, was a cause for celebration.”

The other context – also discussed in [595](#) – is the counter-revolution which swept Oklahoma in the years immediately preceding the massacre. From 1917 the strongest socialist left in the US, one which generally fought racism and united black and white workers and farmers in struggle, was virtually wiped out.

T D Evans, Tulsa’s (Republican) mayor during the massacre, was clear where he stood: “Let the blame for this Negro uprising lie right where it belongs, on those armed Negroes and their followers who started this trouble and who instigated it.”

Evans had been the judge who in the famous “Tulsa Outrage” trial of 1917 convicted twelve members of the Industrial Workers of the World – and five non-IWW defence witnesses! – before having them handed over to the “Knights of Liberty”, a forerunner of the local KKK, who beat, tarred and feathered them. It was an important event in the suppression of Oklahoma’s left.

In the 1914 election for state governor, the Socialist Party, a multi-racial party supported disproportionately by black Oklahomans, which had taken the lead in fighting segregation, won 21%. In 1918, after a year of brutal repression against the labour movement, it won 3.8%; in 1922, 0.7%. The party all but disappeared from the scene.

As the KKK surged, Oklahoma’s governor shortly after the massacre, Jack Walton, made some attempt to stop its terrorist activities. As a result he was impeached by the state legislature, the first US governor ever removed in this way. By 1930 William Murray, long-standing and aggressive opponent of black rights in the state and architect of many of its anti-black laws, was elected governor in a landslide after campaigning against “the Three Cs – corporations, carpetbaggers [Northerners, with the implication of liberals or progressives] and Coons [black people]”. Murray would become an admirer of Hitler. During the class struggles of the 30s he would set records for the number of times he deployed the National Guard and declared martial law. □

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White citizens had postcards made commemorating the massacre.

# Good wind for malaria vaccine



Science

By Les Hearn

Vaccines have been prominent during the course of the Covid pandemic, with the development of several highly efficacious ones (over 90% protection) in less than a year. Even though much preparatory work had already been done, this was an outstanding achievement.

Contrast this with the case of malaria, a scourge for thousands of years. After 200 years of vaccination techniques (one of the first examples of doctors actually preventing illness), and 50 years of research into a malaria vaccine, only in the last few weeks have we heard of one, R21, which is 75% effective against malaria (the WHO target), an improvement on its predecessor, RTS,S, at about 55%.

Malaria, despite its name (Italian: *mal'aria* = bad air), is caused by the protozoan\* *Plasmodium*, a parasite of insects and vertebrates. Infection is transmitted in the bite of the mosquito, the females of which require blood meals to provide protein for egg production: those infected with *Plasmodium* parasites in their salivary glands inject them into their victims; mosquitoes are themselves infected when they take blood from a malaria sufferer.

## The extent of malaria

Malaria features in recorded history from the earliest times, probably becoming a major problem when agriculture first developed and population densities became great enough to support endemic illnesses. *Plasmodium* parasites have been found in a mosquito preserved in amber from 30 million years ago. Mosquitoes date from the Jurassic period, *Plasmodium* probably from a similar time, so it is quite plausible that dinosaurs could have caught malaria.

At its greatest extent, malaria affected every continent except Antarctica (being imported to the Americas by Europeans). In England, as "ague", it was common in coastal marshlands, including London, causing significant mortality. Mentioned in eight Shakespeare plays, malaria may have caused the death of Oliver Cromwell. It was eliminated by the draining of marshes, the last natural UK cases being in the early 20th century. Nowadays, it is largely confined to the tropics, with over 90% of cases being in sub-Saharan Africa. Through debility and deaths, malaria imposes a substantial economic burden in health costs and loss of productivity, hindering the growth of affected countries. The WHO estimates



230 million cases in 2019 worldwide, with 400,000 deaths, two thirds being of children under five.

## Malaria and human evolution

In earlier times, when the cause of malaria was not known, it exerted a significant selection pressure on human populations. Genes providing a measure of protection spread in susceptible populations since their possessors had a better chance of surviving to adulthood. These genes coded for the production of mutant forms of haemoglobin which somehow interfered with the infection: resistance to malaria was greatest in individuals carrying one normal haemoglobin gene (inherited from one parent) and one mutant gene (inherited from the other).

However, those children inheriting two mutant genes suffered from severe life-shortening anaemias, the most common of which are *sickle cell anaemia* (among people of African ancestry) and *thalassaemia* (among those of Mediterranean ancestry). Back in the 1940s, the socialist geneticist, JBS Haldane calculated that heterozygotes (i.e. one normal and one mutant gene) for thalassaemia had a more than 2% survival advantage over those with only normal genes in areas of high malaria incidence, even though the double mutant caused very painful and debilitating symptoms, before an early death. The latter is a serious problem among descendants, who are no longer at risk of malaria, though life expectancy has been greatly increased by modern medicine.

## Defences against malaria

Simple physical barriers to biting mosquitoes, such as insecticide-treated bed nets, prevent infection while sleeping. Spraying insecticides (such as DDT) in mosquito breeding grounds or in homes helped reduce numbers of mosquitoes but the insects started evolving resistance; there were also adverse effects on other wildlife. Drugs, such as quinine and artemisinin (both from folk remedies), which interfered with *Plasmodium's* life within red blood cells, were and are effective, but resistance has quickly evolved. Other drugs,

such as chloroquine and Lariam, can get round resistance to earlier drugs but resistance to these is now known, too.

## Vaccines against malaria: the problem

As with smallpox, polio, and several major killers of children in the past, a vaccine against malaria would seem the ideal solution. If used widely in the most affected regions, the disease would eventually die out, since *Plasmodium* requires both parts of its lifecycle to take place. One major problem with a malarial vaccine is the lack of investment by states and drug companies in the developed world, now that malaria is no longer seen as a threat.\*\* But the crucial problem is the complexity of the *Plasmodium* lifecycle.

## The malarial parasite's lifecycle

When injected (as the *sporozoite* form) into the blood by the bite of an infected mosquito, *Plasmodium* parasites rapidly enter liver cells (hepatocytes), where they are hidden from the immune system. There, they change into the *merozoite* form and multiply into some 30,000 descendants. The hepatocytes burst, releasing the merozoites into the blood, where they enter red blood cells (RBCs). Here, the merozoites consume haemoglobin as their food and multiply about 20-fold; they are released in waves to infect more RBCs.

As they are released, the victim feels fever, chills, body aches, headaches and nausea, with each subsequent wave worse, as the number of infected RBCs increases up to 20-fold each time. The victim becomes anaemic and organ damage occurs as infected RBCs clog up small blood vessels; excessive inflammatory responses also harm the victim. Complications include organ failure, cerebral malaria (causing coma, brain damage or death), hypoglycaemia, and breathing difficulties.

In time, the merozoites form male and female sex cells (*gametocytes*). If taken up in the blood meal of another mosquito, these fertilise each other and new sporozoites are formed in the mos-

quito's salivary glands, ready to infect another victim and complete the cycle.

The body does mount an immune defence to the *Plasmodium* parasite but this is of limited effectiveness, hampered by the fact that, for the vast majority of the time, the parasite is "hiding" inside hepatocytes or RBCs, where antibodies and white blood cells cannot go. The youngest children are particularly vulnerable to malaria as they have not yet developed a specific immunity to infection. Adults may be able to develop some immunity which may reduce the intensity of recurrent infections.

## The new vaccine, R21

*Plasmodium* produces many proteins on its surface (antigens) that might produce an immune response but these are only visible to the immune system for short periods of time, when it is free in the blood prior to infecting a hepatocyte or RBC. Furthermore, its rapid reproduction rate allows evolution in these surface proteins so they can evade specific antibodies. The vaccine candidate R21, and its less effective predecessor, RTS,S, are targeted at the circumsporozoite protein (CSP). This is used to attach to hepatocytes before invading them and is *highly conserved*, meaning that it *cannot evolve* without losing its efficacy and disrupting *Plasmodium's* lifecycle. The recently reported R21 trial claims about 75% effectiveness in preventing infection in children. Larger trials, just starting, are needed. Other vaccines targeting the merozoite surface proteins similar to CSP are also planned. This could be the beginning of the end of one of humanity's worst natural enemies. □

\* a single-celled organism related to us, not to bacteria, similar to Amoeba. Protozoal infections include amoebic dysentery, Chagas disease, African sleeping sickness, and toxoplasmosis. There are no vaccines against protozoal infections apart from the newly developed anti-malarial ones.

\*\* Readers might like to ponder the role of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in funding much of this research.

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# Plutocrat philanthropy and workers' rights

By Wilson Gibbons

Andrew Forrest is an Australian mining magnate and billionaire who set up a foundation with the seemingly benign purpose to “end modern slavery in our generation”. But as with Bill Gates and his [philanthropic foundation](#), all is not what it seems.

In spite of his lobbying for patents and intellectual property, Bill Gates has actually helped *some* people in the global south get vaccinated. Forrest's advocacy does very little to alleviate the material conditions which make modern slavery, namely poverty. Within Australia, Forrest's chief lobbying has been for controls and limits on welfare spending.

Andrew Forrest calls on companies to conduct audits, and then produce a Corrective Action Plan. But what that plan means, beyond further auditing, is unclear.

A free market ideology underpins this, in which businesses and markets drive all improvement. Businesses will fight modern slavery by virtue of being responsive to the market.

Little to no attention is paid to capitalist corporations' logic of increasing productivity and the drive to reduce costs, or to the willingness of capitalists to work with oppressive regimes around the world in order to access cheap labour, such as Uyghur forced labour in China or prison labour in the USA.

The fight to end modern slavery comes to be not about helping workers win rights, but about doing “good business” and ethical consumerism. Companies will be motivated to tackle modern slavery because people will “vote with their money”.

Forrest's [Walk Free Foundation](#) has signalled some support for cash transfers to poor people, both conditional and non-conditional. But on non-conditional transfers they say they have no good data yet; and their report is unclear what exactly they mean by conditional.

[Research](#) by Katherine Brickell and others has shown the harmful effects that microfinance loans, a form of conditional cash transfer, have had on



agricultural workers in Cambodia. Poverty reduction schemes via small high interest loans leave people unable to pay down their loans because of the interest. They end up forced to work in bonded labour for local capitalists to whom they've turned to pay off the loans.

## The Global Slavery Index

Forrest set up the Walk Free Foundation after an audit of the supply chain of his company, Fortescue Metals, found forced and bonded labour. He turned to Bill Gates for advice. Gates told him that he needed to put a number to the issue, an estimate of the number of enslaved people in the world today. Forrest created the Global Slavery Index (GSI) with the help of academic Kevin Bales.

The GSI has become the most widely used measure of modern slavery. In fact, it was [foundational](#) to creating and mainstreaming concept of “modern slavery” by drawing together a number of forms of extreme exploitation under that umbrella of modern slavery. This involves making a political decision about what crosses the threshold into “modern slavery” and what doesn't.

Walk Free has continually revised its definition of modern slavery to include additional forms of exploitation; but it still serves to separate off some forms of exploitation as unique and evil, “a destructive, personal crime and an abuse of human rights”, a “[widespread profitable criminal industry](#)”, and to obscure routine labour relations in global supply chains.

This separating-off constructs a picture where it's not the big multinational company's fault that there is forced labour: the problem lies with criminals down the supply chain.

Walk Free produces document after document on how “corporate social responsibility” is the most effective institutions to tackle modern slavery. It portrays businesses as having a unique set of tools to tackle modern slavery, and better placed than NGOs or Governments.

It claims that businesses are used to acting across borders, and can do so quickly. If businesses have “modern slavery” in their supply chains, it is because they don't know it's there or they don't know how to respond, not because of drives for profit.

## The myth of ethical consumers

In fact, no consumer knows what is going on in the cotton fields which produce clothes for Zara or Nike. Or whether the workers who mine the metals for their laptop or smartphone are children, or have their passports withheld. Audits which send observers to check, but don't engage with workers, won't either.

At best “ethical production” becomes a market niche without affecting the broader structures of modern slavery. It's like expensive environmentally-friendly products which find a niche while the vast majority of companies continue as before. This isn't new. During the transatlantic slave trade the “Free-Produce Movement” attempted to convince well-to-do, ethically-minded people to pay for products produced without slave labour. That had very little effect on the use of slavery in global production.

Some companies may take on board the recommendations of the Walk Free Foundation, but since the incentive is to find a market slot catering to “ethical consumers”, in fact most companies in the UK barely even keep up with their legal requirements on modern slavery.

Walk Free's documents repeatedly push the point that modern slavery isn't just something that happens “over there” (i.e. in the global South), but it casts the blame for modern slavery largely on governments in the global South for not taking a strong enough stand against it, sidelining the role of multinational corporations and global institutions in the creation and maintenance of low labour standards through debt, lobbying, and profiteering.

Walk Free exalts the responses of Western governments to modern slavery, ignoring the prevalence of modern slavery in the global North, particularly in jobs like cleaners or housekeepers. It whitewashes the moves by many governments to raise borders ever higher, creating the very conditions that allow

modern slavery to flourish.

The labour movement and the left must become the frontline defenders of workers at all levels of the supply chain, and build solidarity across borders. As long as we leave it to philanthropists, corporations and governments to fiddle around the edges, workers will lose out.

Forrest is not necessarily a bogeyman or a uniquely evil individual. He is a capitalist. Capitalist philanthropy will not gift workers their rights or tackle the root causes of “modern slavery”. The labour movement can and must stake our claim and fight for solutions which empower workers and which give us greater democratic control over our workplaces and the wealth we create. □



## Vampire juice

By Sarah Morgan

I'm not sure if the retinol serum makers know that when they push a face-cream I'm immediately put in mind of Bulgakov's Margarita smearing her face with the stuff before becoming a witch.

In this case art trumps science. The pot of cream isn't going to make you become a witch, it's designed to give you vampire skin instead – much better. It doesn't matter which face-cream it is, even picking up a more ethical brand the words of this literary master hang in the air.

It is worth wondering if it is a very male view of an ageing woman that these products should have such an occult inference. But as the book is truly great, its images and allusions stick with you in a way that a face-cream commercial just doesn't.

You bring more crazed wonder to your life by picking up Bulgakov than buying a face-cream and it will give those furrows a fair bit more wise beauty than any amount of vampire juice could bestow you with.

So, maybe pick a book instead, they're still free at the library. But vampire juice can be picked up increasingly economically in these post-industrial times. □

## Our videos!

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

- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
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- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
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- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share: [youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK](https://youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK)

# Israel-Palestine: after the ceasefire

By Denise Robson

This is the speech given by Gatehead Labour councillor Denise Robson at the Palestine solidarity demonstration in Newcastle on 22 May.

Comrades, brothers and sisters, I am delighted to address you today. We are all here, I think, because we want to see lasting peace. This weekend, let's hope the truce is holding. I hope this pause in violence lasts long enough for meaningful talks to get under way. We know that true and lasting peace can only be secured when both Israelis and Palestinians live with dignity, respect and security in their own states. Those perpetuating the cycle of violence only push this further out of reach.

This conflict is about power and justice. It can only be resolved if the imbalance of power between Israel and Palestine is addressed. But so far we only see Israel taking land and power



Na'amod protest, Liverpool

from its neighbour. If Israel were a genuine democracy, Muslims marking the end of Ramadan would have their right to do so protected, with no toleration to those who chant "death to Arabs" and attack Palestinians in the streets. I believe Israel has the right to defend itself reasonably. But it has no right whatever to ethnically cleanse, to steal land, bomb civilians, commit war crimes, imprison and humiliate the Palestinian people, using access to food, water

and medical supplies to further that domination.

After decades of hopelessness, I am seeing the beginnings of change. The UK Jewish community, of which I am a member, always likes to argue. Today there is a growing confidence among younger Jews to speak out about Israel's oppression of its neighbour Palestine. There is the Jewish Network for Palestine; there is Na'amod – British Jews Against the Occupation; there is Jewdas, a pacifist group.

I myself became a signatory to the Jews for Justice for the Palestinians in 2008. We stand against Israeli policies that destroy the human, civil, political and economic rights of the Palestinian people.

We are committed to the Palestinians' right to self determination and to a viable state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

We support the right of Israelis to live in peace and freedom within Israel's 1967 borders

We condemn all violence against civilians in the conflict, no matter who commits this. We call on Israel acknowledge its responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem and its obligation to resolve this.

I say carry on demonstrating and speaking out. One day we will be heard! □

• Thanks to Denise for allowing us to republish.

## Standing Together UK

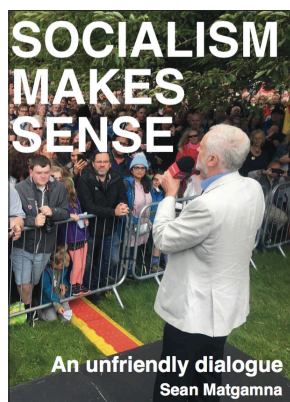
News about joint campaigning by Jews and Palestinians on social and democratic issues, and to win the Palestinian people's right to a state of their own, can be got at the Twitter account [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachaduk), run by supporters in the UK of the "Standing Together" movement in Israel. Support is being canvassed to set up a solidarity campaign in Britain for "Standing Together". □



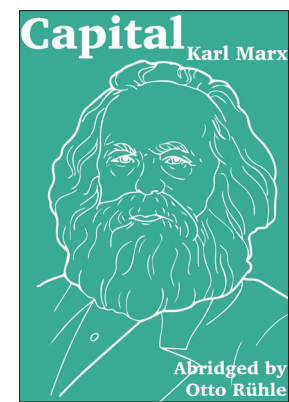
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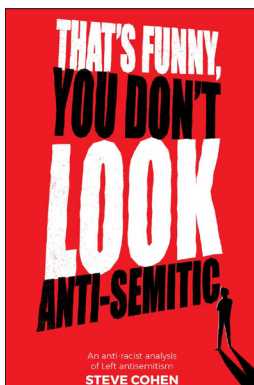
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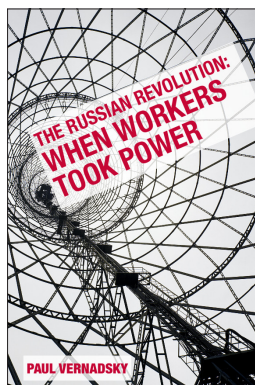
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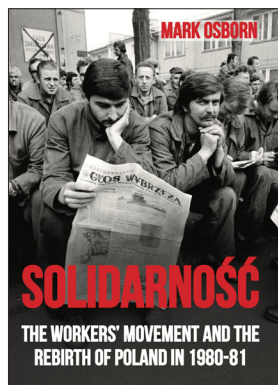
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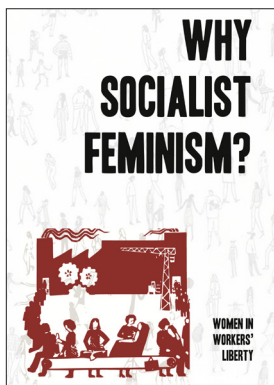
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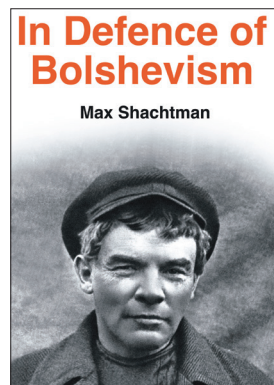
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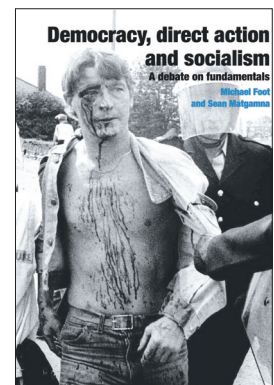
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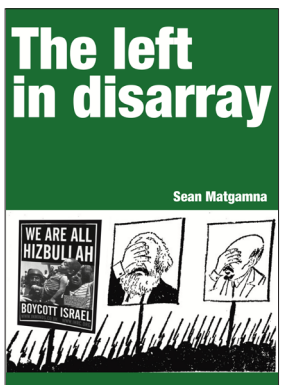
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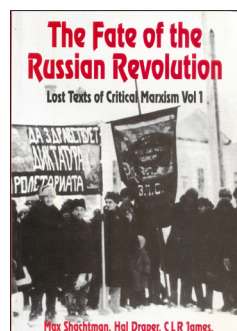
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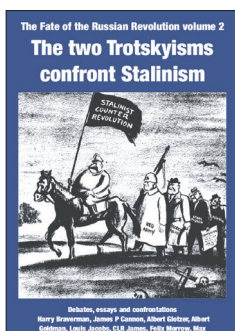
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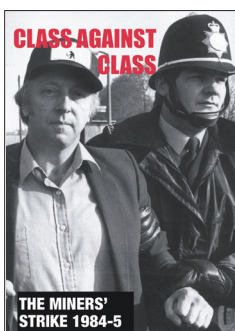
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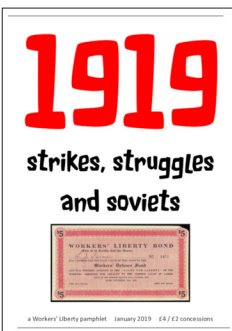
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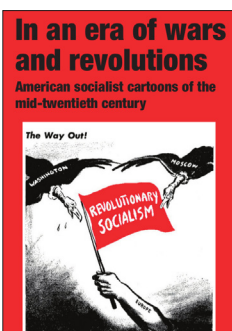
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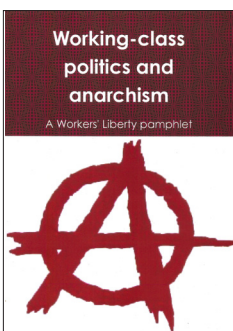
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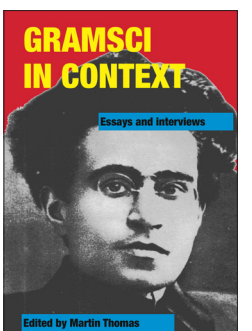
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# BT: take dispute off hold!

By a telecom worker

The Communications Workers Union's (CWU's) ballot for industrial action in the telecoms sector is currently paused. The CWU previously stated its intention to ballot all its members who work for BT group (BT, EE and Openreach) in response to job cuts and site closures and the breaking of long standing agreements with the union. At the heart of the dispute is whether the company's future strategy will include job security and consultation with the union or not.

BT group remains a highly profitable firm in a growing sector. Employees have the right to expect job security and assurances about the future. National negotiations to avoid an industrial action ballot are ongoing, with a deadline for report backs from negotiators later in June.

BT group has high union density,

higher than most other parts of the telecoms sector. What is at stake for the CWU is not whether they are prepared to fight back to defend members' interests in BT but whether they are prepared to fight *at all*. There will be no hope of extending the union into unorganised companies and gaining more members if the union does not deliver in the areas where it is organised.

Currently the Telecoms section of the CWU is under the leadership of the "Left Activist Network", a breakaway from the previous Broad Left. They have total dominance of all executive positions and have had for over a decade. Andy Kerr, as the lead negotiator for the CWU on telecoms, and Davie Bowman, as the officer for Openreach, have been key architects of the conciliatory "company union" approach during this time. This has seen two deals to reduce pension entitlements and the introduction of worse terms and conditions for

new Openreach recruits.

BT has recently concluded a deal on BT Sport with broadcasters. It has also been successful in the auction for spectrum access, and there has been a big shake up in the Executive Board. Perhaps most importantly, in the last couple of months BT has been promised an extra £3 billion to spend on upgrading broadband access across the country. That makes it £15 billion in total from the government.

This extra funding has become available, and is being used by BT, because the Chancellor announced more money for capital investment in the Budget with an accompanying reduction in corporation tax as an incentive. More direct labour jobs should be the prize for the union, but the cost cutting agenda of BT management stands in the way.

One of the best kept secrets of the trade union movement, only partially

revealed in the 2019 Labour Manifesto, is the official CWU policy for the renationalisation of the telecoms industry. This has never been a priority for the current leadership.

Living through the pandemic has laid bare the need for public investment, ownership and democratic control of telecoms and IT technologies. Telecoms is an essential service for all.

Though the Labour Manifesto 2019 headlined on the retail offer of free broadband, this can only be delivered through greater public control and public ownership of the industry. Neither is on the cards with this Conservative Government. The reform of Ofcom regulation to increase access and deal with the "digital divide" is unlikely, public ownership even less so.

Nevertheless the CWU needs to make the case for public ownership and democratic control as a key platform of its political campaigning. □

# Gary Smith wins GMB election

By Dale Street

GMB Scottish Regional Secretary Gary Smith has been elected as the union's new General Secretary. The election turnout was only 10.6%. But this marks an improvement on the 2019 election (8.5%), the 2015 election (4.2%), and earlier elections which were not even contested.

Smith won a fraction more than 50% of the vote. Rehana Azam (very right-wing full-

timer) got 28%. Giovanna Holt (Senior Organiser, and only candidate with a proven track record of challenging GMB bullying and misogyny) got 22%.

As Scottish Regional Secretary Smith has built a reputation for himself as someone prepared to take on employers in both the private sector (BiFab, British Gas, McVitie's, etc.) and the public sector, including local authority equal pay disputes.

He has hired a raft of (former)

members of the Campaign for Socialism and other left-wing grassroots campaigns, giving them homes in the GMB Scottish bureaucracy but also insisting they work hard.

But Smith also has a record of being anti-Corbyn, anti-Richard-Leonard, pro-Jackie-Baillie, pro-Anas-Sarwar, pro-fracking, anti-green-politics-in-general, and pro-big-battleships (but only if built in the UK). His victory has been welcomed by Labour right-wing operators

like Luke Akehurst. He profiles as a true man of the people, with no time for middle-class intellectuals and their fads. The political education which he received as a member of the Militant Tendency in the early 1980s makes him eminently suitable for such a role.

The election took place in the shadow of the Monaghan Report, which exposed the culture of bullying, misogyny, and (even by trade union standards) thoroughly anti-democratic top-down control

exercised by GMB full-timers.

Smith has promised to implement the findings of the [Monaghan Report](#) in full. Ironically, the report identified the role played by white-male Regional Secretaries as the root of evil in the GMB – but the sole candidate in the election who was a white-male Regional Secretary was its winner.

But "Step Aside, Brother" was never part of the programme of "the Marxist voice of Labour and youth". □

# Join the 26 June protest

The People's Assembly (PA), an anti-cuts group, has called a [demonstration](#) in London for 26 June, noon from Portland Place. The PA was formed in 2013, is financed by trade unions including Unite, and now has "Corbynite" former Labour shadow minister Laura Pidcock as its secretary. The small socialist group Counterfire is important in its backroom workings.

The protest is supported by several unions besides Unite (NEU, PCS, RMT, FBU...), and by Extinction Rebellion, which plans additional protests of its own on the weekend 26-27 June.

Awkwardly, the protest, planned months ago, has accumulated ten distinct demands, from ending fire-and-rehire to stopping the Police Bill.

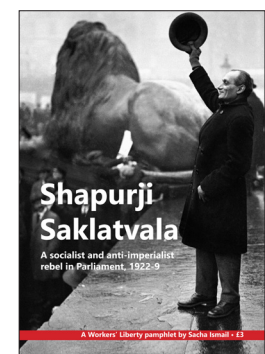
## New normal

Its initial pitch was "demand a new normal", on the assumption that by 26 June the contest would be over rival forms of post-Covid "normal", but, by no fault of the protest planners, 26 June will be far from post-Covid.

Barring a sudden rise in hospitalisations, though, 26 June will be one of the biggest street presence by the left

in Britain in a while. The PA is organising coaches [from across the country](#), while the next big protest day after 26 June, for the NHS on 3 July, is designed as a [miscellany of local events](#), with several in London.

Whatever the detail of official demands, people will use the protest to raise voices for social provision, equality, and democratic rights. Help *Solidarity* make our class-struggle socialist ideas visible on the day! Check out our website calendar ([bit.ly/wl-cal](#)) closer to 26 June for our assembly points and stalls. □



## 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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## “” 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](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)

# First day on the watch



## Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

My first priority when starting work at a large London fire station was nothing to do with being an operational firefighter, but to get to know the station culture. It's a pretty unusual working environment, where you eat, sleep and work in close proximity for sometimes gruelling 12-hour shifts, and shared lives, danger and trauma can create strong bonds.

It can be an intimidating environment to join, and I'd heard stories from our trainers and others about some pretty tough beginnings.

A firefighter, O, has volunteered to be my mentor and support me with settling into station life and operational duties. He calls me the night before to check I have everything I need and meets me just inside the station on the first day. A real joker, he quickly helps me feel at ease, shows me around the station and is on hand to explain the oddities of station life, assuring me that no question was a stupid one. I have many such questions.

The only time he becomes serious is when he asks me if I was in the union, his tone and gaze making it clear there is only one correct answer.

When O introduces me over a cup of tea, I get nothing but warm welcomes from my new watch (the group of firefighters I will be working with on a permanent rota pattern). They are happy with the two boxes of Krispy Kremes I brought, an act the importance of which was stressed repeatedly during training.

Cake is a big deal in the fire brigade. I'm told that my first "tour" (the set of shifts that constitutes our working week, two days followed by two nights), first "wear" (of breathing apparatus) and first fatal incident are among many cake-able milestones. A firefighter who once neglected this tradition is called "a tight-arsed cakeless bastard" to general agreement. Another advises me not to go down the pole carrying a tray of teas, a lesson he learnt the hard way. The atmosphere is boisterous, convivial and swearsy.

We wash up, with everyone bar the washer-upper grabbing a tea towel and queuing up next to the drying rack, drying and putting away mugs as they are washed up and re-joining the back of the queue. It's a sign of how the watch

does everything together – it's a team, and this is true in small things as in big.

The vast majority of firefighters at each station collectively self-cater, known as the mess. The firefighter/mess manager, B, has put on sandwiches. The mess table is the social heart of the station, where arguments are had out, stories are told, and pots of tea are shared after a job.

Conversation turns to the union's successful challenging of new guidance for firefighting in high-rises, which would have allowed firefighters to be sent above the floor where the fire is, into potentially irrespirable atmospheres, without donning their breathing apparatus sets. R argues that the union was overreacting, as firefighters would still have their sets on their back so could start them up if they felt conditions required it. T disagrees, arguing that conditions can deteriorate very quickly, and that we would be skipping the safety procedures used to check our sets work properly before entering a risk area.

It's clear that the union is a fact of daily life on station. Everyone's a member and engages with what the union is doing because they all recognise that they have a big stake in the union's activities – it could well save your life. □

## Winning decent jobs for all

By Colin Foster

Café and restaurant bosses in Britain, the USA, and elsewhere complain that a shortage of workers may now push them into raising wages.

About time. A [pay survey](#) estimates the average wage in fast food in the UK at £6.50 an hour. (The legal [minimum wage](#) is £8.91. But only if you're 23 or over. For under-18s it's £4.62, for apprentices £4.30). In the USA the estimate is [\\$11 average](#) (£7.75), and the common workers' demand is \$15 (£10.57).

But the bosses are puzzled because they'd expected huge unemployment by now and a "buyer's market" for labour.

Thanks to public pressure making the Tories extend furlough five times (there were still [3.5 million](#) workers on furlough on 30 April 2021), joblessness is not *that* high. But it is high. And the "economic inactivity" rate among people aged 16-64, which had been declining for many years, [increased](#) by about 800,000 between pre-pandemic and the latest available stats (January-March 2021).

There are many reasons why people might not be rushing into low-paid work in often crowded indoor spaces at cafés and such. One possible factor is a rise of "cash-in-hand" jobs: the amount

of [cash in circulation](#) has risen surprisingly fast during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, good socially-useful jobs in relatively well-unionised sectors are facing *cuts* or stagnation. The NHS is about [100,000 workers short](#), and the government refuses to raise wages more than minimally. The care sector, less unionised, is also short. Schools, in big cities anyway, are declaring redundancies. Local council budgets for 2021-2 almost everywhere include cuts and job losses, because central government has refused properly to cover extra spending and reduced income in the pandemic.

Companies like Rolls Royce have cut thousands of jobs, but there is no government plan for "climate jobs" to carry through the urgent "greening" of economic life.

*Solidarity* campaigns for the labour movement to combat the cuts, demand more public-service employment and more "green" investment, and to go for a shorter working week (four days or 32 hours as standard) with no loss of pay. That will create more openings for the young workers who, disproportionately, have lost jobs in the pandemic. It will put increased pressure on those fast-food bosses, and put their workers in a stronger position to organise to win better pay and conditions. □

## Jumping for the fund

A total of £855 was raised by Tim Cooper for his parachute jump. You can watch a video at [bit.ly/tc-j](http://bit.ly/tc-j). With that money, plus some other donations in the last week, our total stands at £8,823.38. We have just a month to go before our deadline for our £20,000 target, the Ideas for Freedom weekend, 10-11 July. That weekend always gives a boost, but we still need more: [workersliberty.org/donate](http://workersliberty.org/donate) □

## Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via [workersliberty.org/join-awl](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)



## DVLA bosses pull back on deal



**John Moloney**

Our members in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea struck again on 2-6 June, in their ongoing dispute to win improved workplace safety, and a greater say for workers in determining those measures.

Immediately prior to the last strike, the local branch felt that an acceptable deal had been on the table. But at the eleventh hour, two elements of that deal – additional cash payments and additional annual leave compensation for workers who've been compelled to work at the physical workplace during the pandemic – were unilaterally withdrawn. We don't know where the instruction to withdraw those elements came from, but it almost certainly required ministerial intervention. As far as the union is concerned, Grant Shapps, the Transport Secretary of State, is ultimately responsible.

There'll be further strikes in the week starting 7 June, followed by an ongoing campaign of selective action for the foreseeable future. Six local MPs have written to Shapps demanding a meeting so as to hold him to account. He'd previously said he couldn't be involved, and that the departmental management needed to resolve the dispute, but now the evidence strongly suggests his office has directly intervened to scupper a deal.

In Royal Parks, we have declared a formal dispute after the outsourced contractor which employers cleaners missed a deadline we'd set for them to agree our demands, centrally a commitment to no job cuts. We're now in period with discussions with workers about what action to take. We're working closely with the United Voices of the World (UVW) on this. I'll meet with UVW reps and officers on 8 June to discuss the next steps in the campaign.

UVW initially organised the Royal Parks cleaners and has done excellent campaigning work, including organising a number of strikes. The workers remain members of UVW, but now

that they are dual-carding in PCS, we are able to provide additional legal, financial, and organisational assistance, due to our greater resources.

Our consultative ballots in the Department for Work and Pensions have now concluded, returning a three-to-one majority in favour of industrial action around workplace safety. I have argued all along that we needed to move to statutory ballots as soon as possible, and that remains my view.

PCS is now facing two "fire and re-hire" disputes. Homes England, a stand-alone organisation under the remit of the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government, has tabled a proposal which puts on the table the possibility of dismissing its staff and re-engaging them on worse conditions. We'll meet with them on 8 June and have made our position very clear. If their proposal is not fully withdrawn, we will immediately go into dispute and begin preparations for an industrial action ballot and wider political campaign.

Outsourced contractor Mitie has also said that it "reserves the right" to fire workers who do not agree to changes it wants to implement across its ten civil service contracts. If that threat is not withdrawn, we will take a similar approach there. I believe the union needs to respond to these threats with all means at our disposal, and have been arguing for that approach.

On 4 June, I spoke at a protest opposite the Chinese Embassy commemorating the Tiananmen Square massacre. PCS has taken a strong stance in support of independent labour movements in China and Hong Kong, as well as opposing China's repression of the Uyghur people. At our national Annual General Meeting (AGM), which takes place online from 14 June, there'll be a motion reaffirming that commitment. The fundamental issues are simple: the labour movement should be on the side of struggles for democracy and liberation, wherever in the world they take place. □

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

# Transport in London: cut the Tory strings!



From Tubeworker



driverless trains are unrealistic and unnecessary.

Another condition of the bailout is for TfL to "review" what the Tories call its "generous pension scheme." Like the demand for "savings", this means cuts. The main unions organising across TfL all have policy to resist detrimental changes to terms and conditions. Drivers' union Aslef has a live industrial action ballot mandate, valid until September.

With previous financial audits, including an "independent financial review" commissioned by Khan and the TfL Board, also strongly recommending pension "reform", some attack on pension terms is almost inevitable. This may well take the form of closing the existing scheme to new starters. However the attack comes, unions must fight back – ideally pre-emptively, by balloting as soon as possible, rather than waiting to mount reactive campaigns once cuts and reforms have already been announced.

The wider context is the Tories' long war on TfL funding. Its central government grant was run down from 2015, finally being abolished entirely in 2018. This has left TfL vastly more reliant on fare revenue than any other metro system of its type. When fare revenue (rightly and necessarily) collapsed during the pandemic, so did TfL's finances. Short-term bailouts with strings attached are not a sustainable way to fund a major transport system.

TfL needs proper, stable funding from central government. The whole labour movement, including the Labour Party, must mount a political campaign to fight for that funding. □

The Department for Transport (DfT) has given Transport for London (TfL) another funding bailout, which guarantees its operations for the next six months. The bailout is the latest in a series of similar packages negotiated throughout the pandemic, all of which have been an opportunity for the government to attempt to add more strings to the deal.

The Tories have described the latest deal, which totals £1.08 billion, as "conditions-based funding". The deal includes a commitment for TfL to make £300 million of "savings" – i.e., cuts – in 2021/22, and "identify new or increased sources of revenue for TfL of between £0.5 billion to £1 billion each year from 2023". As part of previous funding settlements, TfL already committed to return to being "self-financing" by 2023.

The current package also requires TfL to "work collaboratively with DfT on a joint programme for implementing higher levels of automatic train operation", and "make progress towards the conversion of at least one London Underground line to full automation but with an on-board attendant." This refers to the Tories' anti-union dream of "driverless trains", an expensive folly which would require an enormous financial outlay to completely refurbish rolling stock and signalling systems on non-automatic lines, before it began to "save" any money. Driverless trains are an ideological artefact that have nothing to do with improving safety or efficiency, and everything to do with the Tories' desire to take on organised labour.

Mayor Sadiq Khan has said in a statement that the "savings" and revenue increases the package demands are essentially undeliverable. Khan's statement also explicitly opposes the implementation of driverless trains. Even senior TfL bosses have previously said

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Saturday

11:30am

» Is socialist revolution possible? Is it desirable? Ruth Cashman, Workers' Liberty, debates Professor John Strawson

» QAnon and the rise of a new far right, with speakers including Joe Mulhall, Hope Not Hate

» Alan Turing and us, with Bruce Robinson, Workers' Liberty

» What should socialists say about the police and criminal justice system?, with Ellie Clarke, Workers' Liberty

» Organising the unorganised, with John Moloney, Assistant General Secretary, PCS union (pc), and Kelly Rogers, former Picturehouse striker

2:20pm

» Should socialists support a "Progressive Alliance"? Neal Lawson (Compass) debates Elaine Jones

» The next wave of climate activism, with speakers including Simon Pirani, author of *Burning Up: A Global History of Fossil Fuel Consumption*

» Covid: what we know and what we don't know, with Prof. George Davey Smith

» Capitalism and mental health, with speakers including Jean Lane, Workers' Liberty

» Class-struggle anti-racism, with Jocelyn Cruy-wagen, Vice Chair, Lambeth Unison, and Kas Witana, Workers' Liberty

4:20pm

» The experience of "Corbynism" and the future of the left in Labour, with speakers including Alan Simpson, former Labour MP

» Winning freedom of speech, with speakers including Shiva Mahbobi (CFPPI)

» Confronting antisemitism on the left, with speakers including Keith Kahn-Harris

» China, Hong Kong, East Turkestan: workers' and democratic struggles, with speakers from the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong.

» Resisting Bolsonaro in Brazil, with Brazilian socialist Luisa Xavier

# SOCIALISM in an AGE of COVID



Sunday

10:00am

» What's happening in Myanmar? with speakers from the Myanmar labour movement

» The backlash against trans rights, with Christie Neary, Workers' Liberty

» Why you should read Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?', with Paul Hampton

12:30pm

» Trade unionism in and after lockdowns, with speakers including Prof. Gregor Gall and Janine Booth (RMT activist and Workers' Liberty)

» Left perspectives on Lebanon's protest movement, with Lebanese socialist Joey Ayoub

» Understanding the Renaissance, with Prof. Cath Fletcher, author of *The Beauty and the Terror*

» USA: where next for workers, unions, and the left? with speakers including Traven Leyshon, Vermont AFL-CIO and Democratic Socialists of America, and Justine Canady, Workers' Liberty

2:30pm

» From #MeToo to the future: confronting violence against women, with speakers including Jill Mountford (Workers' Liberty)

» The historical roots of antisemitism on the left

» Erdogan: Turkish imperialist?

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» **Friday 9th:** walking tour "Battersea vs the British Empire"

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By a Lewisham teacher

On 2 June the government announced a £1.4bn "Covid Catch-up" programme for pupils and students, to cover up to six million sets of 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged pupils and expansion of an existing fund for helping 16- to 19-year-olds with subjects such as English and maths.

Kevin Collins, the government's "Catch-up tsar" resigned after the announcement. According to the *Financial Times*, he and education secretary Gavin Williamson wanted to pay teachers to extend the school day by 30 minutes, and that was vetoed by chancellor Rishi Sunak on grounds of cost.

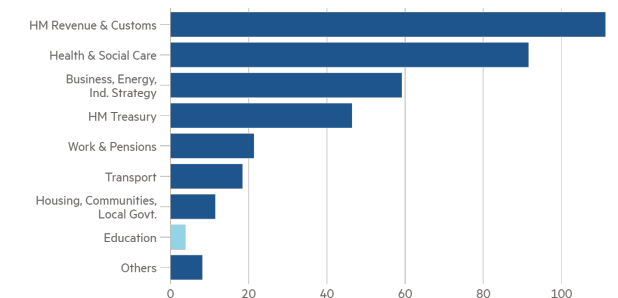
Sunak spent **£0.84 billion** in four weeks of August 2020 on subsidies for restaurant-owners and well-off diners-out by "Eat Out to Help Out", increasing "**second-wave**" Covid deaths by maybe thousands. The £1.4 billion is less than twice that, over three years, for around **nine million** school students in England alone.

Little Covid support funding has gone to the Department for Education – less than a 1/20th that channelled through Revenue and Customs, less than a 1/10th that through Business and Energy, and also less than 1/10th that through the Treasury.

And the whole debate around "catch-up" is mis-focused and hypocritical. The idea that education is essentially about filling students and pupils with "knowledge", so we now need extra shovelling-in to make up for schools being closed in the pandemic, is deeply flawed.

Children and young people construct an understanding of the world, and develop the skills that they need to navigate that world, through stimulus and experimentation, most effectively in a collective setting. Individual tutoring can play a role but cannot replace a creative, stimulating classroom. Extending the school day is not the answer, either. The "productivity" in school diminishes as you extend the hours, particularly for younger children. Half-an-hour a day would add little to learning but a large cost to the mental health and well-being of children and young

Education has received a tiny proportion of Covid support funding  
Lifetime cost of Covid measures, by implementing department (£bn)



people and of school workers.

And in fact schools face cuts, not a choice between this or that expansion of resources to "catch up". Schools in cities across the country are making redundancies.

Falling rolls, probably due to Brexit, a demographic dip, and Covid-induced house-moves away from cities; 13 years of no real increase in schools' budgets; extra spending by schools on Covid measures; and a new funding formula that takes money from inner city schools, have combined into a "perfect-storm" funding crisis.

The redundancies fall disproportionately on support staff, in particular Classroom Assistants and Teaching Assistants, and thus will especially hit students with special educational needs or who have problems accessing the curriculum. Class sizes will also increase.

More adults in classes to support the students, and smaller classes, would be the surest way to ensure rapid and meaningful learning. Yet under the blather about "catch-up", class sizes grow and existing support for learners is removed.

Socialists reject the discourse of "catch-up". We oppose the lengthening of the school day; demand no redundancies in schools; fight instead for a permanent, significant increase in funding for schools; and demand the permanent scrapping of GCSEs and high-stakes tests in primaries (something that really would free resources for more learning).

We need to rouse the labour movement and, in the first place, school unions and the Labour Party, to take up these demands. ☐





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## NHS PAY: ON THE STREETS 3 JULY!

By Alice Hazel

Within the next few weeks, the issue of NHS pay will be sharply back on the agenda. The NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) is due to make their recommendation on pay for England and Wales in "mid-June". That will be followed by an offer from the government.

After 18 months of the Covid response which has stretched NHS workers to their limits, proved fatal for over 800, and left many more physically and mentally scarred, the offer will certainly bring disappointment and anger.

The immediate focus of campaigning is the well-timed day of action called by Keep Our NHS Public, Health Campaigns Together, NHS Workers Say No and NHS Staff Voices for Saturday 3 July: [bit.ly/nhs-3j](https://bit.ly/nhs-3j). There will be demonstrations in many areas of the country, focused on patient safety and an end to privatisation as well as pay justice.

It is possible that the offer will be raised from the measly 1% of the government's submission to the PRB in March. NHS Providers have already said they have budgeted for 2.1%. But a slight increase would go nowhere near redressing the real-terms pay cuts in recent years of Tory government.

Since August 2010 average nurse real wages have fallen by 7.4%. At the top of pay bands the drop has been far higher. NHS workers need a pay rise that rewards them for their work



during the pandemic, and also recognises historic pay freezes and addresses the 90,000 or so vacancies in the NHS, which punish workers and harm patient care. NHS workers need 15%!

All the NHS trade unions have put in claims that would represent significant pay rises. Unite and the GMB at 15%, the RCN at 12.5% and Unison, a flat rate of at least £2K. All the unions must react quickly to the offer when it comes and step up towards co-ordinated industrial action. We need a campaign that aims to challenge the government and win for members, not a token for the bureaucrats' trade-union recruitment war.

The unions' response to the 4% offer in Scotland (acceptance from Unison and Unite and passive rejection from GMB and RCN) should give all NHS workers a warning that we need to go beyond waiting for our unions to take the lead. Members should be pushing their trade unions by passing motions for immediate rejection of anything less than their claims and demanding co-ordinated ballots.

We need to organise within

workplaces to convince members that winning is possible and that industrial action can be effective.

We should also be preparing the ground for challenges in the campaign, by organising cross union networks, and discussing tactics to circumvent the trade union laws such as disaggregated ballots in the biggest unions, Unison and RCN.

It is right that the 3 July protests also raise broader issues beyond pay. The long-term problems that existed in the NHS have only got worse during the pandemic – the social care crisis, workload and burn-out, and waiting times all leave the NHS at breaking point. In addition, and in the midst of the epidemic, the government is driving through a far-reaching top-down reorganisation, through their White Paper, further embedding privatisation and removing local accountability. They continue to drive through lucrative contracts for the private sector, for example the corporate takeover of GP surgeries and the mass sell-off of patient data, without any public debate. The government have learned some serious lessons during the pandemic... that there are massive profits to be made for their class if they can command centralised change without scrutiny.

There is huge public support for the NHS and its staff which can be mobilised around pay. The time to fight is now. □