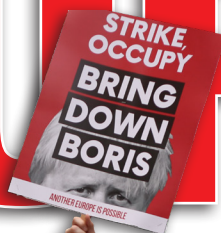




For social ownership of the banks and industry

RALLY THE LEFT IN LABOUR

- » **Democracy and due process**
- » **Socialist policies**
- » **Make unions fight for workers' agenda**



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Rally the left in Labour



Editorial

In early September a couple of opinion polls showed Labour level with the Tories or slightly ahead.

That is better than in June, when the Tories had a poll lead of 10% of more, but poor when the Tories are setting records for U-turns, scandals, fumbles, and looming cuts. Keir Starmer's "personal approval" ratings, good until late 2020, are still wretched.

Back in early 2020 Starmer made [ten pledges](#). They included taxing the rich, ending the Tory sanctions regime on benefits, abolishing tuition fees, "common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water; end outsourcing in our NHS, local government and justice system"; "defend free movement as we leave the EU"; and "unite our party, promote pluralism".

He has campaigned clearly for none of those, and explicitly trashed his pledge on free movement. He has appeared more intent on fighting the Labour Party membership, via successive waves of prohibitions, than fighting the Tories.

His regime has discouraged and suppressed education and discussion on antisemitism, and "dealt with" the issue by scattershot suspensions and expulsions.

Wooing "business"

To many voters Labour must look more ashamed of itself and anxious to get back into favour with "business" than combative against the Tories.

The Tories' poll buoyancy cannot be put down to people rallying round the government in the Covid emergency, or to the "vaccine bounce". In Norway, the right-wing coalition has been voted out despite maybe the best Covid-curb record of any country not closing its borders rigidly. (The credit should probably go to "inherited" high social provision and relatively low inequality).

In Germany, the long-ruling CDU is doing poorly for the 26 September election despite a Covid record better than its neighbours'.

Tory poll buoyancy cannot be attributed to the appeal of Boris Johnson's blather about "levelling up", either. Inequality has risen during the pandemic and is set to rise further. NHS waiting lists have ballooned. The Tories con-

cede social care is in impasse, but offer little for it. The Tories have spent a lot on the pandemic, but mostly through handouts to private contractors like Serco and G4S for test-and-trace operations of low efficacy. They have increased taxes for the low and middle-paid, though not for the rich, while enforcing cuts in local government. Now they are cutting Universal Credit.

The theory of an irresistible swing to right-wing nationalist sentiment does not hold up, either. The Brexit vote of 2016 opened the way for sub-Trump types like Johnson and Patel to gain power, but since early 2015 the percentage saying immigration should be reduced has gone down from 69% to 50%, and of those saying it should be increased, up from 10% to 18%.

In Norway, the right-wing Progress Party lost ground in the election; in Germany, the AfD has lost ground since early 2020 and looks like doing worse than in 2017; in France, Marine Le Pen has lost ground, although partly to another far-right candidate, Eric Zemmour.

The problem is about more than beating the Tories in the polls. To deal with the climate emergency, the damaged NHS, and more, we need government better than just "not Tory". We need a workers' government, as responsive and accountable to the working-class majority as governments since Thatcher have been to the belligerent bourgeoisie, and we need it urgently.

On that score, too, we need leadership much better than Starmer, and, as a precondition and basis, a revitalisation of the labour movement at ground level.

Lockdowns and mass work-from-home have pushed back the unions. Some workplace union groups boosted activity early in the first 2020 lockdown, and unions have improved organisation among school support workers and among care workers.

Overall, though, the small increase in union membership in 2020-1 was more a product of increased employment in relatively-unionised public sector areas than an improvement in density and organisation.

Wages have been pushed up recently in fast food, but by atomistic "market forces" rather than collective struggle: bosses have trouble recruiting for some jobs, despite total employment shrinking since February 2020.

Yet there is potential. The big Black Lives Matter and Police Bill protests brought tens of thousands of young people into political action for the first time.

The Unite general secretary result was, broadly, an advance for the left. Despite new Unite general secretary Sharon Graham advocating less atten-

tion to politics ("Westminster"), Unite will vote against confirming old-Blairite David Evans as Labour general secretary.

In Unison, the left has won the National Executive for the first time ever. In the GMB, new general secretary Gary Smith is at least no more right-wing than his forerunner Tim Roache, more oriented to organising, and sometimes stropky with the Labour leadership.

According to [The Times](#) Labour membership has dropped from 550,000 in early 2020 to 430,000. Anecdotal evidence confirms that many left-wingers have dropped out, or become less active.

However, there was a very similar drop in membership between July 2017 and November 2019. [Motions](#) to the 25-29 September conference show that the right-wing caucus Labour To Win have done badly with their recommendations, and the tone is still broadly leftist. A [survey](#) in July 2021 found 70% of members who had voted in the 2016 Labour leadership poll saying they backed Jeremy Corbyn, though in fact Corbyn got 62% of the vote then.

Political axis

The Labour left needs, most of all, a political axis around which to rebuild, or it probably will indeed dissipate. There is widespread half-recognition that "old Corbynism" will not serve, with its discreditable floundering on Brexit and antisemitism, its habits of having policy handed down from "posh Stalinists" in the Leader's Office, and its neglect of street and workplace activity.

We need an internationalist and class-struggle axis.

All factions of the left should unite to fight for and practise democracy. The "Corbyn surge" was never going to take us to socialism with one election-winning leap. It could have built durable democratic structures in the Labour Party. It could have built lively Young Labour and Labour Students movements rather than leaving Young Labour even weaker than it was under Miliband and Labour Students officially disbanded.

Some democratic gains were won in the Corbyn era. The leadership still shelves and fudges on conference policy, as ever, but this year's Labour conference will have debates on 20 policy areas. In high Blairism, from 1997 to 2003, conference could debate only four motions, all selected by the unions, and Blair would then demonstratively declare that he paid no heed anyway.

From 2003 that was increased to four selected by the unions, four by the CLPs (though, until 2012, the total was often fewer than eight, since CLPs were often fewer than eight, since CLPs were duped into choosing areas which the unions had already chosen). In 2007-9 motions were for a while abolished alto-

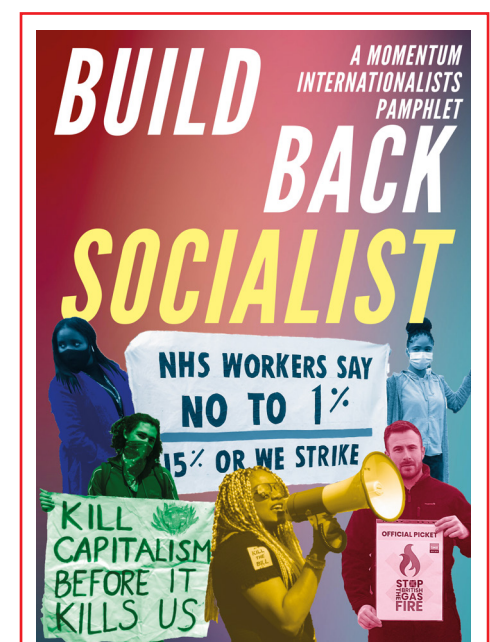
gether. In high Blairism the stitched-up National Policy Forum report went to conference only on a "take-it-or-leave-it" basis, and was almost impossible to overturn. Now sections of the NPF report can be, and even are, referred back section-by-section.

Stitched-up Local Campaign Forums still inhibit local-government-level democracy. The National Executive Committee remains deprived of the political authority it had before Blair, subordinate to the unelected "Leader's Office" and Shadow Cabinet: its [change](#) of structure from 1997 remains in force and makes it tamer.

On one dimension Labour democracy got worse in the Corbyn era. From 2015 there were successive big waves of "auto-exclusions" (without due process) and suspensions. The foundation for those was laid by the centralised membership registration introduced in the 1990s, but Blair relied more on members dropping out, or being ignored if they stayed in, than on excluding large numbers.

The first waves in 2015 and 2016 were executed by Labour HQ staff to try to undermine Corbyn. Those eased off after Corbyn won his second leadership poll. But the regime under Jennie Formby as general secretary continued to suspend members by the dozens and hundreds, to instruct them that all complaint would be considered a disciplinary offence, and to hold them suspended for years.

Starmer's new general secretary David Evans has turbo-charged the purging. Labour needs a democracy of pluralism, debate, and due process. □



Social inequality has deepened the Covid pandemic; the pandemic has deepened inequality. This new pamphlet offers ideas for the labour movement to regroup and fight back on socialist lines. □

momentuminternationalists.org

Solidarity 608 on 13 October

Solidarity 608 will be out on 13 October, not 6 October as it would be in our usual weekly schedule. In the week of 6 October we will focus on distributing the forthcoming new issue of [Women's Fightback](#). □

Why care workers are striking



Interview

By Julia Veros Gonzalez

Julia Veros Gonzalez is a worker at the Sage nursing home in Barnet, North London, where members of United Voices of the World (UVW) have been striking and campaigning over pay, sick pay and holiday parity with NHS workers, and union recognition (bit.ly/uvw-sg). She spoke to Sacha Ismail.

Key workers – care workers, people sweeping the streets, drivers – getting up early in the morning or working at night, doing long shifts – sometimes as care workers we do twelve hours – we don't mind doing it, we want to help people, we're doing it the best we can, but we should be treated differently.

I've been at Sage for two and a half years now. I've only worked part-time, but I quickly noticed different workers being treated differently, given different rights.

I'm from Spain. I came to the UK seven years ago. I was also here before, 1973 to 81.

Once the pandemic started, some people didn't have access to masks and things like that. I started to have more and more issues with management.

I knew another worker called Bella, who had been in UVW for a while, and she talked about the union and we started to join, quite quickly about 25 of us, about half the workforce. We held a meeting and decided there were some basic things we needed to have some dignity at work [see their demands here bit.ly/uvw-d].

My salary is £9.10. The ones who have been there for longer, I think they get

£9.60 – so it's not even the London Living Wage. We decided to call for £12.

How did you decide on £12? CaSWO [the Care and Support Workers Organise network, which the Sage workers are part of] and now GMB have called for £15.

£15 is a good demand; but we felt we needed something which was a step forward but immediately winnable. They responded that this was not possible because they're a charity. Let's be clear: several of their trustees are billionaires and the Freshwaters [brothers Benzion and Solomon] are some of the biggest landlords in London.

We are increasingly understaffed, to the point where it is very difficult to carry out our basic work. They are making increasing use of agency staff, which is a real problem because agency workers typically don't know what to do. The jobs have to be done, and we do them, but it is more difficult, more stressful and everything takes longer. It is an issue for the welfare of residents too. This is a specific problem which we are now campaigning about, and we are raising it with the Care Quality Commission.

Who works at Sage? How do you organise?

Mostly women. Mostly early middle-aged: 30s, 40s, 50s. It's mostly migrants, from many different places – Filipinos, Africans, Indians, South Americans, Eastern Europeans... Quite a lot of second-generation people.

We talk pretty much constantly on Whatsapp; we have quite regular Zoom meetings, extremely regular around the time of the strike days; and we also find opportunities to speak in the workplace.

I'm also now on the wider executive



for UVW. Our contacts in the union have obviously been limited by the pandemic but more should be possible now with physical meetings.

You struck in January and February?

The first time we had only one day and more limited numbers on the picket lines. We did things like chalking the pavements. On the second strike we did more days and had more people with us. However we had masks and hand sanitiser and everything; we were responsible. Overall I think we did well.

The management started to make noises about things changing, about talking to us. They set up a staff forum. We elected representatives, but then found management wanted to drag things out. It got to summer this year and they still hadn't held the first meeting. They kept coming up with new excuses.

Meanwhile they have started victimising some workers who are members of the union [see bit.ly/cw-v-h].

Now it's clear to more workers now that management are not going to do anything without more struggle. We are restarting our campaigning – leafleting, getting posters up in shops. I should say we have great support in the Jewish community, which is important

because Sage is very much linked to that community.

We're looking at striking again at the start of October. Any support is welcome – publicity and donations for the strike fund are very important. Come to our picket lines and demonstrations.

What would you advocate to transform social care more widely?

Very simple: it should be public. Everyone should be able to go to a public care home or have a public service helping them. If anyone wants to run private care homes, or a private agency, ok. But they need to pay good wages and give workers good conditions. We can't say the public sector will pay everyone over £15, but in the private sector you can pay less than £10. Then I don't think they will bother to set up. For people who need care it should be free. You could have some small fee, but not like now. Ideally, everything should be free.

Do other workers at Sage discuss these wider issues?

Yes, absolutely. This is something people want. Most of us don't want to work for the private sector! □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/j-v-g

Turn back Patel, not the boats

By Mohan Sen

France's right-wing government, whose leader Emmanuel Macron has called for Europe to "protect itself from waves of Afghan immigration", has opposed Priti Patel's plans to forcibly turn back migrant boats in the Channel as incompatible with "safeguarding human lives". The MP for Calais, from the even more right-wing Les Republicains, calls it a violation of human rights "that should not be tolerated in a modern society".

Of course right-wing French politicians do not want more migrants kept in France. Still, the Tories are putting them-

selves in the vanguard of European anti-migrant politics.

Border Force staff are being trained to employ "turn-around tactics" to force boats back into French waters. Patel suggests this will also apply to people from Afghanistan.

Not content with this barbarism, some Conservative MPs are calling for the Home Secretary to break international law and send all migrants arriving illegally by boat straight back to France.

TUC Congress earlier in September discussed nothing of any substance nothing about migrants' rights. Some decent motions on migrants' rights, including on the so-called



refugee crisis, have been submitted to Labour conference (25-29 September), but it seems likely Keir Starmer's leadership will try to evade firm commitments. The labour movement must speak up for migrants. □



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, many held online over zoom. A selection (excluding **student** meetings):

Sunday 26 September 6:30 - 8pm: The Tories, immigration controls and modern slavery

Monday 27 September, 7:30 - 9pm: Marx, the Environment and the Metabolic Rift

Saturday 2 October 10am: Corbynism: what went wrong?

Sunday 3 October, 12pm: Berlin's Third Sex – Socialist Feminist Reading Group (online, or in-person Sunday 10 Oct, 2pm)

Sunday 3 October, 6:30 - 8pm: Capital Vol. 1 reading group

Monday 4 October, 7:30 - 9pm: Solidarity with Afghanistan

Saturday 9 October, 12pm: Meat: environmentally bad, or a non-issue? – reading group

For our calendar and more details, see workersliberty.org/events or scan QR code □



Care, caring and a shorter working week



Letter

The editorial in [Solidarity 606](#) highlights well the need to fight for a bold programme for social care, funded by taxing the rich. There is a further area worth considering in the fight for liberatory and humanistic social care, wider carework, and society.

Nancy Fraser, in *After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment*, argues persuasively for welfare states geared towards a “universal caregiver” model:

“to induce men to become more like most women are now, namely, people who do

primary carework... a welfare state[s] employment sector would not be divided into two different tracks [i.e. part-time and full-time employment, which remain heavily gendered]; all jobs would be designed for workers who are caregivers, too; all would have a shorter workweek than full-time jobs have now; and all would have the support of employment-enabling services. [H]owever, employees would not be assumed to shift all carework to social services. Some informal carework would be publicly supported and integrated on a par with paid work in a single social-insurance [non means-tested] system. Some... in households

by relatives and friends, but... not necessarily [in] heterosexual nuclear families. [Some i]n state-funded but locally organized institutions”

This seeks to undercut forces behind restrictive and unequal gender roles, while responding to contemporary capitalist crises of care. This would improve the situation of women and of gender and sexual minorities in particular, as well as recipients of care who could receive more flexible support from family, friends, lovers if preferred. (I would recommend the 2020 docudrama *The Mole Agent* for moving insights on the latter point.) The fight for a shorter working week is a fight for freedom



beyond the direct oversight of our bosses and the ruling class.

Fraser’s approach is limited: she relies overly on something like a “Universal Basic Income”, as against “Universal Basic Services”. She wrongly sees the state, more than the working-class, as the most

important agent of change. Still, the fight for both shorter working-weeks across the board, and for support of flexible “informal” carework should be part of our vision for social care. □

Mike Zubrowski,
Bristol

Yes, celebrate Yuri Gagarin!



Letter

Rhodri Evans ([Solidarity 604](#)) quotes Astronomer Royal Martin Rees, who described the advances provided by the International Space Station as “meagre” to support his opposition to increased human space flight.

Quoting this, whilst ignoring Rees’s belief in humanity’s expansion into the Galaxy on the basis of discovery and adventure, is however remarkably short-sighted. Rees rightly believes that the durability of robots makes them better suited to certain aspects of space flight, but has never ruled out human involvement in, nor humanity’s desire to explore space.

Whilst probes have been flung into the furthest reaches

of our Solar System and are collecting essential information on our planetary and cosmic origins, robotic dexterity and maintenance requirements make some discoveries impossible without the support of humans. Unless Rhodri (who is well-versed in the limitations of robotics) wishes to limit scientific advances to those only possible with remote-operated instrumentation, he must accept the need for human space exploration too.

He states that “since 1972 no government has found sending humans... beyond low Earth orbit worthwhile”. This being the case, since 1972, all governments have failed, and humanity is poorer for it. That said, Rhodri may wish to read more on NASA’s Gateway and Artemis programmes, which plan to develop capabilities to put humans back on the Moon,



and then Mars. Although missions to land humans on the Lunar and Martian surfaces have been sorely lacking in the last five decades, it is at least understood that scientific advance has been slowed as a result. This is now (hopefully) being corrected.

Finally Rhodri challenges the cause that Gagarin served. But Gagarin proved human space flight possible, and opened up endless possibilities for scientific discoveries, of the kind we can only yet imagine. His contribution to science is worth remembering. □

Lewis Joyes, Cambridge

Pouliopoulos and “return”



Letter

The debates about “return” as the redress-slogan for the Palestinian people (Dale Street, [Solidarity 606](#)) echo the aftermath of the 1919-22 war between Greece and Turkey.

The centuries-old Ottoman Empire collapsed in and after World War 1. Britain and France sought to scoop up most of its territories. Turkey was fighting to establish itself as an independent state. Greece, backed by Britain, went to war. Sections of the Greek ruling class aspired to a “Greater Greece” including the three great Greek city-populations of the time, in Smyrna (now Izmir), Constantinople (now Istanbul), and Thessaloniki.

By the end, 1922-3, Turkey had won. The Greek population of Smyrna had been driven out with great violence and deaths. A “population exchange” overseen by the League of Nations had evicted about 1.3 million Greeks (or at least Orthodox Christians, sometimes Turkish-speaking) from the newly-created Turkey, and 0.4 million Muslims (now labelled Turks) and 0.1 million Bulgarians from areas decreed Greek of Macedonia and Thrace.

The Communist International had backed Turkey in the Greek-Turkish war, without supporting the anti-Greek atrocities. Now, in a policy drift licensed by the Fourth Comintern Congress of 1922 but sharpened after the “Zinovievite” 5th Congress of 1924, it went beyond denouncing the population transfers to demanding “return” of the transferred groups.

The Greek Communist Party, and notably its leader Pantelis Pouliopoulos, later a Trotskyist, and killed by Italian occupation forces in 1943, opposed that drift. “Return” was impossible without renewed war.

In fact, because the Comintern leadership then favoured the Bulgarian CP and its attempted alliance with Bulgarian-leaning Macedonian nationalists, the Comintern policy tended to narrow down to supporting Bulgarian claims in Macedonia and Thrace.

Those areas now had few Bulgarian inhabitants, and CP support for Bulgarian claims could only come across as a cool attitude to the Greek refugees now scrabbling amidst great hardship and disease to build new lives. The story is told in Joseph Rothschild’s history of the Bulgarian Communist Party, pp.233ff. □

Colin Foster,
London

Attack on trade union political action



Letter

One aspect not covered in the article in [Solidarity 606](#) on the Elections Bill is the specific attack on trade union funding in elections.

A provision in the bill would further restrict campaigning by non-party groups. It would also affect initiatives like La-

bour for a Socialist Europe (or Vote Leave), but would have a larger impact on the affiliated unions.

It would mean joint campaigns require the declaration of spending by all groups involved, both reducing the total amount available and creating further bureaucracy.

Currently non-party groups are allowed to spend up to £390,000 in an election. TULO,

the body that represents the Labour affiliated unions, has said the Elections Bill would limit each union to spending just £30,000.

While what unions spend their money on in elections is a legitimate question – fewer beanie hats and more politics might be a start – this law should be opposed. □

Stephen Wood,
Southwark

Hong Kong: silence is not an option



Eric Lee

When the question of trade unions in China would come up, some of us were fond of saying that there is an independent, democratic trade union movement in the country. It is called the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions.

This is no longer true.

In the last week, news has come out of a move by the HKCTU to disband. This is an enormous blow to the Chinese working class and to the international labour movement.

It appears that the HKCTU is the latest victim of a Chinese government crack-down not only on the unions, but on all of civil society.

The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, one of the HKCTU's largest member unions, voted to disband on 11 September. News emerged this week that the journalists' union has been accused by a national security official of "having political preferences and receiving foreign funding". The International Federation of Journalists called this "deeply concerning".

For more than thirty years, the HKCTU has been a lone voice in China representing workers and defending their rights. Tens of thousands of workers joined unions that were affiliated to it. Its leaders achieved world-wide recognition, in particular its founder and general secretary, Lee Cheuk-yan.

But according to a report in the *Hong Kong Free Press*, Lee "is currently serving concurrent sentences of 18 months for his participation in the 2019 pro-democracy protests. He also faces a national security charge of 'incitement to subversion.'" Other leaders of Hong Kong's unions are also in jail.

What is the labour movement outside of China doing about this?

At the moment, it seems like very little.

No doubt there is some activity happening behind the scenes. Some are cautioning that too loud a protest by free unions outside of China will fuel the claims by the state that the trade unions in Hong Kong, like other civil society organisations, are tools of foreign powers and receive foreign money.

There may well be merit to that argument. One should certainly do nothing to make things worse for the trade unionists of Hong Kong. But that cannot be an excuse for inaction.

Every government that crushes unions likes to claim that they are the tools of shadowy international conspiracies. This is not something invented by the Chinese Communist Party – it is a well-established trope, part of the playbook for every authoritarian regime.

The fact is that the unions in Hong Kong, like unions everywhere, are created by their members, and draw their strength from thousands of workers recruited to their ranks. It is not the occasional gesture of solidarity from a foreign union that gives these unions their

strength – that comes from within.

For unions to be saying and doing nothing is sending the wrong signal, and not only to the Chinese Communist government. Governments in places like Iran and Myanmar are regular abusers of workers' rights, and have often been met by strong resistance from democratic trade unions around the world. The military dictatorship in Myanmar is struggling to be treated as legitimate, with unions playing a leading role in the effort to get them kicked out of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and more recently the United Nations.

No one is saying that we cannot raise the issue of workers' rights in Iran or Myanmar because that could be used against our comrades in those countries.

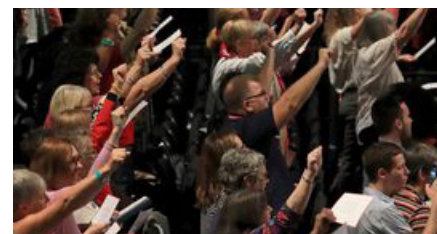
The same is true with Hong Kong and China.

It is only by raising our voices, and consistently demanding that all governments, everywhere, respect workers' rights, that we have any chance of succeeding.

How we do that, and what language we use, of course needs to be guided by what our comrades in those countries tell us is best.

But for the international labour movement today, silence is not an option. □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal opinion column.



Activist Agenda

At Labour Party conference, 25-29 September in Brighton, Neurodivergent Labour is pushing to refer back a section of the National Policy Forum report because it ignored submissions on rights of autistic, dyslexic, and other neurodivergent people.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement will be backing motions against the Borders Bill and for an open door for Afghan refugees, and has a fringe meeting on migrant rights (jointly with Another Europe is Possible) 12:45pm on Tuesday 28th at The Walrus, 10 Ship St, BN1 1AD.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and the Hong Kong campaign LMS-HKUK will be backing motions for Uyghur and Hong Kong rights. Free Our Unions will be backing motions to reaffirm Labour conference policy, never yet taken up consistently by the leadership, for the repeal of all anti-union laws including the Thatcher-era ones. □

• Links and info for these and other campaigns, suggestions for labour movement motions and petitions: workersliberty.org/agenda

Beijing pushes Hong Kong revolt underground

By Ralph Peters

Hong Kong's Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) is being forced to disband in the face of a brutal offensive by the Chinese government. The HKCTU is the only body coordinating independent unions in Hong Kong. It has long supported universal suffrage against the rule of Hong Kong by the pro-CCP and tycoon-dominated Legislative Council and the Beijing-appointed Chief Executive.

At its press conference on 13 September, the HKCTU announced that it was recommending disbandment to a general meeting of its affiliates on 3 October.

Vice Chair Leo Tang, one of the three remaining Executive Committee members – the others having already resigned – explained that this was because of threatening messages sent to their leadership.

HKCTU has been under investigation for violations of the 2020 National Security Law (NSL) for the last few weeks.

Tang said that organisations with whom the HKCTU is in contact, such as the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) were being considered as "foreign forces". Under the NSL, "collusion with foreign forces" is deemed "subversion" and liable to incur a life sentence.

Tang would not expand on what threatening messages they had received. But last week, pro-CCP media *Tao Kung Pao* ran an article in which the Hong Kong Commissioner of Police – appointed by Beijing – was exclusively interviewed.

In the article, unsubstantiated attacks were made on the HKCTU. It claimed that the HKCTU had received "black gold" from the US over 26 years – a dishonest refer-



ence to trade union financial support for its training programmes.

That it had published children's books inciting "violence" – a reference to a picture book, *Guardians of the Sheep Village*, published by five speech therapists, about sheep needing to defend themselves from wolves. Those trade unionists have since been arrested for sedition.

Tao Kung Pao also accused the HKCTU of organising strikes with political objectives (the crime of crimes from an anti-working-class viewpoint).

Xi Jinping's desire is for Hong Kong to become just another Chinese city where work-

ing class revolt is episodic and generally squashed by overwhelming state repression; where obedience is ensured by nationalist rhetoric and by economic advances for its "middle class" (and some better-off workers, as long as they remain compliant).

That won't work so easily in Hong Kong, which faces a difficult economic future and where Chinese nationalist propaganda has little positive history.

Despite the repression now being imposed on Hong Kong, the spirit of democratic revolt will not disappear. Pro-Beijing authorities are banning all dissenting working class organisations, rewriting the history curriculum in schools, and destroying the oppositional press. But they cannot abolish the recent memories of millions of Hong Kong people.

If the HKCTU does disband at its general meeting on 3 Oc-

tober, that will make it harder to make links between the everyday oppression of Hong Kong workers in the workplace and political oppression from their Hong Kong, Beijing, and before that, British, rulers.

It will be a major setback. However it will make clearer to the workers in Hong Kong driven underground, or in their hundreds of thousands overseas, that their fight for liberty is an inseparable part of the fight of workers across China. □

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 for the current stock and prices, and to order. □

Less carbon emitted means less pasture farming



Environment

By Zack Muddle

Second part of a two-part article responding to David Walters (Solidarity 586: bit.ly/dw-soil)

In Solidarity 606 I argued that, for soil health and carbon content, we need vastly fewer, not more, grass-eating animals worldwide. Below, I make the case for the wider environmental need to urgently diminish animal products, globally; and how we should approach this transition.

Costs of meat

Producing food via animals is much less efficient than producing it directly from plants (bit.ly/forest-s). There is variation, of course, but animal products generally require an order of magnitude more land (or ocean) and more energy per meal.

With our current agricultural methods and energy sources this translates into much greater environmental destruction. Even if moving to green energy sources and “regenerative” food production, animal products still bring a real – albeit much smaller – cost.

If, tomorrow, we win a global socialist revolution, and phase out fossil fuels and other major greenhouse gasses the day after, we will still have a major problem. We would have the emissions from past centuries to deal with. Without active climate intervention – such as removing carbon from the carbon cycle – they would continue to drive increasing climate catastrophe, irreversible destruction. In fact, even with active climate intervention they would do so, just somewhat less horrifically.

Net carbon draw-down on any significant and rapid scale will be an unnatural and damaging process. We don’t yet know what methods would be most effective, and least destructive, for doing so – if viable at all. But we do know that

they would all require swathes of land, energy, or ocean. Land, such as mass tree planting; energy, such as direct capture machines; or ocean, such as seaweed, creating biomass to have its carbon extracted and stored underground.

Raising fossil fuels from underground and burning them is much easier than recapturing the carbon, and removing it from the cycle once again. The difficulty is greater still given the shorter time-period we must do it over; and the need to do it in a democratic, just way, one which factors in other environmental concerns.

The industries which extract, refine, and burn fossil fuels now are big: the land, energy, and oceans needed to take the edge of this current mess must be bigger still. Not just tackling greenhouse gasses, but the other environmental crises too, such as rewilding to combat biodiversity and ecosystem loss.

Unnecessarily using these natural resources for a very inefficient mode of producing food, on anything comparable to the current scale, would compete with the necessary efforts.

To the extent that we pursued the necessary climate interventions – while ensuring plentiful, nutritious, and delicious food for all – animal products would become more difficult to produce. This would drive up their relative price, and drive down their relative availability.

We should celebrate this change in itself. But we must openly recognise it as an inevitable consequence of an environmentally responsible programme. As Trotsky put it, for revolutionaries it is imperative to “face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones”.

Some aspects of the necessary environmental transition are bitter. Even more bitter than dietary transforma-



tions, for internationalist socialists, is the necessity – for the foreseeable future – of limiting flying.

The transition

Culturally, some may find a transition away from animal products difficult. Socialists should not moralise over individual consumer choices; nor should we advocate state restrictions on the availability of animal products. Mass movement away from animal product dominated diets may be slower than many other social and environmental transitions. Public investment in lab grown meat, and being honest in our environmental discussions, may help.

The socialist transformation of agriculture and food, as with the economy in general, is primarily concerned with “the commanding heights of the economy”. Agricultural and food workers, organised democratically at work, will be central to any transition.

Around the world – and particularly in the global south – there are many subsistence farmers and hunters, nomadic people and inuits, who rely on animals, and products derived from them, for their food and way of life. Some make an income from selling animal products

on a small scale. Many have very little negative – or even a positive – impact on the environment.

It should go without saying that the ecological imperative for a vast reduction of animal products does not apply to them. Indeed, the large majority of meat eaten is a purchased commodity, mostly in richer parts of the world. □



Corrections

Part of a URL made its way into the text of “More cows will mend soil, will mend climate? No!” (Zack Muddle, [Solidarity 606](https://solidarity.606)), so that it read “Soil carbon can be increased-after-geoengineering...”; it should have read just “Soil carbon can be increased...”. The next environmental reading group has been moved to midday Saturday 9 October. The next socialist feminist reading group will start at 2pm on Sunday 10 October. See workersliberty.org/events □



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Supporting gas is not left wing



Letter

Sacha Ismail’s report on the TUC congress ([Solidarity 606](https://solidarity.606)) misses a crucial point on climate change. “The most lively debate was on climate change... [m]uch of the debate focused on the motion’s support for nuclear energy. As some speakers pointed out, the much wider problem

is that it advocated essentially not very much change at all.”

The [motion](https://solidarity.606) is not left wing, detailed, environmental or substantive. The reason to oppose it (rather than bemoan its inadequacies) is its support for gas, for gas-derived “blue hydrogen”, for carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) to help drive further gas. It has nationalistic undertones. Supporting nuclear power is not a problem, being pro-business

(including nuclear business) is.

Opposing nuclear while overlooking gas is to tacitly accept gas as a “lesser evil”. Doing so minimises the threats of climate change, irrationally distorts the dangers from nuclear power out of all proportion, and/or makes a reactive conflation between rightly abhorred nuclear weapons and the distinct issue of nuclear energy supply. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

A win for teenagers' rights

By Angela Driver

The Court of Appeal have overruled the Tavistock vs Bell judgement. This is good news for young trans people under 18. It means that they are no longer legally obliged to get permission from the court to receive puberty blockers.

It is also good news for other young people whose ability to make choices about medical treatments rests on "Gillick competency".

"Gillick competency" is based on a legal case in 1985 in which Victoria Gillick was defeated in her attempt to rescind NHS guidance which allowed under 18s to access contraception without parental approval. The original Tavistock vs Bell judgement put that precedent under threat.

By her own account Keira Bell had a difficult family life as a teenager. Like many teenagers going through puberty, she struggled with her identity. She wanted medical treatment to help

her transition to be a man. Now she regrets those decisions, and feels the Tavistock clinic did not support her enough, did not explore the other options before starting medical management.

It is certainly true that the NHS provides a woefully inadequate service to trans people, and the original court case highlighted many failings by the Tavistock. But it is not true that it is easy for trans teenagers to access puberty blockers. The waiting lists are so long (and will remain so long after the new ruling) that many end puberty before getting treatment.

Going through puberty is often difficult. Eating disorders, self-harm, and other mental health issues continue to increase among teenagers. Many teenagers struggle with their identity. It is right that medical professionals should carefully assess a teenager's ability to consent before starting medical treatment for gender dysphoria.

But the great majority of teenagers



do not identify as trans. The stigma against trans people is such that many are only just beginning to have the courage to transition.

Kiera's solicitors are Sinclairs Law. The same firm is acting for Heidi Crowter, who has Down's syndrome – she's legally challenging what she sees as "abortion discrimination" against disabled people. The case is being widely supported by Christian organisations hoping to undermine access to abortion.

They are pursuing an agenda where teenagers need to be "protected"

from trans people. This often goes along with the belief that women and lesbians also need to be "protected" from trans people, and women, especially sex workers, must be "protected" against men.

As socialists we are for liberty. We want people to be empowered to decide things for themselves and to call in help and protection when they need it, and not necessarily from the state. Even when the "protectors" mean well, such protection can often result in oppression. □

Confronting antisemitism on the left



Book review

By Omar Raii

The double meaning apparent in the title of Daniel Randall's new book *Confronting Antisemitism on the Left* expresses its two important aims: to confront antisemitism which appears on the left while at the same time confronting antisemitism firmly from a left perspective.

Grabbing the baton from Steve Cohen's important 1984 analysis of left-wing antisemitism, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Antisemitic*, and running much further, Randall's book is not only sharp in its arguments about the nature of antisemitic forms of leftist discourse, but it's also very well grounded in the history of the different forms that antisemitism has

taken on the left.

This includes what may be termed "primitive antisemitism", the centuries-old conspiratorial view of Jews being associated with finance or secretive power, which though ancient has clearly not been absent from the milieu of many Labour party members as the many examples in the book illustrate. As well as quoting infamous antisemitic statements from well-known left-wingers such as Bakunin and Proudhon, more remarkably, Randall also discusses the origins and critiques the problems with the well-known adage that well-meaning socialists fall upon when describing antisemitism as the "socialism of fools".

Though indeed well-meaning, there has always been within that phrase a half implication that an antisemite has rightly diagnosed the problem but misattributed it to Jews. Antisemitism and anti-capitalism should not be partial synonyms; someone who has subscribed to antisemitic ideas isn't "partially right" about anything and the view that someone denouncing Jewish bankers is on their way to becoming a socialist



if only they stopped saying the word Jewish has its own problematic consequences. The book emphasises strongly the disempowering nature of conspiracy theories that end up turning people away from seeing the real problems with a capitalist system whose essential processes are carried out in the open and clear for all to see.

Another strain of left antisemitism that is investigated in detail is the legacy of Stalinist antisemitism, from the Doctors' Plot of the 1950s to the "anti-Zionist" campaigns during the Cold War. This form of antisemitic anti-Zionism,

and its overlap with a "campist" worldview that sees Israel as not just an oppressive state towards the Palestinians (undoubtedly true) but as in some sense the embodiment of world imperialism (a view that leads to seeing any force that considers itself anti-Zionist to be necessarily progressive) has been one of the major problems with the worldview of many on the left and the need to confront this ideological error for left antisemitism to ever be defeated is articulately discussed in great length.

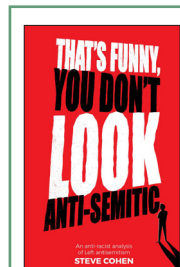
The problem of whether or not specifically left-wing forms of antisemitism can be considered racism or a form of oppression is intriguingly discussed as a separate chapter, with the author giving his own view and contrasting it with those of other serious thinkers who have written about the issue. Though concluding that left antisemitism is not always best understood as straightforwardly racist behaviour and instead considers it as an ideological problem, Randall is nevertheless sharp in his opposition to it not simply because problematic worldviews hamper the left's wider project but because there has been

clear historical precedence for ideologically reactionary views such as antisemitism being an intellectual weapon of projects that do cause violence and oppression towards certain groups.

Randall also spends time dealing with how we may combat left-wing antisemitism and promote an ideologically healthier left, while at the same time critiquing the problems with attempting to right the wrong of left antisemitism by bureaucratic methods, a tactic surely likely to fail. Notwithstanding individual antisemites whose behaviour constitutes harassment or abuse, for whom few would disagree that disciplinary action is appropriate, the major fundamental problems the left in particular has with antisemitism are in the sphere of ideology and the political culture that arises from it.

Confronting Antisemitism on the Left is an ideal tool in the arsenal of socialists to use in the extremely necessary work of arguing against and ideologically confronting the poison of the left antisemitic worldview. □

• 200 pages, £10: bit.ly/c-l-as



A socialist dissects Left antisemitism. Third ed., 212 pages, £5

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A feminist speaks from



Interview

Mariam, an activist with the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, living in Afghanistan, spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity

There have been some demonstrations for women's rights since the Taliban returned to power. Can you tell us more about that?

The demonstrations started in the first week of full Taliban rule, particularly in Herat in the west of Afghanistan and in Kabul and other cities. In these cities at least women before the collapse of the old government had some basic rights, like working and going to school and university. These were small demonstrations, dozens of women rather than hundreds or thousands. Even communication is difficult at the moment. But demonstrations took place in quite a lot of places, and that showed the power and strength that women in Afghanistan have.

Women could see immediately their rights are being violated. A lot of those demonstrating were women employees, especially in government bodies. Women workers in both the state and private sector have been sent home. Often these women are the sole breadwinners for their families; there are a large number of widows living in Kabul and other areas.

Since the Taliban returned, many schools are closed, with only some primary schools remaining open. Even there they are insisting the male and female children must be separated. [Since the interview secondary schools have started to reopen – but with girls and female staff excluded.]

Of course, before this, women in Afghanistan did not enjoy a lot of rights; it was a very male-dominated society. With the Taliban however it is different. Largely you don't even see women on the streets now. If they are on the streets it is in the burqa.

But Afghan women are not the same as 20 years ago. They have learnt a lot. It is very important to say this was not because of the US or NATO presence. It is because in 20 years a generation has come who have had some basic rights and want to try to keep them. We [RAWA] reject the US's deceiving slogans that it stood for women's rights and democracy in Afghanistan.

The old government was not a democracy, it was a corrupt and rotten re-



gime and in many ways a puppet. But at the same time many women went to school and work and were introduced to a new vision and saw things could be different. They don't want to experience what their mothers experienced under the first period of the Taliban.

Would some of the women workers protesting be members of any trade unions or workers' organisations?

There really isn't much in the way of trade unions in Afghanistan, even among male workers. Our economy is completely different. It's not an industrialised country. A lot of people are shopkeepers and so on, they work in small places. The women I'm talking about, in the cities, have mostly worked in the education system or healthcare, though more of the health system is still running. Also there are women who worked for aid agencies and the like, mainly in Kabul.

The other thing I should say is that there were also some women's rights protests that were joined by men too. However, as soon as the new Taliban administration was established, the very next day, one of the first things they announced was that no protests or demonstrations would be allowed. Unfortunately, the protests came to an end. Then in fact they mobilised some small demonstrations of their own female supporters, covered from head to toe in black, including a meeting at Kabul University. Of course the various fundamentalist groups have a tradition of mobilising their wives and daughters and so on in this way; there are also women who have attended madrassas and are won over.

Do you think there could be student protests against the regime?

In Afghanistan university students have played an important role defend-

ing democracy and progressive values, particularly in the 1960s and 70s but more recently as well. Universities have been an important base for leftist and progressive groups. But again it will be hard for them to demonstrate at least in the period ahead.

What has happened with the media there?

Under the old government there was a lot more usage of the internet and social media. Now it is all changing. In the last few weeks there have been a lot of intellectuals, writers and so on arrested. Many journalists have fled the country or are in hiding. The media networks that have kept going are just putting on entertainment, not any reporting or political discussion. And suddenly there are hardly any women appearing.

There is some debate in the West about whether the Taliban will be as repressive as in the 90s, given the pressure from foreign governments but also the fact that Afghan society has changed. What would you say?

Well, in a sense the Taliban have changed, but not in a positive manner. They have not become more modern, let alone democratic. You can see this reality just from what I have described already. Very soon they will establish their own army and police and intelligence service, and they will control the population more and more. It is absolutely in the nature of the Taliban that they are reactionary fundamentalists. It would be foolish to expect any positive changes.

So for instance they say they are not against women's rights, but listen to what they actually say, that women's rights must come under Sharia law. Sharia law is itself incompatible with the rights of women and means limiting them. The very best that we could

end up with is something like Iran, but of course you know what a misogynistic regime that is, and very likely it will be far worse.

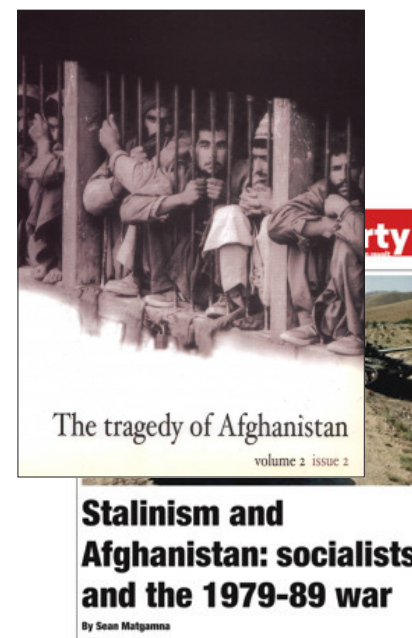
I think that for the majority of Western governments and the Western media, if they can achieve their goals, they are not against dealing with the Taliban and they will find ways to legitimise them. We will hear a lot more about how the Taliban have changed and modernised and so on. The US can deal with so-called "democrats" and technocrats as we had before but it can also deal with jihadist terrorists.

What does RAWA say or what do you say about the US withdrawal?

For 20 years we raised the slogan for independence of the country and against the US occupation. We think that in the long run the US leaving is positive for Afghanistan, because we were an occupied country and because of the US's support for fundamentalist and terrorist groups. But the US will want to try to keep some influence in Afghanistan, partly because it fears the influence of Russia and China. The US can work with so-called "democrats" and technocrats as we had before or it can work with jihadist terrorists.

What role do you expect other governments to play, in particular China?

For China it is a golden opportunity to pursue their own economic interests in the area through friendship with the Taliban. China's involvement will absolutely not benefit the people of Afghanistan. We believe that no foreign power,



More from Workers' Liberty on Afghanistan and the third camp.

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m inside Afghanistan



RAWA in Pakistan, 1998

whether that was the US, the former Soviet Union, Russia or now China can bring justice and peace to Afghanistan. It is only by our own people becoming conscious, becoming organised, being mobilised and rising up that we can achieve justice.

There are food shortages in Afghanistan. How do you think the Taliban will deal with the issue and could it lead to protests?

People will be dissatisfied, of course, the situation is very bad now and getting worse – though poverty and hunger are not a new thing in Afghanistan. We don't know yet what the Taliban will do. Possibly they will allow some international aid agencies and organisations in, but I don't know whether they will allow local NGOs to start running programmes again.

What is your attitude to humanitarian aid? In your view should it be opposed because of the Taliban, or supported anyway to relieve distress?

People are in dire need of assistance. In reality though very little of this kind of assistance reaches needy people. For years foreign aid agencies here operated with their own huge admin costs, and they were ineffective reaching the remote villages. Now many of these organisations no longer function at all. So aid can function as a kind of bribe for the Taliban, propping up and legitimising their government. The Pakistani prime minister, Imran Khan, called it a treat for the Taliban!

Do you have links with women's rights activists and the left in Pakistan?

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan there were many Afghan refugees in Pakistan and RAWA was active there, including in organising hu-

manitarian relief. We were kept under surveillance and pressure from the Pakistani government and Pakistani intelligence services. Our members were arrested and some of our meetings and demonstrations were attacked. We had a good relationship with left and women's rights organisations there. However after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 we moved our organising back to Kabul and so our connections in Pakistan weakened.

We always see a huge difference between the governments we criticise and the ordinary population, the people, and especially those seeking social justice. We criticised the Pakistani government, but we know there are many freedom-loving people and movements in Pakistan; we strongly criticised the United States government, but our biggest networks of supporters are in the US.

In terms of the Taliban's oppression of women, was it previously harsher in the countryside or the cities? How do you think it will be now?

It will be harsher in the cities, as before, because everyday life, and the mentality of the people, is different in the cities compared to the remote villages. Those are the main areas where civil rights exist, where there is some media, some political activities and so on. People in the cities are generally more concerned about these kinds of rights.

In the countryside people are very much involved in the daily routine of getting up and going to work in the fields. In many areas they don't even have electricity, let alone phone connections or the internet. The Taliban has been dominant in these areas for much longer. Now they will be able to carry out their repression in the cities.

In the last 20 years, in the cities, it was extremely rare to find a woman in a burqa. Women wore headscarves but as the years went by they were getting smaller and in general women's clothes were getting less restrictive. Many young women wore tight jeans and maybe long sleeved t-shirts or something like that. There was lots of Western-style fashions. Now all that has been wiped out.

In certain areas, in eastern Afghanistan, women have had the right to work in the fields and do not wear the burqa. They wear their own traditional clothes and small headscarves. The Taliban allowed this for their own self-interested reasons, to keep things running. But in most of Afghanistan women mostly do not work in the fields. They are very much involved in agriculture, but the

work they do is in their own houses or in their gardens or similar.

How much popular support do the Taliban have, in your view? Do they have any support among women?

I would say they have very little support, particularly in the cities. In the rural areas there will be some people who support them – not because they think the Taliban are wonderful, but because they were fed up with the previous government. They were fed up with the bombing of rural areas by the government, backed by the US. Of course it was mostly civilians who were killed. So some people think ok, now we can put an end to this and under the Taliban we can get on with our work in agriculture.

Still, even in the most remote villages of Afghanistan, you will find many people who are concerned about education for their children, including girls, who are concerned about healthcare for women. I always say, Afghan people are not from some other planet. They want rights, they want development, better living standards. So when they see the Taliban taking things backwards, they may not accept that.

On the other hand don't forget that people can be brainwashed. Even some women see the madrassas the Taliban run as a positive thing for children, a good service in a part of the world where there are not many services. That is where most of the Taliban fighters come from, they are young men in the 20s or 30s who were brought up in these schools.

The Taliban is a Pashtun-dominated movement and their new government is Pashtun-dominated. What will their rule mean for different ethnic groups in Afghanistan?

When the various fundamentalist groups were growing in Afghanistan, from the 1970s, they used religious and ethnic differences to build up their forces, by claiming to defend this or that group. In reality they were just as repressive to most people in their "own" communities as the other groups they were fighting. What it did do is encourage a very bad trend, where people think in terms of their own group. Previously things were much more mixed up and fluid in terms of marriages, families, friendships. As an organisation we say that ethnic questions, like gender questions, can only be solved on the basis of a just, secular, democratic government that guarantees equality for all people. However, yes, you are right, the Taliban are a Pashtun movement and they are a threat to other ethnic

groups, in particular the Hazara people who have always been under attack as a minority in the country.

What kind of activities is RAWA trying to organise now?

Even before this, we didn't have offices. We ran out of people's houses, through private meetings in homes and so on. Now it is extremely difficult for us as you can imagine. Some of us have some experience from the first period of Taliban rule, when we regularly documented executions, beatings and the oppression of women. We will do that again. We will continue our fight, with patience and determination. It will be more difficult than before and we will not be as strong. We will have to see what is possible and how we need to adapt.

We have always taken a lot of strength from international support, by which I mean support from activists in other countries. We have never received any support from governments or mainstream organisations. We do need support from freedom- and justice-loving people, more than ever. The first thing is to listen to the voices of those fighting for human rights in Afghanistan and try to magnify them. The second is to understand that the Taliban have not changed, not fundamentally, and to reject and challenge any talk suggesting they have. We are working with V-Day and One Billion Rising to call for solidarity actions around the world on 25 September.

It would be great if people could organise some actions in the UK. □

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Marx, the environment



Debate

By Matt Cooper

For the last twenty years the idea of the “metabolic rift” has become a key component in reconstructing an approach to environmental crises based on the works of Marx. This has been critically discussed in the pages of *Solidarity*, particularly by Paul Hampton, who has suggested that these ideas are an important source for anyone seeking to understand how capitalism impacts on the environment, but do not constitute a rounded theory.

Here, I take a more critical approach, and suggest that the idea of the metabolic rift may be a dead-end.

The idea of the metabolic rift has been popularised by John Bellamy Foster, who has (with others) done important work in showing that Marx and the pre-Stalinist Marxist tradition was strongly engaged in environmental issues. It is the detail of his understanding of “metabolism” that I wish to question.

He suggests that in the 1840s Marx took Feuerbach’s idea that people are part of nature but have become separated (alienated) from it through (in Marx’s rendering) class society and especially capitalism. The rift is that separation. Thus one of the tasks of a socialist movement is to restore humanity to its intimate relationship with nature. Foster, and more assertively Kohei Saito in *Marx’s Ecosocialism*, argues that this idea was developed

in Marx’s later works, particularly *Capital*. Both Foster and Saito see this as an unfinished project. Saito makes the extravagant claim that it is “not possible to comprehend the full scope of [Marx’s] critique of political economy if one ignores its ecological dimension.”

Metabolism and Marx

First, attention should be given to Marx’s use of the word “metabolism” (or rather the German word “Stoffwechsel”). Stoffwechsel also has a more elemental meaning of “interchange of materials”, which informed early English translations of *Capital*. Only in the 1970s did new Penguin translations render this as “metabolism”. This had the merit of making this element of Marx’s thought more transparent, but it needs careful contextualising.

Marx used the word Stoffwechsel in two senses in *Capital* (neither in an extensive or elaborated way).

1. The “social metabolism” of commodity circulation

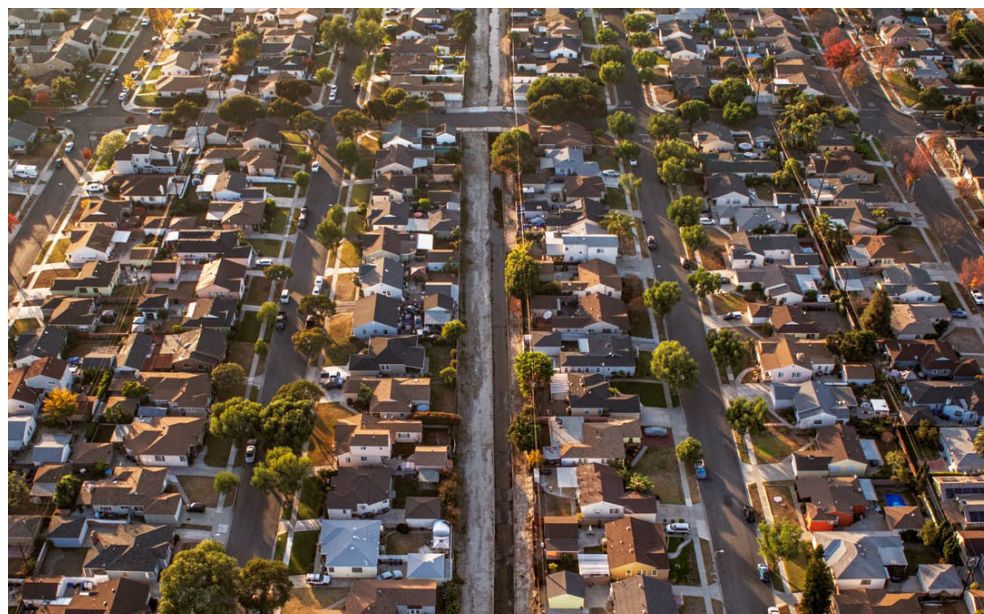
Marx’s use in *Capital* of “social metabolism” might be considered an analogy, although the circulation of commodities as material things can be seen as a step on from humanity’s metabolic relation with nature. Either way, the usage sheds light on Marx’s thinking.

The term is used to describe the circulation of commodities in an unchanged form (a coat retains its form as a coat even as it is bought and sold). This movement is pushed (mediated) by a different process, exchange with money. Here there is a change of form. The value in the form of the coat becomes value in the form of money: Marx calls this “the change in form or the metamorphosis [Metamorphose] of commodities”. Marx also uses the German words Formveränderung and Formwechsel [change of form] as a synonym for this metamorphosis.

So when Marx uses Stoffwechsel/metabolism here, he means a process of movement of a material thing that *does not* change its form. This has nothing to do with the biological process of metabolism which involves changes in form, e.g. from chemical energy to energy in heat. In this context the older translation in *Capital* (“interchange of material”) has some virtue as a translation of Stoffwechsel.

2. The “metabolic” relationship between humanity and nature

The second sense is the more important here. “Labour is”, writes Marx in *Capital*, “a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature.” “Metab-



olism” here does not refer to the transformative labour but the movement (appropriation) of material. This movement cannot happen without transformative labour, labour that facilitates (mediates) this movement of Stoff.

It is important to note the word “between” (zwischen). This has nothing to do with a modern understanding of biological metabolism, a process within a cell or organism which has no “between”. Again, it appears Marx was not thinking of metabolism in the biological sense at all, but the “exchange of material”. Labour is pulling Stoff (material) out of nature, and in so doing it is transformed into the product of labour. But insofar as the material also remains the same material, it is this to which Stoffwechsel/metabolism refers.

The “metabolic rift” and soil science

Finally in volume 1 of *Capital* Marx arrives at the “rift”: “Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance ... it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil”.

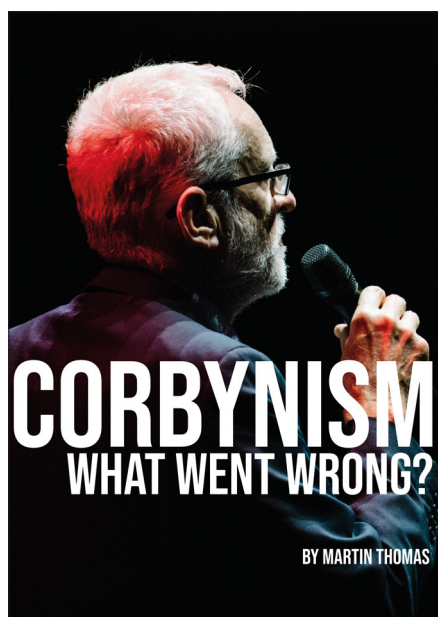
This is a very specific point about agriculture and returning human waste (rags, faeces, bones) to the soil. This was no great new insight. Rather, Marx followed the changing position of the biochemist Justus von Liebig who in the 1840s favoured fertiliser to boost agricultural production, and by the 1860s had changed his view to one in which (in Marx’s terms) capitalist agriculture was robbing the soil for profit.

This is another iteration of Stoffwechsel as the movement of material. Here

the movement is of soil nutrients that are passed to plants and thence to humanity in the form of clothes and food, all the time unchanged it would appear, and what is necessary is to pass the spent residues back to the soil to complete an “eternal” cycle with the earth. This is the description of a cycle without transformation/metamorphosis. It is much more of the form of “material interchange” than of metabolism in its biochemical sense.

But more. If we look closer at the assumed “nature”, both agricultural land and the crops that grow on it are already the products of previous human labour. Most farmland was originally forest, cleared not under capitalism but in the previous 10,000 years of settlement, at least in Europe and the near East. The repeating tilling of the land, the use of natural and manufactured fertilisers, the sowing and harvesting of crops or the grazing of livestock (whose characteristics are themselves the product of human intervention) make this land the product of human labour. Marx and Engels recognised this point as early as 1845 in *The German Ideology*: pristine “nature ... no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin)”. Marx recognises this to a degree in *Capital*. “Animals and plants which we are accustomed to consider as products of nature, may be, in their present form, not only products of... last year’s labour, but the result of gradual transformation continued through many generations under human control, and through the agency of human labour.”

Marx may have underestimated the degree to which agricultural land is the product of human labour. For example, in many parts of Northern Europe from the late Bronze Age, rich plaggen soils were formed by digging animals’ winter bedding into arable land each



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t, and “metabolic rift”

spring, this building up a fertile soil over hundreds of years.

The point here is that the “metabolic rift” does not account for a “nature” that is already the product of past human activity. Most relevantly to the work of Foster and Saito, it shows that Marx did not have the worked-through ecological perspective they suggest, let alone the greater theory covering “depletion of coal reserves, the destruction of forests, and so on” that Foster suggests, although Marx did recognise these as problems.

In much of this Marx drew from Liebig, an important forerunner of soil science who discovered the importance of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium in plant nutrition. As a chemist, however, he had limited practical understanding of soil, which led his underestimation of both its physical and biological nature.

Saito points to Marx’s interest in the German botanist and agronomist Carl Fraas around 1868 (although on a slim amount of material in the new Marx-Engels collected works, MEGA2). Against the chemist Liebig, Fraas was interested in soil’s physical qualities and its interaction with the climate (Saito makes far too much of Fraas’s theories of climate change, which have no relationship to our current greenhouse gas driven crisis).

The problem was that Marx was ploughing the wrong furrow by studying Fraas. After Liebig, the next step towards modern soil science was made by the German geologist Friedrich Fallou, with works published around 1860 which established the study of soil in its own right, including the examination of its formation and degradation. This was developed by Vasily Dokuchaev, publishing only in the year of Marx’s death. His view was of soil as a changing system with chemical, physical and organic elements, as the basis for understanding soil.

Town and country

The one programmatic proposal to follow from Marx’s view on the “metabolic rift” was that the distinction between town and country should be abolished. Marx held this view long before developing ideas of soil depletion, it being mentioned in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848).

The closest to an elaboration of this comes in Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*. As Engels documents, early utopian socialists favoured rural communes combining farming with manufacture. The reasons for support of this are stated in numerous places in Marx and Engels’s work: industrial towns were crowded, fetid, dirty and polluted, stunting the workers’ bodies, whereas the countryside



offered a healthier physical environment that was intellectually stultifying.

This was problematic even in the 1870s. About a fifth worked in agriculture at that time, and the figure now even for a net food exporter like the US is less than one in fifty. There would be little agricultural work for most of these commune dwellers. Engels envisaged each commune having a population of 1,600 to 3,000. Even increasing this to 10,000, in England it would now need communes at intervals of every two miles (east to west and north to south) across the country to house everyone (and two million miles of road to link them, ten times the current amount, not to mention other infrastructure). Even when Engels was writing, the population of England would have required a commune every four miles. This is the obliteration of the countryside.

Perhaps there are cities in the developing world (most notably in India) as polluted as Victorian Britain’s worst, but the best of developed world cities show the potential for these being healthier places with better housing, sewerage systems, clear air laws and (more recently) limitations on traffic.

In the 1960s Jane Jacobs advocated for densely populated cities as places where people walked more, shared local amenities and were (literally) places of conviviality. Suburban and rural living on the other hand relies on cars to access dispersed and often poor-quality services. These ideas have been developed in the context of the climate crisis by a range of writers who point to Manhattan being the lowest-carbon place to live in the US – it has the lowest car ownership and per capita energy usage in the US, and high rates of walking.

Figures from the US for personal direct per capita CO2 emissions (2016) show Washington DC producing 2.6 tons per head simply by being largely

urban (even though it is not a pedestrian friendly city: everyone drives and the city sprawls). The more rural Wyoming produces 14.8 tons. Alaska is higher still at 18 tons, but this suggests that people should not live in frozen wilderness.

Nor does the “metabolic break” reasoning for rural living still pertain. Such a rift no longer exists in the UK, where around 80 per cent of human waste in the sewerage system is returned to the land in the form of fertiliser. Even so, only around 1% of the fertiliser used in the UK comes from sewerage.

There is thus no environmental case for semi-rural life, but rather a case for high density cities. As far as human faeces is a useful fertiliser (and it certainly does not have the important role that Marx supposed for it), urban living facilitates its collection and use.

There is more that could be said about how humanity might wish to distance itself more from nature, to widen the rift. The current pandemic shows the need to put a rift between ourselves and natural pathogens. The history of the earth has instances of natural shifts in its environment which we may need to counter.

Generally, there can be no restoration of some supposed “unity” between hu-

manity and nature. The earth is already the product of humanity’s long term activities. There are no giant land sloths in the Americas not because of capitalism, but because hunter-gatherers with rocks ate them all. The surface of the earth is not what nature made. It is what millennia of agriculture has made.

This is not an excuse for being blasé in the face of environmental crises, but we live in an environment that our activity has shaped. Only by understanding how we have shaped our environment can we hope to maintain a habitable Earth. To say this is not to promote technological fixes to evade action. Much of what is immediately needed is to stop doing harm (not pump CO2 into the atmosphere, not deforest, not dump plastics into the sea, not farm in a way that will destroy soil, not overuse fertiliser and pesticides, not fatten animals in feedlots and presume not to take what we cannot replenish in a circular economy). The necessity is, as Marx and Engels pointed out, for humanity to manage our environment collectively and rationally. □

• A version of this article with footnotes containing references and fuller elaboration of some arguments is on line at bit.ly/met-rift

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Covid: the bother with boosters



By Martin Thomas

The British government is acting as if it has opted for extra jabs as its first line against the probable new Covid surge in winter.

Those, rather than social improvements (ventilation, workers' control of workplace safety, full isolation pay for all, boosting the NHS and reversing privatisation, improved housing, improved social care) or mild restrictions (mandatory mask-wearing and work-from-home, limits on indoor crowding).

While the government has spent billions on extra vaccines, and test-trace contracts of dubious efficacy, it still stonewalls on proper isolation pay for workers in... Covid test centres! (After pressure from the [Safe and Equal](#) campaign and Emily Thornberry MP, it

made promises, but stonewalls on the big loopholes).

The start of the new school term has come with (contrary to predictions which *Solidarity* never shared) a slight dip in Covid cases. A rise as we go towards winter is probable, with the seasonal patterns of the virus, more indoors time, *universities* restarting, and the fading of voluntary Covid precautions.

Widespread vaccination has reduced Covid case fatality rates to something comparable to a bad flu season; but may well not block an autumn-winter rise in transmission.

There is some [evidence](#) from Israel that booster vaccinations (now started by Britain for all over-50s) reduce transmission and serious cases, and Britain's scientific Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) concluded that the (small) extra protection from jabs for 12-15 year olds may outweigh the (small) risk of bad side-effects.

So the new Tory policy may "work" to some extent and in its own terms. Israel started boosters from 20 July, and Germany, France, Ireland, Czechia and others have followed.

Yet scientists have [protested](#). The World Health Organisation has called for a "moratorium" on boosters, and extra jabs to be used *first* for the very vulnerable people denied them in poorer countries.

Sub-Saharan Africa has only 2% of people fully vaccinated. The world jab rate is still jogging along at 0.4 per 100 people per day. The WHO-backed initiative to get vaccines to poorer countries, Covax, has been starved of supplies.

Beyond that, *Solidarity* campaigns for Big Pharma to be taken into public ownership, to allow a coordinated world drive to spread technical know-how freely, to multiply vaccine production sites, and to distribute vaccines.

The booster drive is also problematic in the longer term. Neither booster jabs

nor lockdowns are going to abolish Covid. The best [estimate from scientists](#) for an endgame is that it evolves into a disease which we *all* get (except the unlucky ones so old or frail that we die of something else first), but, eventually, we almost always get it *mildly*, first as young children, than with an increasing degree of broad immunity after successive infections.

If that's anywhere near right, then the guideline is: catch Covid young; or, if you're too old for that but not yet frail, get vaccinated before your first infection; or, if old or frail, get vaccinated regularly.

Blanket repeat vaccination in the short term diverts supply from first-time vaccination in poorer countries, and longer-term may *slow* the fading of Covid's threat and *increase* the risk from probable future spikes. It also diverts from the measures for *social equality* and *social provision* which can reduce the toll long-term both from Covid and from other disease. □



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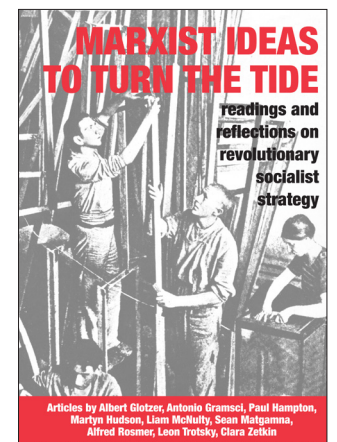
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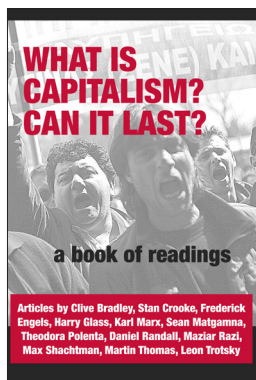
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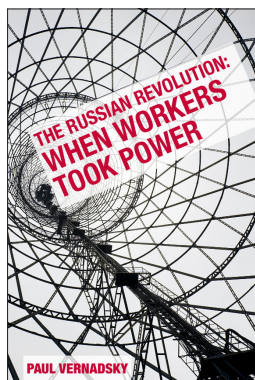
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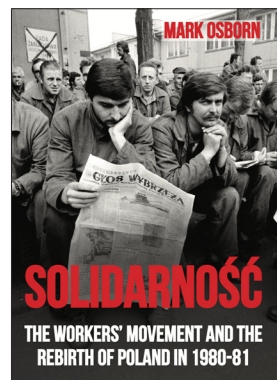
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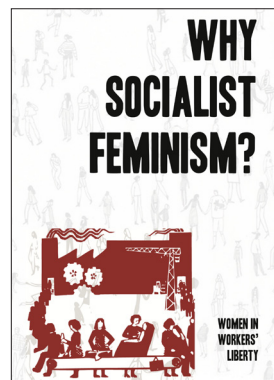
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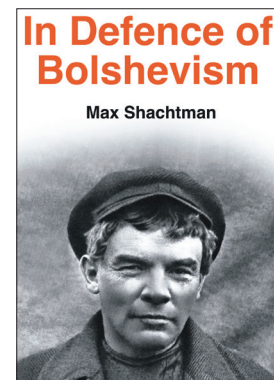
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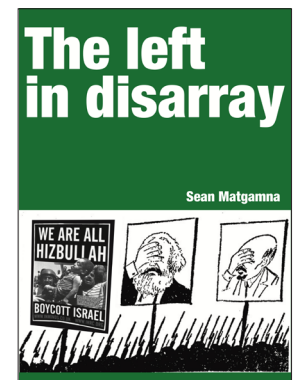
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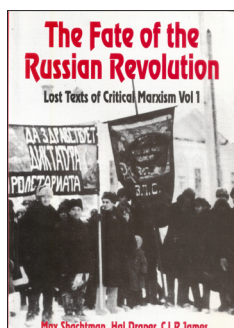
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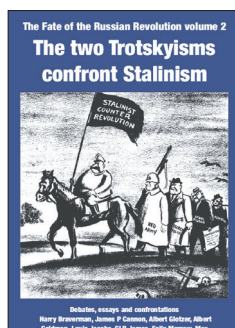
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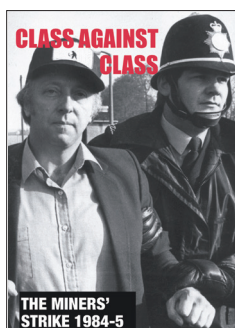
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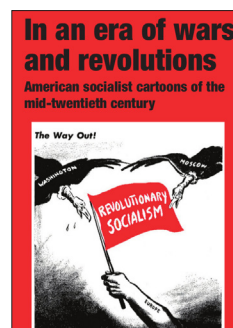
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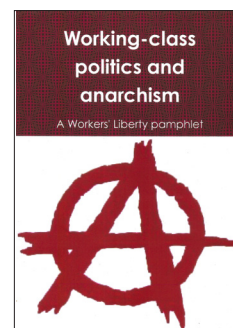
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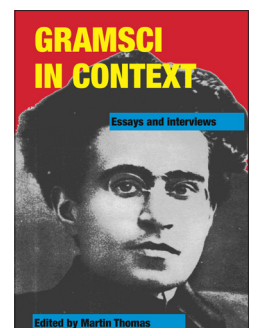
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Test case for Texas abortion ban



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

A San Antonio doctor who said he had performed an abortion in defiance of Texas's new law has been sued, setting up a potential test case for the law.

In an opinion piece in the *Washington Post*, "Why I violated Texas's extreme abortion ban", the doctor, Alan Braid, who has been performing abortions for more than 40 years, said that he performed one on 6 September for a woman beyond the state's new limit.

"I acted because I had a duty of care to this patient, as I do for all patients, and because she has a fundamental right to receive this care," Dr. Braid wrote. "I fully understood that there could be legal consequences – but I wanted to make sure that Texas didn't get away with its bid to prevent this blatantly unconstitutional law from being tested."

The law prohibits abortions once doctors can detect cardiac activity, which is usually around six weeks. The law makes no exception for pregnan-



cies resulting from rape or incest. Prosecutors cannot take criminal action against Braid or other doctors providing abortion services, because the law explicitly forbids that. Enforcement is through lawsuits brought by private citizens, who are entitled to claim at least \$10,000 in damages if successful.

Oscar Stilley, the former attorney in Arkansas who filed one of the lawsuits, has said he is not personally opposed to abortion and sued in order to force a court to review the ban.

"If the law is no good, why should we have to go through a long, drawn-out process to find out if it's garbage?" Stilley said.

Dr. Braid's clinics are among the plaintiffs in a pending federal lawsuit seeking to overturn the measure. On 1 September, the US Supreme Court, prompted by the lawsuit, declined to block the new Texas law in a 5-4 vote.

The majority stressed that it was not ruling on the law's constitutionality and did not intend to limit "procedurally proper challenges" to it.

On Tuesday, the Justice Department asked a federal judge to issue an order that would prevent Texas from enforcing the law, known as Senate Bill 8, which was passed with the strong support of the state's Republican leaders. The Justice Department argued in its emergency motion that the state adopted the law "to prevent women from exercising their constitutional rights," reiterating an argument the department made last week when it sued Texas to prohibit enforcement of the contentious legislation.

The courts have protected safe, legal abortion throughout the United States since 1973, when the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed access to abortion as a constitutional right in its *Roe vs. Wade* decision.

Attacks on *Roe vs. Wade* began to ramp up in 2011, when anti-abortion politicians made massive gains in federal and state elections. Since then challenges to safe, legal abortion have grown. In some places, abortion restrictions have in fact made abortion much harder to access. These restrictions fall

especially hard on people with low incomes, for whom the cost of transportation, childcare, and taking time off work often combine to put abortion access out of reach. □



This pamphlet remembers the brave workers who occupied their shipyard to try and save not just their own jobs but the jobs of future generations. □

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Israel-Palestine at Labour conference



Briefing

By Martin Thomas

The conference agenda has several motions on Israel-Palestine, mostly elaborations on Labour and Palestine's [model motion](#). No likely composite will deserve support as improving Labour's existing policy.

Nor would the model motion circulated by the Labour right (Labour To Win), but no CLP has submitted that (see bit.ly/bt-ltw)

- No motion adds to Labour's "two states" policy what it mostly lacks – solidarity with forces on the ground fighting for that, such as the Jewish-Arab Standing Together movement in Israel, trade unions, or campaigns against checkpoints and house demolitions. Probably all the CLPs submitting would recoil from supporting Hamas as their ally on the ground, but most describe the May 2021 war exclusively as an Israeli assault

on Gaza (which it was), without mention or criticism of the Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians. Hamas is an enemy, not an ally, for a democratic or secular outcome.

- Instead of solidarity, as agency for their aims the motions (to varying degrees) propose boycotts of Israel. It is not for us to object to big-power leverage such as that from the USA which forced Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1957 and 1979-82, or to diplomatic pressure to restart two-states negotiations. Or to action against arms-trading. But the boycott-Israel policy has meant, in practice, exclusion of Israeli academics from editorial boards, of Israeli film-makers from film festivals, of Israeli contingents from LGBT protests, and such; and a license for union officials to block solidarity with workers' struggles in Israel (bit.ly/bds-u). None of that has helped Palestinian rights. If "boycott" gathered momentum, then, given the family and other links between Jewish communities and Israel, it could only become a Jew-hunt. Better solidarity with

movements on the ground, as in other countries where we oppose oppressive policies.

Palestinian state

- None of the variants call explicitly for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel or for what we reckon is the underlying principle for a democratic outcome – self-determination for both nations, Palestinian-Arab and Israeli-Jewish – though some call for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and an end to the blockade of Gaza. Probably few of the CLPs involved would want explicitly to oppose "two states", but, most stridently in Young Labour's variant, they state their general aim as "the refugees to return to their homes". This is not a matter of individual free movement improving a "two states" settlement between nations, but of mass collective resettlement in what is now the homeland of the nation formed by generations of Jewish refugees and their descendants in Israel. It could not happen without Israel being overrun militarily. It cuts across

"two states". In any case resettlement onto the usually long-gone meagre peasant plots of their great-grandparents and grandparents is no way forward for the heavily-urbanised Palestinians of 73 years on.

- To be angry against Israeli government misdeeds is good. Skewing facts to demonise Israel is not. The motions cite reports from B'tselem and Human Rights Watch as equating Israel with apartheid, without noting that HRW and B'tselem do *not* (bit.ly/is-ap) equate Israel with pre-1994 South Africa. (The Israeli Jews are a nation, not a caste placed above drudges, like the whites in pre-1994 South Africa). Motions refer to the reprehensible threat of eviction against some 13 Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah as "ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem". In fact the Palestinian majority in East Jerusalem has increased (bit.ly/e-jeru) since the 1990s. (There were some evictions in Sheikh Jarrah in 1998, 2008, and 2009: what's new, and welcome, is the big mobilisation of Palestinians to resist the threatened new evic-

tions). The motions denounce the Israeli government for not offering Covid jabs to Palestinians. Israel is to be criticised for not donating more vaccines to poorer governments like the Palestinian Authority, but so, equally, are Britain and other well-off countries: Palestinian residents of Israel have had the same right to vaccines as Jewish residents. □

More online

Against the Labour right's policy

Ben Tausz dissects the Labour To Win model motion for Labour conference on Israel-Palestine: bit.ly/bt-ltw

A conversation on antisemitism

The Tempest website in the USA has published a discussion between Daniel Randall and David Renton: bit.ly/ra-re

“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.

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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

The tests are ok, but the workers aren't



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

The company that processes the plant's "Incinerator Bottom Ash" call to return three loads, and say they are quarantining two more. The logistics company who do the deliveries are not able to tip, and they tell their drivers to stop collecting from us. I ask the company if they're able to separate the unburned waste from the ash and return it to us, at our expense – she says no. This means that the plant is now producing Incinerator Bottom Ash (IBA) continuously with nowhere to send it. The ash bay is very small, and it won't take long before it's full. The only way to stop producing ash is to go off-line.

I inspect the IBA and take pictures, feeding information back to the operators. There is unburned waste in it – some remains of plastic bottles, fabric, plastic streamers, cans with labels, remnants of crisp packets... but I've never really looked at the IBA on a good day. I have nothing to compare it to.

N, the shift team leader, suggests trying to sift the unburned waste out of the IBA with a jerry-rigged skip and

some wire mesh. He and the assistants rig something up, but it doesn't work. In the end, me and N work out a plan to feed the IBA back into the pit. It means instructing the assistants to fill front-loaders with IBA and tip at designated times, then the crane driver will mix the ash thoroughly with fresh waste, and feed it into the furnace again. This is disruptive for many reasons; it adds traffic to the tipping hall which is already full of bin wagons; it adds waste to the pit which is already full and hard to mix; it uses up all of the assistant's time; and it puts material on the fire that cannot be burned, essentially dampening the combustion and making all the existing problems worse.

I learn in the first few weeks of my new job as Compliance Technician that there are chemical tests done to ensure the IBA has been burned sufficiently. The labs test for Total Organic Carbon (TOC) content; if over 3% of the sample contains organic carbon, then it has not been burned enough. The other test performed is called Loss On Ignition, where the IBA is heated until any unburned waste in the sample catches fire; if this portion exceeds 5% of the total sample, then it has not been burned enough.

My manager's first line of attack is to

look at the plant's contract with the IBA processing company. He speaks to his manager and comes back with a definition of "Rejected IBA".

"IBA shall not exceed 3% TOC or 5% LOI on testing", G tells me. "It's extremely unlikely we're exceeding those limits, but we need to get the ash tested every day to confirm this."

I write an email to the company director quoting the contract, providing photo evidence and the last report from the lab. He doesn't respond well – he rings G and they have a very polite and passive-aggressive phone call.

It turns out that the company who process our IBA have had a problem with "black matting", which originated from Sheffield. Photos show it's an abrasive carbon-fibre-like webbing that separates into individual fibres which tangle with everything else in the ash. The company have a line of workers on a conveyor belt separating out unburned residue, and they have complained to the Health and Safety Executive that their employer hasn't provided them with the correct PPE. The company tells me their workers have skin-rashes and cuts from this fibre. □

• Emma Rickman is an engineer in a Combined Heat and Power plant.

Democracy, war, and the scruples of generals

By Chris Reynolds

We already knew that US military chief Mark Milley had told his associates, as he observed the build-up to Donald Trump's 6 January Capitol riot, that he feared Trump was seeking a "Reichstag moment" (after the fire at the German parliament in 1933 which Hitler used as leverage to complete Nazi control).

"They're not going to succeed", Milley told his military colleagues. His argument: "you can't do this without the military... the CIA... the FBI. We're the guys with the guns". He would block moves by Trump to bring troops onto the streets.

We also knew that between November 2020 and January 2021 Trump wanted to sack Milley, but was too uncoordinated to push it through.

Now we find that Milley privately phoned China's military chief Li Zuocheng on 8 January to tell him, general to general, that he, Milley, would block it if Trump tried starting a war to save his position.

A new book by Carl Bernstein and Robert Costa also reports that Milley convened a meeting with top commanders to remind them that nuclear weapons could not be launched just on Trump's say-so, without Milley's ok.

Trump has declared outrage, but

president Biden has reaffirmed confidence in Milley.

Trump is still strong in the Republican Party, may control a majority in Congress after 2022, and looks intent on running for president in 2024. By then, he, or others around him with more competence and coherence, may be able to replace Milley and his allies.

Organising to defeat the Trumpist far right, both on the streets and in the political thinking of a section of the US working class, remains an urgent task for the US left. We can't rely on the scruples of generals to save democracy or avoid war, and Biden is unlikely to make the dangers go away. □

Putting Blair "on trial"



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

In June 2003 Reg and Sally Keys sit down to watch the news on TV. Six British soldiers have just died that day in Iraq and one of them is Tom, their 20 year old son. Reg is told by Tom's commanding officer that prior to the fatal operation his unit had been "descaled" (vital equipment had been removed).

Reg then hears that the so-called "weapons of mass destruction" do not exist, and he decides to stand against Blair in the 2005 general election, to expose the war that was "based on a

lie". Jimmy McGovern adopted Reg's story for the BBC with Tim Roth playing the bereaved father. The film *Reg* was broadcast in 2016, just before the release of the Chilcot Report.

The drama follows Reg's campaign in Blair's Sedgefield constituency and his repeated attempts to meet Blair, which are always refused. On election night Reg confronts Blair on the platform. Mixing archive footage with dramatic action, Blair remains stone-faced in the background as Reg exposes his duplicity and lies.

Grief-stricken, Sally Keys died in 2011. Tony Blair has consistently refused to meet Reg and, to this day, has still to offer any explanation or apology for his actions. □

Royal Parks out from 1 Oct



**John Moloney, PCS
Assistant GS (p.c)**

We're preparing for a month-long strike by outsourced cleaners and attendants in Royal Parks, which will begin on 1 October. That's a significant escalation, so we're also launching a new drive to fundraise for the strike fund. We'll need active solidarity from our own branches, especially in London, and from the wider movement to help the strike win.

Strategic discussions are ongoing within our branch at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea. There's a strong resolve to launch a new ballot, but detailed discussions are taking place about exactly how that ballot should be organised, whether all workers should be balloted in a single ballot, or whether the ballot should be disaggregated between different groups of workers at the complex.

Our reps for driving examiners have been phone-banking and speaking to all members to get the vote out in their ballot for industrial action against an increase to their workload.

In the coming weeks, we're aiming to organise meetings of reps from a number of government departments to discuss the "back-the-office" push. Workers in departments such as HMRC are now coming under more pressure to resume working from the office. Depending on the outcome of those meetings, we could see increased campaigning and possible ballots over this issue.

I've also been working on some legal campaigning around the issue of indirect discrimination. Previous Tribunal cases we've taken over this issue have established that, if it can be shown that a particular policy or practice by an employer amounts to indirect discrimination, it's not necessary to show exactly what it is within that practice that causes the discrimination, simply that it has that effect.

We want to use that legal precedent to mount new legal challenges over this issue. I'm coordinating correspondence to all civil service departments asking for statistics about how various HR policies impact workers in terms of race and gender, and we'll actively pursue legal challenges in cases where policies are having a discriminatory impact on BAME and women workers.

Obviously we can't rely on the legal system to win lasting change, but legal challenges can be an important supplement to industrial campaigning. □

GKN workers launch indefinite strike

By Ollie Moore

Workers at the GKN Drivelines factory in Birmingham, which produces parts for cars, will launch an indefinite strike from 27 September, in an attempt to resist the closure of the plant.

The closure, which is slated to take place in 2022, would see the loss of 500 jobs. A Unite statement said: "Due to the 'just in time' nature of the automotive industry supply chain, strike action will very quickly affect production at several of the UK's car plants, primarily Jaguar Land Rover, but Nissan and Toyota will also be heavily affected."

In 1976, workers facing job losses at Lucas Aerospace produced a plan to repurpose the productive capacity of their factories away from making mili-

tary hardware and towards producing renewable energy technology and medical equipment. In a conscious echo of this approach, GKN workers have produced their own plan to save the factory by repurposing it to produce parts for electric vehicles.

Frank Duffy, the Unite convenor at the plant, wrote in a Guardian article:

"We realised that if we want to see a green future for the UK car industry and save our skilled jobs, we couldn't leave it to our bosses and had to take matters into our own hands. We put together a 90-page alternative plan detailing how we could reorganise production to save money and make these new components.

"Ours is the first transition plan for an automotive plant proposed by union stewards in the UK, and an echo of the

1976 Lucas Plan, when shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace, also in Birmingham, proposed converting their plant to socially useful products.

"Now, as then, our alternative plan proposed saving jobs in Birmingham while transitioning the plant into an asset to support the wider UK industry. That's a win for the workforce, the industry and the environment. If that isn't what's meant by the phrase 'just transition', I don't know what is. However, Melrose declined to take our plan forward."

Melrose is the investment firm which owns GKN. It is also pursuing job cuts at other GKN sites globally. On Saturday 18 September, 20,000 workers marched in Florence, Italy, in solidarity with GKN workers in Italy facing layoffs. □

Push for action on NHS pay!

By Alice Hazel

Members of the main health unions have overwhelmingly rejected the government's 3% NHS pay award.

RCN rejected by 91.7% (in Wales 93.9%), Unison by 80%, and GMB by 93%. Unison and GMB included willingness to take industrial action in their informal ballot.

These votes show the activist base of the unions is ready to take action. The decisive figure for action, under the anti-trade union laws, was always going to be the turnout. There, the news is not positive. RCN turnout was 25.4% (29.3% in Wales), and Unison, 29%.

GMB have not released their turnout figures, presumably meaning they did not reach 50% overall, though rumours have it that there was wide variation across branches.

They have decided to move straight to a formal ballot on action. RCN and Unison are holding further indicative ballots. Those add an unnecessary barrier to taking the campaign forward and reflect the union leaderships' ultra-caution in dealing with the anti-trade-union laws.

We want the union leaderships to acknowledge that their work in the run up

to the recent consultations was inadequate and now put the full force of the unions behind a move to action. The way to beat the laws is to campaign vigorously, provide leadership and confidence to members, and use tactics to circumvent the laws when necessary, not fixate on the laws as an excuse to not ballot formally.

The cross-union organisation, leaf-letting and speaking to members at workplace level needs to continue and grow. Branches should organise members' meetings, set up campaign teams of activists, organise phone banking and workplace walkabouts

Of course, huge change will be needed to reach legal threshold turnouts of 50%. The detail of the results by sector and branch has not been released. It should be available to branches and needs to form the basis of a strategic campaign to focus on areas where formal ballots can be won on a disaggregated basis.

The 80% plus results show that is possible, and the turnouts show it is necessary. Opposition to the anti-union laws, and explanation of how they have worked here as an obstacle to challenging the employers, should be tied into the campaigning. □

Barnoldswick workers to vote

By Ollie Moore

Workers at the Rolls Royce plant in Barnoldswick will vote on a new proposal from management, following further strikes by a section of the workforce in July, and a subsequent vote by the entire workforce for further action.

It looks likely that the workers' union, Unite, will not recommend acceptance of the proposal, as it does not include one of the workers' key demands, for a five-year no-compulsory-redundan-

cies guarantee. The last phase of the dispute at Barnoldswick began after Rolls Royce announced it was reneging on an agreement, secured following extensive strikes in 2020, to guarantee staffing levels at the plant and to secure new work streams.

Should the proposal be rejected, workers could use their live industrial action ballot mandate to launch further strikes. □

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MI briefing for Labour conference



Briefing

Thanks to [Momentum Internationalists](#) for this briefing on Labour Party conference (25-29 September, in Brighton).

Who are Momentum Internationalists?

Momentum Internationalists was formed by activists from the left anti-Brexit campaign Labour for a Socialist Europe, [L4SE](#), in early 2020 to continue the fight for left-wing and internationalist politics after the Tories finally forced through Brexit. We ran candidates in the Momentum NCG elections of 2020 and promoted motions in the Momentum policy priorities ballot of 2021. We are not just a caucus within Momentum. We have been active on the streets, for example in the Black Lives Matter and NHS pay protests of 2020. We have run public Zoom meetings on the farmers' movement in India, on the resistance in Myanmar, and on the EHRC report and antisemitism in Labour (we reckon there is a real problem there, not just a concocted smear). At this Brighton conference we are organising activities to support Afghan refugees, as well as pushing our favoured motions on conference floor. We have worked with a range of other campaigns, including the [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#), the [Uyghur Solidarity Campaign](#), the Hong Kong campaign [LMS-HKUK](#), [Free Our Unions](#), the UK [support group](#) for the Jewish-Arab movement for equality and justice in Israel-Palestine Standing Together, the [Labour Homelessness Campaign](#), and [Neurodivergent Labour](#).

Democracy, exclusions

As too often before, the National Executive Committee (NEC) will seek to ram through large rule changes at this conference at short notice. Many are presented as responses to the EHRC report on antisemitism. But that called for an independent disciplinary procedure. The rule changes set up procedures run by the NEC and "Boards" appointed by committees appointed by the General Secretary. We call on delegates to oppose those rule changes. We want due process, and disciplinary committees elected and operating independently of the NEC and the General Secretary: see more at [bit.ly/lp-dp](#). The issues here are part of the broader battle to push back the "auto-ex-

clusions" and arbitrary and indefinite suspensions which have hit the party in waves since 2015: [bit.ly/c-proc](#). The Labour HQ machine have been forced to apologise recently after overreaching themselves with spurious warning letters to Young Labour chair Jess Barnard and to Kate Osborne MP. Now Labour List editor Sienna Rodgers reports a similar letter sent to a housemate by mistake for someone else who had anyway quit the party...

Making Parliamentary Labour Party accountable, and other rule changes

There will be other regressive rule-changes from the NEC, possibly including a return to giving MPs one-third of the voting power in leadership elections, increasing the "trigger" threshold for open parliamentary selections where there are sitting Labour MPs, and increasing the threshold for forcing leadership challenges. Labour-List reports Starmer saying that he wants policy decided by other than "endless motions at conference", and may want to limit the number of motions debated. There will also be good rule changes proposed by CLPs. The biggest is one to make the Parliamentary Labour Party accountable to conference. It's a good change anyway, and will give conference the power to reinstate Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour whip.

Approving David Evans as General Secretary?

The rulebook says: "The General Secretary shall be elected by Party conference on the recommendation of the NEC... Should a vacancy... occur... between Party conferences, the NEC shall have full power to fill the vacancy subject to the approval of Party conference". That "approval" has in the past been given "on the nod", but no previous General Secretary has scattered suspensions and exclusions and prohibitions like Evans. Unite, CWU, FBU and other unions are against "approving" Evans. We need to force a card vote on this.

Referring back the National Policy Forum report

Neurodivergent Labour will move a reference-back on the National Policy Forum report because it contains nothing on neurodiversity despite ND Labour's submission being the second most popular in its section: [bit.ly/ND-ref](#). Oddly, Momentum has been saying (without explanation) that it will take no position on reference-backs.

Motions ruled out

The Labour for a Green New Deal motion, and the Build Back Fairer motion prioritised by Momentum (about social and economic reconstruction), were initially ruled out by the Conference Arrangements Committee, on grounds that they fail to be "on one subject", as the rulebook requires. Motions on the "single subjects" of climate and on reconstruction in pandemic and after have to be wide-ranging. The criterion is slippery, and in 2019, for example, many equally wide-ranging motions were debated. The LGND motion has been reinstated on appeal.

Climate

A compositing meeting will decide two or three alternative "composite" texts for conference to debate. Delegates must make sure that public ownership of energy industries, transport, and high finance, contained in the Fire Brigades Union text, do not get lost in compositing.

Uyghurs and Hong Kong

Versions of a motion drafted by the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong have been submitted by East and South East Asians for Labour and Finchley and Golders Green CLP. The Hong Kong labour movement is being forced underground, with the HK Confederation of Trade Unions and the HK Professional Teachers' Union both pressured into disbanding by threats that otherwise their leaders still at liberty would join the several trade unionists already in jail.

Social care

The conference has many motions on social care. We want to see text reaching conference floor which calls for social care to be run as a publicly-owned public service, free to those needing care, and for care workers to be on at least NHS-level pay and conditions.

Borders Bill, Afghanistan

Lewes CLP (at least) has a [motion](#) against the Tories' Borders Bill. Putney CLP has one for an open door for Afghan refugees.

Anti-union laws

Labour conferences 2015, 2017, and 2019 voted for the repeal of all anti-union laws, the Thatcher-era ones as well as the Trade Union Act. 2019 conference even voted to refer back a section of the National Policy Forum report on the issue. In July Shadow Employment Secretary Andy Mc-

Donald [said](#) "Labour is committed to repealing anti-union laws", but that tweet is almost all we've heard from the Labour leadership on this since early 2020. Several motions to conference will seek to reaffirm the commitment.

Trans rights

Edinburgh Central CLP has submitted an emergency motion ([bit.ly/ed-cen](#))

Proportional representation

144 motions call for Labour to support Proportional Representation. And, yes, PR is more democratic. Under FPTP voters in marginal seats have more sway than those in "safe" seats, voters are pushed into "tactical voting" (e.g. for Lib Dems when they seem more likely to beat the Tories in a particular seat), and regionally-based minorities are favoured over more evenly-spread ones. But we worry about PR being seen as a short-cut enabling Labour to shelve the task of winning a positive majority for socialist policies in favour of the apparently easier route (to what?) of a centrist "anti-Tory" majority via alliance with the Lib-Dems.

"Zero Covid"

Birmingham Hall Green CLP calls for Labour to back a "Zero Covid" (ZC) policy of "eliminating" the virus. (The motion doesn't say how, but the ZC campaign looks to longer and stricter lockdowns). Some may want to vote for ZC as a rebuke to the Labour leaders' weakness. That would be wrong. The York Central motion for a Covid inquiry is better. Elimination is not possible any time soon, any more than elimination of flu. Lockdowns have their place, but long strict lockdowns (like Argentina, eight months in 2020) do not work in countries whose geography precludes rigidly closing borders. To focus on police measures (lockdowns, rigid border closures) ignores the fact that the best predictor of lower Covid tolls, between areas and countries, is lower social inequality. One of us debated with the "Zero Covid" campaign back in February 2021: [bit.ly/zc-debate](#) □



Motions on Israel-Palestine

Inside, page 13: *Solidarity's* view on the conference motions on Israel-Palestine. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

Common ownership is key for climate

On 13 September, BBC Newsnight asked shadow business and energy secretary Ed Miliband about Labour for a Green New Deal's Labour Party conference [motion](#) calling for public ownership in energy, water, transport and other sectors:

"We're in favour of common ownership... Keir Starmer said in his leadership campaign he was in favour of public ownership in those areas. We haven't changed that commitment... And why is that? Let me just explain this to you. Because in particular, in relation to natural monopolies, if we're going to make this green transition, then public ownership is the right way to go. We don't resile from those commitments."

All the more relevant now the Tories are considering hand-outs for the big energy suppliers to persuade them to take over supply abandoned by small energy companies going bust – due to fossil gas's soaring energy prices.

However, Miliband also said: "There's always management of these things at conferences... It's always messy at these things."

Not messy enough! Two days later Labour's Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC)



had "managed" the issue by ruling the LGND motion out of order. On 20 September the CAC ruled that motion back in. Other Green New Deal [motions](#) to Labour conference, submitted by the Fire Brigades Union and Bakers' Union, include clearer calls for democratic public ownership of the banks and finance, energy industries, and public transport. Political work to win the labour movement to such policies is as important as climate action on the streets.

Despite Miliband's comments, Starmer has certainly not campaigned for the left-wing policies he pledged in his Labour leadership campaign. Senior spokespeople have suggested those policies are being abandoned. As Gordon Brown's Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, in 2009,

Ed Miliband steadfastly refused the demands of occupying [Vestas](#) wind turbine workers on the Isle of Wight to nationalise their factory and prevents its closure.

Still, he is right to say (now) that expanding public ownership is essential to tackling the climate crisis. State ownership by itself is no solution, but suppressing the profit motive is necessary to radically change the way key industries and services are run.

To shut off the funding from high finance for fossil fuels and other high-emissions environmentally-harmful projects will be hard enough without taking them over.

To mobilise their vast resources to enable and fund a just transition, including the creation of millions of green jobs, without doing that – impossible. □