

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

## A GOOD TIME FOR STRIKES



See page 2

- » **Tories on back foot**
- » **Bosses under pressure**
- » **Prices rising, cuts biting**

### India's farmers defeat Modi

Worker activist Nodeep Kaur speaks to us from India about the battle

Pages 8-9

### Building protest after COP26

Results inside COP26 were scant; build from the protests outside

Pages 5-6

### Abolish GCSEs, curb testing

Schools union makes the case, but has yet to mobilise to win

Page 7

### Connolly on mobs and churches

Another text not in the usual collections of Connolly's writings

Pages 10-11

# A good time for strikes



Sometimes workers and unions have to strike at times we would not have chosen. The bosses pick a time when they feel secure and can afford a risk of idling their business to victimise union reps or impose worse conditions.

Sometimes we win strikes even when the bosses have done the best of calculations.

This is a time when the chances of winning strikes are better than usual.

On 5 November the *Daily Mirror* compiled a list of 39 u-turns by the Tory government since early 2020. It is a government with little solid strategy beyond its December 2019 election slogan, "Get Brexit done".

Brexit is not "done" yet. The Tories want to scrap or drastically change the "Northern Ireland protocol" they themselves signed less than a year ago. They have postponed the full introduction of checks on EU imports to Britain to November 2022. UK exports are [down 10%](#), in cash terms, on 2018.

From February, with the vaccination programme, to mid-October, the Tories had a 5% to 10% lead in opinion polls. Public patience with their hand-



ing out of billions to cronies, speeded via the "VIP lane" for Covid contracts, is currently fading. Recent polls show a slight Labour lead.

## Labour

The feebleness of the Labour leadership limits the Tories' losses. But, with furlough and the £20 Universal Credit boost gone, increasing numbers will realise that, despite the high taxes it levies, this is a government of cuts in core social provision. The record NHS waiting lists (already, before winter has actually started) and the insulting 3% pay award to NHS workers show that.

Workers in the NHS and local councils face employers directly dependent on funding from central government. If they mobilise, their chances of forcing the Tories into yet another u-turn are better than usual.

Private bosses are generally under pressure too. There is no boom comparable to the short ones that followed the worst of the 1918-19 Spanish flu pandemic, and economic activity may be pushed down again soon by renewed Covid restrictions, but many firms are running to meet increased demand.

The early-2020 [predictions](#) of 10% jobless in the UK by late 2020 proved false. The repeated extension of the furlough scheme, eventually until 30 September 2021, helped. The end of furlough has been followed by no

sharp rise in unemployment. The current figure is 4.3%, a bit up on 4% in early 2020, but down on 5.2% in October-December 2020.

Hours worked have decreased by 2.5% compared to early 2020, and the percentage of 16-64 year olds employed has decreased from 76.6% to 75.4%. More workers have [retired early](#) (or retired when they were already over pension age and previously continuing

to work), and more people are [studying](#) (or more studying without working alongside). An economic jolt could yet produce snowballing collapse of many firms still carrying big [debts](#) from the lockdowns; but that hasn't happened yet, and it's possible that debt backlog will reduce gradually rather than setting off a rapid spate of collapses.

## Shortages

Many people lost jobs early in the pandemic: insecure jobs, or jobs that were never likely to "come back" until Covid had faded decisively. Now there are large sectors, notably drivers and delivery workers, short of labour.

Some groups of workers have won pay rises through "market forces". Only some: the NHS and social care both have around 100,000 unfilled vacancies, and pay rises there are scanty.

For now, most workers in employment face bosses who are keen to avoid stoppages, and who would have difficulty recruiting desperate new workers willing to undercut existing staff.

That many more workers are back in the workplace at least part-time has downsides for Covid spread, but makes union organisation easier.

So workers are in a stronger position to push back. And we need to.

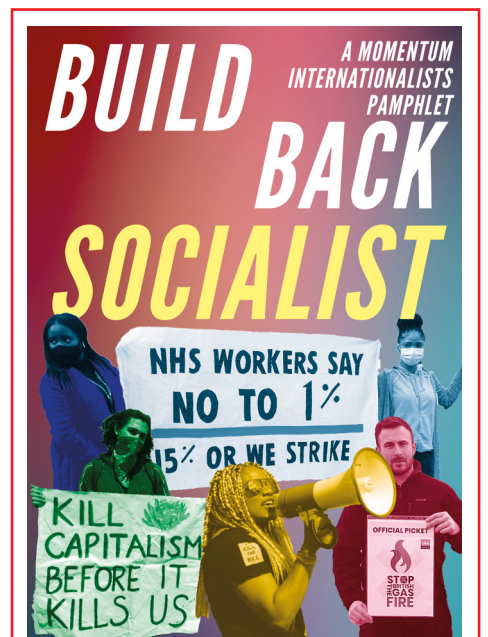
The [Resolution Foundation](#) reports that on average "real wages are already falling and are likely to continue to do so for the next six months".

Official inflation figures are high ([4.2% CPI, 6% RPI](#)). Rents are rising at [4.6%](#) per year. Prices which weigh especially on the worse-off have already risen sharply (gas and electricity) or are likely to do so as world-trading price increases work through (food).

France is currently in a strike wave. In Guadeloupe, Caribbean islands formally part of France, a general strike is underway, headlined as against Covid-pass rules (seen as metropolitan imposition), but with demands also raised for "a generalised wage rise" and "integration of all the precariously-employed and massive new hiring". The USA has a spate of disputes called "Striketober". In the UK we have a chance to regain some economic ground and revitalise the labour movement after the difficulties of the lockdowns. □

## 23-24 April conference

Workers' Liberty's annual conference, where we debate our policies, plan our actions, and elect our committees for the coming year, will be on 23-24 April 2022 in London. (We're working on the assumption that Covid rates will be relatively low by then, at least for a while). More info? Email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org)



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

[momentuminternationalists.org](http://momentuminternationalists.org)

# Votes on pay action in health and local government

By Alice Hazel

The health unions are carrying out their second round of membership votes on the 2021 NHS pay award of 3%. GMB is holding a formal industrial action ballot which closes on 15 December, Unison's second informal consultation closes on 5 December, and the RCN's on 30 November.

Across the unions the proportions of members voting

in the first rounds were not high enough to meet the legal threshold for industrial action, and so the main objective of the current ballots is to increase the turnout. In some areas the campaign has had more energy this time, and in these last weeks activists should continue to push the ballots, by organising workplace walkabouts and phone banking.

The unions as a whole are still failing to organise effectively. We will not turn around creaking union structures generally engaged in servicing members and "partnership working" will not happen without much more determined and co-ordinated rank and file activism and increased membership involvement than we yet have.

Pandemic conditions are still

having a massive impact on healthworkers. Workload and patient safety are at the forefront in the workplace. Organisation on these issues, such as that seen among the midwifery protests on the weekend 20-21 November, is often outside the trade unions. In Unison there is a battle over union democracy and control, with the established union officials resisting the newly-elected left

majority of the National Executive. These issues must be bought together with the pay campaign to rebuild fighting unions.

Also in Unison, ballot papers are scheduled to go out to Unison members in early December for a formal vote on strikes to win better than the 1.75% pay offer. The ballot will run from 1 December to 14 January. □

# Victory for HK strikers

By Pete Radcliff

From 13 November 200 food delivery workers in Hong Kong struck for two days against their employer Foodpanda. They took to the streets on 16 November with a 15 point series of demands. The police unfurled blue banners instructing them to disperse or face arrest as an illegal assembly – the charge that has seen many leading Hong Kong trade unionists given prison sentences of up to two years. But the workers did not cease their action. The Foodpanda workers, many of whom are Asian migrants to Hong Kong, were protesting about many of the problems experienced by other delivery workers across the world: low pay; dependency on technologies and working practices that have been unilaterally imposed by employers; neglect of workers' problems e.g. no allowances for delays in food preparation or final delivery; distance of travel by delivery drivers calculated without reference to actual route maps etc. They were joined in their protest by comrades of the union of catering workers (CHIEGUHK) which had been affiliated to the HKCTU before that union confederation was forced to close in September.

After the bosses initially accused Foodpanda workers of intimidation they soon reversed that stance, fearing a spread of the strike to the 10,000 other food delivery workers in Hong Kong, and called the workers into negotiations. On 18 November the bosses offered a settlement which was accepted by the Foodpanda union negotiators.



There is agitation amongst food delivery workers across the world, and even in mainland China, where delivery worker organiser Chen Guojiang has been in prison since March for his attempt to organise up to 80,000 delivery workers there. He is imprisoned on the catch-all charge of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". Many international union links can and are being made. In the UK, the HK diaspora group Power to HongKongers alongside the Labour Movement Solidarity Campaign (@labsolidarity) is coordinating solidarity from delivery workers and unions in the UK.

On the same day as the delivery workers first took action, construction workers had launched a two-hour sit down protest at Hong Kong airport in protest against non-payment of wages. Despite the imprisonment of many Hong Kong union leaders and the authorities' use of legal threats to close many of Hong Kong's independent trade union organisations, Hong Kong workers maintain their determination to end injustice. □

# Against Fortress Europe and Fortress Britain

By Mohan Sen

At least thirteen people trapped on the Belarus-Poland border have died, the most recent a one-year-old child. Given the magnitude of the barbarism inflicted on these people, it could easily have been many more.

Belarus' noxious regime, which funnelled refugees to the border in order to exert pressure on the European Union over economic sanctions, is undoubtedly in large part responsible for this crisis. But so, equally, are the EU governments (and the UK's, which has backed them up, including with troops!)

This particular confrontation may fizzle out, as Belarus sends many of the migrants back to the Middle East. But it is only one cliff-face of Europe's wider "migrant crisis", actually a crisis caused by the adoption of authoritarian, anti-migrant nationalism by supposed liberal EU governments (to say nothing of the likes of Poland and Hungary, and the UK's even more strident anti-refugee regime since Brexit).

Those who have organised on the frontline to aid people trapped on the border – particular Poles organising in a deeply hostile political environment – are heroines and heroes.

We must challenge the whole framework of Fortress Europe, and of Fortress Britain.

The Nationality and Borders Bill is likely to come back to Parliament for its "third reading" (a vote for and against, without amending) soon,



maybe this week (starting 22 November 2021). Then it goes to the Lords. Time is short to mobilise against it.

The Bill denies refugee protection to people who arrive in the UK other than by a "safe and legal route", i.e. to most refugees in desperate circumstances. Even those who can make an asylum claim will be put into "reception centres" (detention) while the claim is processed.

If their claim succeeds, they get temporary permission to stay for up to 2½ years, then have to apply for another 2½ years. An amendment to the Bill allows the government to deprive people of British citizenship without even telling them. □

- A Polish socialist recommends donating to these two Polish NGOs working to support the people trapped on the border: [Fundacja Ocalenie](#) and [Nomada Stowarzyszenie](#)

# Sudan: resistance committees reject junta deal

By Sacha Ismail

The Sudanese military leadership has released political prisoners and reinstated deposed Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to office.

In a sense the junta is retreating. But in another sense they have simply put some window dressing on their coup.

Hamdok has declared there will be elections by July 2023 – exactly what the coup-leaders was already saying. He has agreed a technocratic cabinet likely to be highly compliant with the military. And the military still has the control of the country's governing "sovereignty council" it took after the coup.

Moreover Hamdok and his allies have legitimised the

coup-makers – after the murder of at least 40 protesters, many of them teenagers (a majority of those in the last week).

The deal was apparently mediated by US and UN officials.

Many foreign powers are pro-coup (Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel). Some, including the US, evidently want to rein in the military – a very different matter from supporting Sudan's democracy struggle.

Even the mainstream leadership of the bourgeois Forces of Freedom and Change coalition has condemned Hamdok's deal with the generals. The "resistance committees" leading the struggle in neighbourhoods and on the streets have raised the slogan "No ne-

gotiations, no partnership, no compromise", and called for "open escalation of the struggle" until the coup is crushed.

The committees and Sudan's militant trade unions will not get solidarity from foreign governments – but they do need solidarity. The international left and labour movement must do our best to give it. □

- Take a solidarity picture and tweet with the hashtags #SudanCoup, #SudanRevolution, #AllEyesOnSudan, #KeepEyesOnSudan. Sign the solidarity statement at [bit.ly/sudan-s](https://bit.ly/sudan-s). There will be more protests in UK cities – look out for them, go along, take your organisation's banner. More: [workersliberty.org/sudan](https://workersliberty.org/sudan)

## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom or in person.

**Wednesday 1 December, 6:30-8pm:** Off The Rails online public meeting: What kind of union do we need?

**Thursday 2 December, 6.30-8pm:** Workers' Liberty Students online meeting: Free speech and the university

**Monday 6 December, 7.30-9pm:** North and West Yorkshire Workers' Liberty (online): Class Struggle and Climate Crisis.

**Wednesday 8 December, 7.30-9 pm:** Socialist Film Club: White Riot. New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS.

**Thursday 9 December, 7-8:30pm:**Free Our Unions online public meeting: how postal workers built and maintained a tradition of unofficial action, with Dave Chapple.

**Sunday 12 December, 2-5 pm:** Socialist Film Club: Gramsci: Everything that Concerns People. New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS.

**Wednesday 15 December, 7.30-9 pm:** Socialist Film Club: 10,000 Black Men Named George New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS.

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see [workersliberty.org/events](https://workersliberty.org/events) or scan QR code □



# Morning Star's Nick Wright praises Wagenknecht



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In the *Morning Star* of 18 Nov, former Straight Left ultra-Stalinist Nick Wright, now rehabilitated into the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and a regular contributor to the paper, had a lengthy article headed "The truth about immigration waits at the Polish border"

While rightly condemning Poland and the EU over the plight of the people at the border, Wright glosses over Lukashenko's cynical manipulation of desperate migrants in his efforts to destabilise the EU (while his master Putin gloats from the sidelines), and reports of Belarusian troops forcibly turning back migrants attempting to flee the Polish border

The twist is this. Much of Wright's piece is a thinly-disguised argument in favour of immigration controls and nationalism: "For the European Union 'freedom of movement' is a highly conditional right exerted in the interests of

each state in which the demands of the market in human labour is paramount". Even Merkel's relatively liberal policy towards immigrants is sneered at as: "Germany... was happy enough to take its pick of the more educated Middle Eastern migrant population in order to increase the skill-set of its working population."

The most interesting points in Wright's article are his comments about the German politician he describes as "The unorthodox left-wing German Bundestag deputy from Die Linke (Left Party), Sahra Wagenknecht [who] has challenged liberal responses to the rise of the far right to make the point that in challenging racism it is necessary to name those responsible for the flight of refugees and migrant workers..."

Wright fails to mention that Wagenknecht's "unorthodox" approach to "challenging racism" has been to call for stricter immigration controls and to criticise the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)... for being too soft on immigration!

This is not simply a slip or an oversight of Wright's part: he goes on to

claim that "she [Wagenknecht] had calumny heaped upon her for suggesting that in a factual and democratic debate about migration that there are many people who oppose racism and xenophobia and at the same time consider the regulation of migration to be essential." Later in the same article, Wright praises Wagenknecht for "challenging Die Linke's runaway accommodation with liberalism and German capital: Wagenknecht has compelled a rethink". This can only be a reference to Wagenknecht's long-standing criticisms of the party for being (as she sees it) too pro-immigration.

This is part and parcel of Wright's extreme (even by the standards of the *Morning Star* and CPB) pro-Brexit stance, leading him to sympathise not just with the red-brown Wagenknecht, but even with the French National Front (as was). On 8 March 2017 the *Morning Star* published a letter from Wright objecting to an article "shot through with liberal illusion" that had cited, as evi-

dence of the NF's reactionary nature, its opposition to the EU. Wright's letter read: "The politics of the National Front in France have some similarities to Donald Trump's stance, but the motor of Marine Le Pen's success lies not simply in reactionary rhetoric but in an economic programme which is suffused with policies which appeal to millions of French workers..."

"To include the National Front's 'opposition to participation in the EU' in a list of reactionary positions is to misunderstand the critical role of the EU in underpinning the power of capital... it is this reality which Le Pen's party recognises as a wedge issue to separate sections of the French working class from the parts of the left which retain the illusion that the EU can be transformed."

Nick Wright's article is further proof that some even supposedly "left wing" Brexiteers subscribe to a fundamentally reactionary world view tainted by the essential racism of Brexit. □

## Needing right-wing policies to beat Tories?



Letter

We had a friendly, respectful debate about the way forward at a recent Labour Party branch meeting in York. It was prompted by members asking questions.

Why are the Tories still popular despite their incompetence and corruption? Do the Tories have a Trump-like base of support, impervious to evidence and argument? In the tussle between the left and the right within Labour, which side has the answers that can deliver a General Election win?

Some people had stayed loyal to Labour throughout the Blair years and said they were tired of being made to feel ashamed of New Labour's achievements. Unlike Corbyn, New Labour won elections. They reduced poverty and invested in Surestart centres and the NHS. Their positive record shouldn't be overshadowed by Iraq.

Some said left wing policies don't win

elections. In this country, elections are won on the margins. Ideological purity is pointless. You have to get dirty.

I responded that Blairism doesn't have the answers for the problems that have arisen since the 2008 financial crash and now the climate crisis. Some people could see the need for more radical politics to address the current crises, but fewer are yet convinced that these politics could win an election.

Some people seemed to be groping for an easy-to-reach election winning formula, and gravitating towards Blairism out of despair rather than ideological conviction.

There will be lots of people genuinely grappling with the question of what Labour should try next. As life gets worse under this Government, people will become desperate for respite and there will be pressure to row even further back from the Corbyn experiment and water down the programme to appeal to marginal voters. How can the left convince people that its policies are not just right but popular too? □

Becky Crocker, York

## Glossing over threats to Stock



Letter

I had some difficulty following the arguments in Camila Bassi's article "Academic freedom: we must fight for it" in *Solidarity* 614. I can only assure Camila that I am not being facetious when I say I simply do not understand what she means by "Academic freedom is contingent upon the epistemologies and politics of the time."

What was clear to me, however, is that Camila is entirely unsympathetic to Kathleen Stock, referring to her complaints of bullying and intimidation by some colleagues, students and campaigners as a "lament that she was a victim" and claiming that her resignation has "provided her with an extraordinarily high platform in mainstream media" which she has "used to question the right of students to protest."

This follows on from an equally anti-Stock article by a "UCU activist" in *Solidarity* 612, suggesting that she is "positioning herself as a 'free speech martyr', despite the fact that her resignation was her choice." This earlier article also contains the rather half-hearted statement that "while there was no sacking here, in general *Soli-*

*arity* opposes dismissal of academics for political views" (my emphasis).

What both these articles gloss over is the level of personalised abuse, harassment and thinly veiled threats of physical violence directed at Stock, demoralising and wearing her down to the point that she resigned. There is no credible evidence that she set out to be a "free speech martyr" or that she actually did or said anything in the course of her employment or related to her employment, to warrant such vile treatment. No-one, to the best of my knowledge, has claimed that Stock had discriminated against anyone or abused her position as an academic to proselytise for her contentious views whilst teaching or lecturing – unlike, according to at least some accounts, the antisemite and conspiracy theorist David Miller, sacked by Bristol University.

And the fact that Stock eventually resigned does not change the reality that the campaign against her centred upon the demand that the Sussex University bosses sack her *because of her views*, not because of anything she had done: that is unacceptable from any socialist or even just trade union perspective and *Solidarity* should say so clearly, without reservation and in plain language. □

Jack McDonough, Birmingham

# COP26 was no triumph, but the protests were a base to build on



## Environment

By Zack Muddle

In “COP and the credibility gap” ([Solidarity 614](#)) I covered the COP26 outcomes on energy generation. This week I cover other aspects.

In transport, the biggest focus was on cars. A pledge of dozens of national and regional governments and automobile corporations committed to end the sale of new cars and vans with internal combustion engines [by 2040](#), globally. This far-too-late deadline does not address cars that have already been bought before that date, or retrofitting. It does not aim to reduce the production and usage of this inefficient and environmentally destructive mode of transport, in itself: it doesn't even aim to tackle its extremely rapid growth. Germany, China, the USA, and several major car manufacturers didn't even sign up to this weak – and non-legally binding – declaration.

No agreements were made in COP26 on promoting walking and cycling, reducing necessary travelling distances, or expansion of efficient and electric trains and public transport. Electric cars will continue to have a much greater environmental footprint than any of those.

Various countries and governments made promises to support moves to supposedly “zero-emissions” shipping routes. The proposed method is using hydrogen, derived from water electrolysis. But this is a very inefficient way of

storing energy. And talk of reliance on so-called “green” hydrogen often [cov-ers](#) for the fact that the more commonly proposed and economically more profitable way of generating the hydrogen is steam-methane reforming, using natural gas and releasing at least as much greenhouse gas as burning gas would.

There was no discussion of modern wind-powered cargo ships. They would be considerably greener, but would require a greater technical change, and adaptation of freight practices from just-in-time to allow for variable weather. Nor was there discussion of global levelling up and coordination to minimise unnecessary shipping of goods and parts around the globe.

### Aviation

Aviation is a particularly dirty form of transport and freight. Unfortunately, large electric and low-carbon planes are unlikely to exist in the near future. Yet a declaration on [aviation](#) accepted and took as given that “the international aviation industry and the number of global air passengers and volume of cargo is expected to increase significantly over the next 30 years.”

It does not even intend to stop air-planes from running on hydrocarbons and belching out CO2. Instead, it aims to “tackle” aviation emissions by “offsetting” them. This would be partly through “Carbon Offsetting Schemes” – with all the problems that carbon markets bring. The other method would be through using “sustainable aviation fuels”, i.e. “biofuels”, that would supposedly offset emissions when the plants to make the fuels are grown.

Many biofuels are sourced through



deforestation, or processes which degrade the soil, undermining any “offset” potential. Even genuine “offsetting” would be the wrong approach. We need to reduce emissions everywhere we can, including by a rapid reduction of aviation, while drawing down *and storing* (not burning and releasing) carbon as fast as we can.

To halt the climate crises, we need to rapidly end all burning of fossil fuels, primarily used in energy, transport, and heating. There was nothing agreed on heating, building temperature regulation, or insulation.

### Redistribution

We need also global redistribution of wealth to the global south, to support carbon mitigations, adaptation, and “loss and damage”. We need to open borders to climate and all migrants. We need to stop deforestation, and transform agriculture to stop methane and nitrous oxide emissions.

The quantity of wealth wielded indicates well how serious ambitions to tackle climate crises are. The \$100bn per year by 2020 promised *but not delivered* by wealthy nations to the global south would have been woefully insufficient. The conservative International Energy Agency, considering energy alone, estimates \$5tn/year by 2030 is needed, globally. This is 50 times larger than the broken promise to date for total finance for *all* carbon mitigation *plus* adaptation for the half of the planet who are in “developing countries”.

The “Like-Minded Developing Countries” and the African Group, early in negotiations, did call for \$1.3tn per year with a “significant percentage on a grant basis”. This did not make it into the agreements itself.

Those ambitions themselves were already severely toned down. The UNFCCC's Standing Committee on Finance recently concluded that these nations would require nearly \$6tn up to 2030, including domestic funds, to support just half of the actions in their [NDCs](#). As socialists, we fight to take the wealth of the rich and the ruling class into democratic working-class control, with a radical distribution across society and globally. We demand a vast redistribution from the global north to the global south: in grants, not loans.

COP 26 has seen steps in sketching processes for these discussions, as part of UNFCCC: but not decisions.

Despite what the Paris Agreement calls for, climate finance to the global south is heavily skewed towards mitigation activities, which are generally seen as better financial investments. COP26 upped aims for spending on climate adaptation, but not as far as called for. While our priority in richer parts of the world is on [reduction of emissions](#),

*continued →*

## Stalinism: not so “external”



### Letter

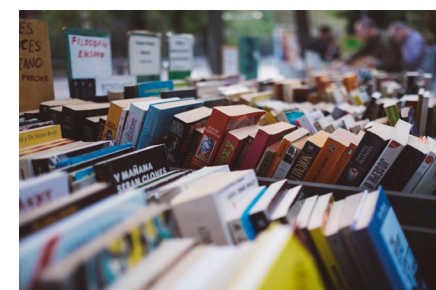
U rte March, in their review of [Corbynism: What Went Wrong?](#) in [Solidarity 614](#) cites their own comrade Tim Nailsea's review of the Communist Party's re-issued *Britain's Road to Socialism*. This is to hammer their argument that Martin Thomas is wrong to blame Stalinism for many of Corbynism's weak points when the finger should be pointed at the reformist character of the Labour party itself.

But, as Nailsea says in their review: “*Britain's Road to Socialism* is, in fact, probably one of the clearest blue-

prints for reformist socialism one might find on the British left”. Since its publication in 1951 and arguably since the Popular Front period from 1934-5, Stalinism in its British form has been avowedly reformist.

In Britain, the CP had little of the pretence of being revolutionary (ultimately: reformist and class-collaborationist only “for now”) which it had elsewhere in Europe. Stalinism deeply infests and is intertwined with the reformist labour movement in Britain. To argue otherwise would only be to vindicate Stalinism as, even if deformed, an “external” revolutionary alternative. An idea which Workers Power might countenance but *Solidarity* won't. □

*Stephen Wood, Southwark*



### 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](https://bit.ly/2h-books) for the current stock and prices, and to order. □

→ poorer countries produce much less carbon and are disproportionately receiving the brunt of climate change. African nations already disproportionately [spend on adaptation](#). In this context, greater funding on adaptation is a basic component of global climate justice: but one which rich countries generally push back against.

Many were pushing for a facility for “loss and damage” funding, something often seen as akin to “reparations”, for poorer countries suffering the terrible impacts of climate change. The EU and US in particular blocked any such agreement.

Who are the rich countries in question? The UNFCCC list is based on those who were members of the OECD in 1992, so doesn't include South Korea or the oil-rich Gulf states. These continue to fight attempts to be obliged to provide finance.

Money spent for mitigation and adaptation *within* the richest countries does not directly form part of the COP 26 negotiations. Instead, agreements cover specific tangible policies. As seen, these too have fallen far short.

Climate crises are already driving increasing migration, within and between countries. We should aim to undercut the conditions which force people to *involuntarily* migrate. But there is only so much adaptation that can be done to an island going underwater. Mitigating the impacts of climate change must involve welcoming climate migrants. There has been a small amount of discussion about this, but not concrete [decisions](#). Indeed, many of the biggest polluters spend [twice as much](#) on border enforcement as on climate finance. The 1951 Refugee Convention hasn't even been expanded to include people forced to migrate by climate change.

Our sights must be set higher still than that. Any border policy which seeks to permit only certain groups of

people necessarily leads to the kind of death and suffering that we see in Calais, at the Poland-Belarus border, and elsewhere. We must fight for free movement and migrants' rights for all.

Little specific was agreed on [agriculture](#) within the core COP 26 process itself. The Glasgow Leaders' Declaration of over 130 countries did promise to “wor[k] collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030”. It promised \$19.2bn of public and private funding. There was a second “Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade” statement. Within days the government of Indonesia, a signatory and majority-forested country of almost one million square kilometres, denounced the agreement and sought to reinterpret it. If the regulation and policy agreed fails to meet the challenge, so does the funding. One investigation found that banks and asset managers based in the EU, UK, US and China have made deals worth \$157 billion with firms accused of destroying tropical forest in Brazil, Southeast Asia and Africa since the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement.

### USA and China

During COP26, the USA and China announced that they had agreed to work more closely on climate change. That announcement has been widely celebrated. They make promises about deforestation, and about methane. Yet the promises they made about coal didn't impel China to even sign up to the commitment (discussed last week) to phase out coal; likewise with methane. Xi Jinping, China's president, didn't even show up to COP 26.

The even more celebrated launch of the “global methane pledge”, with 105 signatories, had a foundational flaw. Signatories don't face individual targets for reducing emissions. Thus they may sign up without drawing up any goals or policies.

[Nitrous oxide](#) was not even covered in agreements.

The greenwashing didn't end at the edge of Glasgow. Much of the media have been celebrating the successes of COP 26. Even some [campaigning NGOs](#), eager I assume to offer quick gratification to their donors, have played up the successes.

To celebrate COP26 you must first

lower your ambitions through the gutter. Yet we can make the so-far empty promises real, and go beyond them. We must and can build a movement to force the needed changes in our workplaces, countries, and internationally.

Baby steps have been made in that direction within the movements built around COP 26.

### Peoples summit

In many cities, and in the COP26 Coalition's “People's Summit for Climate Justice”, activities around COP26 took the form of a coalition, of individuals and groups taking action within one area. They did not cohere into a movement. COP26 Coalition was neither democratic nor transparent in its organising. It was not clear who was making decisions, how they were made, or how they could be challenged.

The summit was relatively open with a reasonable range of perspectives and organisations taking part. Yet they were not put in serious dialogue with each other. Instead of working together, debating out differences as parts of a common movement, different groups worked in independent silos alongside each other. That was a big missed opportunity.

Within the discussions, in the meetings we organised, and in wider protests and discussions in Glasgow and beyond, Workers' Liberty activists raised the urgency of a class struggle approach to environmentalism.

There was an appetite for this message. But where we were not making such arguments, they were largely absent.

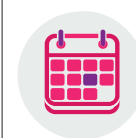
The left wing environmentalists in the People's Summit generally recognised that capitalism, with its insatiable drive for profit, is the engine behind climate change. Yet they failed to take the next logical step: recognising that workers organised at work, at the place where profit and capital is produced, are the key agents with the power to make change happen.

Even those advocating engagement with workers often saw trade unions as just another movement in a “movement of movements” against climate change. Many trade unionists there advocated a *state-led* “just transition”, with “trade-unions” as a homogenous body negotiating a better deal as part of an

already occurring transition.

Against this, we advocate a worker-led transition, with grass-roots organising to transform our unions and movement from the bottom to the top, to fight for the environmental changes we need. This struggle will take us into increasing conflict with capital, and with its representatives within the labour movement. We organise and educate to face this conflict straight on, to win it, and to build a better and ecologically sound society.

Environmental organising is no less urgent now than before or during COP26. A radical class-struggle approach to environmental organising remains the only strategy that can win. Check out your local COP26 coalition hub or XR group, which may already be organising next steps, and advocate a workplace orientation. From the other side: raise environmental issues in your workplace, and union. □



### Activist Agenda

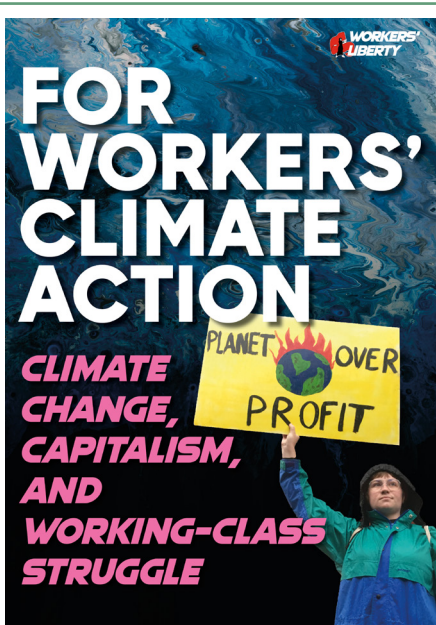
On Friday 9 December (7pm: [bit.ly/9dec-fou](https://bit.ly/9dec-fou)) Free Our Unions is running a Zoom meeting with former postal worker and CWU activist Dave Chapple on how workers in the postal service (unlike almost everywhere else) have retained a tradition of unofficial, “wildcat” strikes which defy the anti-union legislation, enabling them to take swift and often victorious action, for example in defence of victimised colleagues.

On Saturday 20 November Labour Left Internationalists hosted a Zoom meeting (brief report: [bit.ly/hous-20n](https://bit.ly/hous-20n)) about the housing emergency, with Andrea Gilbert from the Labour Homelessness Campaign and Martin Wicks from the Labour Campaign for Council Housing, plus authors Dave Renton and Paul Watt speaking on their recent books on the subject.

It was the first of a series of “link-with-campaigns” Zoom meetings LLI plans with speakers from left and labour movement campaigns.

The next is on Saturday 18 December (4:30pm), with speakers from health and social care, and after that on Saturday 15 January (5pm) with speakers from campaigns for free movement and against detention centres. LLI's committee, meeting before the 20 Nov housing discussion, also decided on an effort to get left-wing motions and delegates to Labour women's conference (19-20 March: deadline for motions and delegates 11 February) and a protest against the apparent disappearance of the “democracy process” in Momentum. □

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



Workers Liberty have published a new edition of our climate pamphlet, updated with new articles, reviews, and debates.

[workersliberty.org/climate-pamphlet](https://workersliberty.org/climate-pamphlet)



## Our audio!

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

- Solidarity Newspaper
- Environmental pamphlet and meetings
- Public meetings – recordings of introductory speeches
- Fighting racism: pamphlets and more
- Solidarność: The workers' movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-81
- Many other pamphlets

See [workersliberty.org/audio](https://workersliberty.org/audio) for episodes, and for information on subscribing and using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search “Workers' Liberty” or “Solidarity & More”. □

# Abolish GCSEs, turn the tide on toxic testing

By a Lewisham teacher

Over the last ten years Workers' Liberty school workers have been at the forefront of pushing the debate about testing in schools in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and in its successor the National Education Union (NEU).

In 2019 we wrote a motion passed at the NEU's national conference which committed the union to an indicative ballot of members to boycott the statutory tests in primary schools. The ballot result was strong, but sadly not built upon. Last year, we wrote a motion, passed with amendments, that committed the union to call for the abolition of GCSEs.

On 23 October Joint General Secretary of the NEU, Kevin Courtney, posted an article on Facebook entitled "Should we reform GCSE exams?" Although the union's democratically agreed position is abolition, not reform, there is much good in Courtney's article.

He starts by outlining the system:

- Our 16 year olds sit 30 separate GCSE exam papers, across three weeks in the summer. Not 30 hours of exams; 30 separate exams usually longer than one hour.

- They generally aren't allowed reference books of any sort; memorisation is key.

- There is almost no other form of assessment, which contributes to their GCSE grade, at least in the GCSEs which count towards league tables; it all rides on the exams

- Their teachers will generally have spent months working with them on exam technique and revision, because they want their pupils to do well and their school wants to do well in league tables



- Many pupils will also have had private tutors also concentrating on exam technique, again because their parents want them to do well and get good grades in the exam race

- The pupils' scripts are marked by examiners and then the exam boards distributes the grades by a process they call "comparable outcomes" which rations the number of grades; this is a "norm referenced" system not a "criterion referenced" system.

- Then, after the exams, pupils stop studying most of the subjects they have worked so hard for and narrow down for A-levels.

The system is in essence the same as when GCSEs were introduced in 1988, Michael Gove made them significantly worse by

- a) changing the way the league tables are counted, to say some subjects matter more than others (...)

- b) introducing the comparable outcomes system after a grade inflation panic and

- c) removing the big majority of non exam assessment – there was a lot more coursework in some exam boards in the early period.

## Problems

This brings many problems.

1. England tops the OECD's own league table for rote learning – as reported by both teachers and students.

2. We are testing recall, but that means we aren't assessing or developing skills in the subject

3. Our system narrows down learning far faster than other countries.

4. This system of 30 all or nothing exams following months of cramming is a major contributor to adolescent anxiety and mental illness.

5. The system of rationing grades means one third of children are told that have failed English (the language they actually speak!) or Maths every year.

6. The high stakes nature for schools leads to many so called "unexplained exits".

Courtney continues: "On the first two

points – rote learning is good for many things – multiplication tables is the obvious example. But it is not good for higher order thinking. You actually have to transform knowledge, to manipulate it in real jobs and adult life – not just to recall it...

"An exam system focussed on recall means it is not focussed on building team-work, initiative or creativity.

"And our system is so narrow – much more than other countries; the number of students whose A levels cover three out of the five big buckets of Humanities, Sciences, Maths, Languages or Vocational studies has halved since 2010 – from 38% to 17%. And vocational education is always the poor relation. Yet our modern world is so interdisciplinary.

"Perhaps worst of all our system is bad for disadvantaged children. The one third who fail every year are the most disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those with free school meals. And let's be clear – they haven't 'failed', they just haven't scored as well as another child in this system of exam races we have. Just think: even if every teacher and every student worked twice as hard, still a third would be told they have failed and still it would be the same third. We are rationing success.

"Maybe sometimes we need exams to ration: perhaps medical courses are oversubscribed so you want to ration entry. But we don't have to ration the number of 16 year olds who become 17 year olds!

"And that's not the only way disadvantaged children are damaged by this system: they are also the children you find leaving schools when heads say to parents this school is 'too academic for your child'."

Later, despite his "reform" headline, Courtney states the issue more clearly in line with union policy:

"Do we need any high stakes exams at all at 16 – if all young people are staying in education or training until 18?"

"Should we instead say that every 16 year old should do something big, with the sort of challenge you get from the Duke of Edinburgh award, alongside formative assessments by their teachers?"

"Shouldn't our assessment system be essentially criterion referenced not norm referenced – that is like the music grade system. There is no rationing of the number of children who get a music grade 4 each year. Why is there a rationing system of how many children can get a Maths grade 4 each year? This isn't 'prizes for all' – some children don't get their grade 4 music – but they can practise more and get it next time.

"Now I've concentrated on GCSE – but there are so many similar arguments around the phonics check, the multiplication check, the baseline assessment, the key stage 2 SATs.."

## Change

Taken as a whole, the article is strong. The problem is: how do we achieve change? Remember Kevin Courtney is the joint general secretary of the largest school workers' union in Europe and the fourth biggest trade union in the UK, claiming over half a million members. In the middle of the article, Courtney states:

"Now the National Education Union has set up an independent commission to look at all of this. It is genuinely independent and we many or may not agree with all of the conclusions it reaches." This would be ok if it were a small part of the union's overall strategy. In fact, it is almost the entirety of the union's strategy.

The union has spurned the opportunity thrown up by the 2019 indicative ballot on primary tests and the further opportunities by the cancellation of examination and tests during the pandemic. This year baseline testing for all reception children (four year olds!) was rolled out and the Department of Education is threatening a return of Key Stage 3 SATs. Strong words, lobbying and Independent Reviews aren't turning the tide on toxic testing.

As a motion written by Workers' Liberty school workers for the 2022 NEU conference puts it:

"Despite strong policy and lobbying by our union, the burden of toxic testing is increasing year on year... The only way to stop this is effective collective action." □



Women's Fightback Issue 26 out now. Includes articles on protecting women beyond the police, sex positive feminism, solidarity with Afghan women, and more. □

[workersliberty.org/publications](http://workersliberty.org/publications)

A socialist dissects Left antisemitism. 253 pages, £9.99 □

[bit.ly/shop-wl](http://bit.ly/shop-wl)

# The farmers' and workers

By Nodeep Kaur

On 19 November, India's farmers [triumphed](#) after a year-long struggle, as Narendra Modi's government announced it would repeal its neo-liberal agricultural reforms.

In January, at a high point of that struggle, working-class activist Nodeep Kaur was [arrested](#), held for 45 days and subjected to violence and abuse by the police. She briefly shot to international prominence after Meena Harris, niece of US Vice President Kamala Harris, tweeted about her case. See [bit.ly/nk-jail](#) for a short background article on Nodeep's family and her arrest and treatment in jail, and [bit.ly/kaurkumar](#) for a longer one on her and her comrade Shiv Kumar, also jailed in January. A week before Modi's retreat, Nodeep spoke to Sacha Ismail and Faryal Velmi.

**You became relatively well-known internationally, earlier in the year, because of the farmers' protests, but you yourself are a worker. How did you become involved in the farmers' movement?**

Modi's farm laws affect workers too. Without agricultural labourers, the farmers can't produce anything. If the farmers don't get a decent rate for their crops, the labourers suffer too. There is also a loss of jobs in the mandis [state-regulated markets where farmers sell their crops] – and for workers more generally, the reforms will increase the price of food.

I am from Punjab. I couldn't finish university in Delhi because I couldn't afford the fees; there wasn't any work in Delhi so I ended up in Kundli [on the Haryana-Delhi border], working in a lightbulb factory. That's how I came into contact with my organisation, [Mazdoor Adhikar Sangathan](#) [MAS, Workers' Rights Organisation]. Together with my comrades I worked to help the factory workers understand what the farmers' protests were about. We built solidarity and mobilised workers alongside the farmers.

## Nodeep Kaur speaking on 27 Nov

Nodeep Kaur, jailed earlier this year, will speak about the struggles of workers, farmers, women and oppressed minorities in India at Workers' Liberty's 27 November "Building a new left" event. Details: [bit.ly/wl-newleft](#)



Farmers' protest at Tikri border

That did not please the authorities. And we were also organising protests outside many factories for workers' rights, which the millionaires who own them did not like!

In January I was arrested, and my comrade Shiv Kumar was arrested a few days later. He was treated like a terrorist – arrested in his home by plain clothes police who covered his face, held a gun to his back and told him not to make any noise.

I was in jail for 45 days. For ten days I didn't really hear anything, but then a protest movement started to snowball. I learnt there were not only protests here, but international solidarity, through social media, too. That had an important impact in India too, because it pushed some in the farmers' movement who didn't want to support me into doing so. Things snowballed and there was serious disruption by farmers, workers and students to demand our release.

**Why were some in the farmers' movement reluctant to support you?**

There were voices saying that workers' rights was a separate thing and the farmers' movement shouldn't mix itself up with other issues. We said that they have to be linked and that view became more widespread.

**Tell us about your organisation, MAS.**

The organisation is based in Haryana, which has thousands of factories, many in the Kundli industrial area. It was set up in 2018 by Shiv Kumar and others. We have campaigned on a range of issues. Very low wages, often much less than the minimum wage. Inequality of pay between men and women; for women workers there's also a serious problem of rape and sexual assault by supervisors. Child labour. And the police and factory owners working in collusion with each other.

We have 300 factory workers who are members; but also some involvement from agricultural labourers and people who work in the streets. They are gen-

erally connected to the organisation less formally.

When a worker comes to us with an issue, we often give them a letter, with our stamp, demanding the employer sorts it out. Prior to our arrest, when the organisation was smaller, these letters were often ignored or even snatched off workers. Now because of the struggles we have waged we are stronger. Very often now the letters say we will organise a protest outside the factory, and the bosses know we are serious.

**What is the latest in the farmers' struggle?**

On 26 November it will be a year since the farmers' movement began. There will be a day of action, a day of solidarity, in every village, in every university and school. There will also be a new convergence on the parliament in Delhi, with farmers bringing their tractors.

In that last year 700 farmers have died taking part in the protests, and there is a lot of repression against the movement. The numbers protesting fell due to Covid, and also because of people's need to work so they can survive. But still the battle continues. In many parts of the country, if a BJP politician goes to a village, they will be beaten up and chased out. And after a year, the farm laws have not been implemented yet.

**Can you say more about the relationship between farmers and farm labourers in this struggle?**

There are always conflicts and tensions. In a village if a labourer speaks up for their rights, or for instance goes off with a farmer's daughter, they will very often be boycotted, their freedom will be restricted. But during the farmers' movement we have built a lot of solidarity. Labourers know that they will be the first victim of the farm laws, farmers know they need labourers' support. In some areas of the country, for instance Punjab, there is a tradition of farmer-worker solidarity, and this movement has strengthened that a lot.

All this has an impact in everyday life.

For obvious reasons, the government has tried very hard to divide the farmers and also to divide the farmers from the agricultural workers.

**What is your assessment of India's trade union movement? How effective is it?**

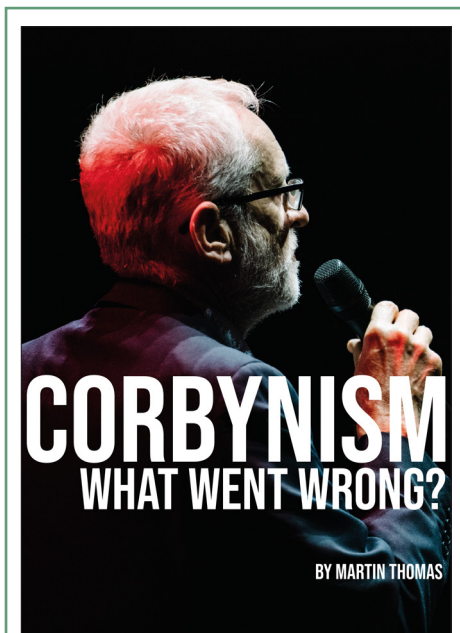
In many workplaces across India there has been great solidarity with the farmers' movement, but of course workers' rights are being attacked by Modi too. The strikes unions have called about this, including in November last year, are very patchy.

There is a huge amount of repression in India against trade unionists and any workers who want to fight for their rights – from the hired thugs of factory owners and from the police. There is also an issue of corruption in some big unions, where they actually take money from employers and aid their oppression of the workers. My organisation is a lot more grassroots and a lot braver than many unions. There is also a problem of unions being divided politically, linked to different political parties, and of different unions failing to work together even for very basic demands like a higher minimum wage. I don't just mean the unions linked to right-wing parties like the BJP, I mean even left unions refusing to work together.

Despite all that, there is a tradition of big trade union struggles in India, for instance in Mumbai, and there have been many victories over the years.

**Can you say a bit more about unions linked to right-wing parties?**

They use the same arguments as the parties, dangerous nationalist argu-



Lessons for socialist activists and the Labour left from the Labour Party under Corbyn 2015-20. 60 pages, £4. □

[workersliberty.org/publications](#)



# s' struggle that beat Modi

ments. They say that workers and farmers who protest are against India, that they are terrorists, that they are linked to people in other countries conspiring against India. They call the farmers from Punjab Khalistanis [Sikh separatists].

These movements helped provoke [Hindu] workers to carry out nationalist actions, like the shameful killing of Muslims that happened in Gujarat [when Modi was chief minister there]. They make workers ignore the fact that their stomachs are growling by mobilising them for nationalism.

## What is your experience organising as a young Dalit women? How does caste fit together with class in Indian society?

Women in India are treated terribly. They are seen as existing just to bear children, and in many cases are treated worse than animals. Dalits are seen as fit only to sweep up rubbish, to serve the needs of the higher classes. They believe god created us to serve them. So having someone like me standing outside factories, raising my fist to a rich factory owner, that is a huge protest against the status quo just in itself.

The ruling classes in India have woven class divisions and caste divisions together. Caste is used to divide working-class unity and solidarity. If workers in a factory are fighting for their rights, often the owner will use caste to divide the workers and stir up hostility, and often that works.

The most dangerous aspect of the BJP and their friends is their whipping up of hostility and violence against

non-Hindus, particularly Muslims. They are also extreme religious fundamentalists. On Valentine's Day, for instance, they go round attacking young couples.

Whenever there is a protest movement, the ruling class and the media try to give it a sectarian label, saying this is the movement of just one religion or one caste. But in the farmers' movement the message is that we are all farmers, not divided by caste or religion. This struggle has opened the minds of many farmers and other people to understanding the divisive and sectarian nature of the BJP.

## Does the issue of climate change come up in your struggles?

For a lot of workers and farmers in India, they are living hand-to-mouth, and just getting enough to eat can be hard work. It's difficult to ask them to protest about climate change. However there are massive issues in India; for instance Delhi is extremely polluted, if

you go there your eyes will constantly water and you will not stop coughing. Some better off activists in India, students for instance, have started to engage with these issues a lot more.

There needs to be government-level action against the companies that are polluting and churning out emissions, and international action too. Individual workers and farmers are powerless to address this question.

## Are you a socialist?

Yes, I am a socialist – I am influenced by Marxist ideas. I believe workers should not be divided by religion or caste; I believe the division of society into a working class and a ruling class is not natural. I want to see a radical social change. I have often been referred to as a Dalit activist, but I don't call myself that, I call myself a labour activist.

We fight for workers' rights but we also fight against privatisation and for public ownership. Both farmers and workers are fighting this battle against

privatisation, it is the same struggle. It is an international struggle too – the companies we are taking on here in India are international companies.

## Are there struggles in other countries that have influenced or inspired you?

The Black Lives Matter struggle in the US. I was also inspired by the international solidarity demanding my release.

## How can we help now?

Social media support is really useful. So are donations. A great thing about the farmers' movement is that it got financial help from the Indian diaspora all over the world, that's one reason it has continued for so long. Donations to my organisation are welcome too, and would benefit us a great deal.

It is a very difficult task overcoming caste and other divisions, and fighting for workers' rights. We are doing our best to organise and unite workers, agricultural labourers and farmers. The farmers' movement has given a very good platform for our struggle. □

# War sharpens in Ethiopia

By Luca Brusco

A ceasefire is looking unlikely in Ethiopia, as tensions remain high in the conflict between the central government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

On 2 November, the federal government declared a state of emergency, and granted authorities the power to conscript "any military-age citizen who has weapons". Five days later, a pro-military demonstration was held in the capital, with tens of thousands of attendees, denouncing efforts to stop the conflict through negotiations. Recently, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed even called on all Ethiopians "to organise and march... using every weapon and power... to prevent, reverse and bury the terrorist TPLF."

Meanwhile, starvation is spreading in Tigray, due to the systematic blockade maintained by the federal government. According to former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock: "There's not just an attempt to starve six million people but an attempt to cover up what's going on." The TPLF hopes to make receiving aid easier by seizing the roads leading to the port in Djibouti.

Tigrayans living in areas outside of TPLF control also suffer from arbitrary detentions. Amnesty International reports that more than 1,000 people



are held at one camp in squalid conditions.

Sexual violence is reported from all sides. Recently TPLF fighters have been accused of gang rape by 16 women in the Amhara region. TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda denied the allegations and called for an independent investigation. Amnesty International says all sides have been accused of human rights abuses in the year-long war.

As the Tigrayan forces are now less than 300 kilometers away from the capital, Addis Ababa, pressure is mounting on Abiy Ahmed.

"The TPLF wants to put the government under pressure to negotiate. I don't think they [TPLF] will enter Addis Ababa. They are very unpopular there"

– says Samuel Ghebrhewet, former BBC Tigrinya editor.

Earlier this month, nine groups formed a coalition known as the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces, with the goal to oust Abiy. The group includes the Oromo Liberation Army, historically an opponent of the TPLF. Abiy himself came to power due to protests led by Oromo democracy activists.

Although mountainous Tigray includes a relatively small part of Ethiopia's population, it has historically often been a dominant element in Ethiopia. The TPLF was the main force in the central government from 1991 to 2018, and claims some credit for the relatively rapid economic growth under that government from about 2011.

Abiy Ahmed took power in 2018, and proclaimed a policy of releasing political prisoners, privatising the economy, and making peace with neighbouring Eritrea. In September 2020 the TPLF went ahead with regional elections in Tigray, despite Abiy postponing them, allegedly due to the pandemic.

Abiy would soon arrest the leaders of the Oromo democracy movement, and dissolve their parties.

Shortly after, allegedly in response to TPLF attacks on Ethiopian Northern Command headquarters, Abiy attacked Tigray with his Eritrean ally. □

## Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to [our pamphlets](#) including:

- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers' Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Shapurji Saklatvala: Socialist Rebel in Parliament
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- Automation and the working class
- When workers beat the fascists
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it □

[workersliberty.org/publications/](http://workersliberty.org/publications/)

# The Churches and the mobs in

## Introduction

This puncturing of the smug self-satisfaction of the Protestant Unionists in this article is valuable, not least in teaching socialists why we must fight religious bigotry in all its forms. The article is also an illustration of the limitations of the “but-what-about...” riposte in politics.

Connolly told the truth about the past of the Anglicans and the Scottish Presbyterians, but the horrors he recounts were by and large things of the past. Catholic clericalism was very much of the present... And the future. Some of the details were different, but Lecky's-Connolly's account of the Presbyterian clergy in Reformation Scotland is close to a description of the rule of the Catholic Church in the 26 Counties, then and for many decades to come.

Both the Six-County and 26-County states were sectarian, though in different ways. In the Six Counties, the Catholics were a conquered people, physically repressed and systematically ill-treated and discriminated against. In the 26 Counties, Catholics – and non-Catholics – lived under a clerical domination akin to the domination of the Presbyterian clergy in Scotland, which Lecky-Connolly describe in this article. And it was the Catholic bishops who insisted on having their own denominational schools in the Six Counties, a central feature of Catholic-Protestant alienation from each other. □

Sean Matgamna



### The unexpurgated Connolly

By James Connolly

A sudden outburst of strikes in the industries and districts under my supervision officially have rather disturbed my schedule of arrangements, and have seriously encroached upon my time for writing this week. Hence my notes this week will be short to compensate for their undue length on other occasions, and will consist for the most part of quotations – more or less apt.

The chief event in political circles in the North of Ireland since my last writing has been the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Belfast. This was looked forward to with much interest, as it was expected that a big effort would be made to get it to make some pronouncement



upon the vexed question of Home Rule. So it did. It pronounced heavily against that proposal.

But it did not cover itself with glory in the act. The political tacticians who are manoeuvring this fight against Home Rule first introduced a proposal that the voting should be open and no ballot should take place, thus leaving the menace of the boycott, and worse, over the heads of those who stood up for freedom against the Orange wire-pullers. This reactionary proposal was carried, and of course the rest was plain sailing. Those whose consciences would not allow them to vote against the legislative independence of their country, but were not prepared to sacrifice their living, left the Assembly quietly, and the politicians had it all their own way, but for the determined fight of a small body of high-principled ministers and laymen.

When these few attempted to speak in defence of their position, the Assembly indulged in a series of cat-calls, howls and interruptions such as would have disgraced the frequenters of a penny “gaff.” Of course all this was in pursuance of the admonition “Be Christ-like in spirit.”

Not being of the same religious persuasion as the Assembly, I may be out of court as a critic, but as a commentary upon the claim that religious persecution is the monopoly of the Church of the majority of the inhabitants of Ireland, and religious toleration the peculiar heritage of their opponents, perhaps I may be permitted to quote the verdict of history upon this point.

In his *History of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, speaking of the influence of the Presbyterian clergy

on the character of the Scottish people, Mr Lecky [1] says:

“There was one country, however, in which it attained an absolute ascendancy. There was one country in which the Puritan ministers succeeded in moulding alike the habits of the nation, and in disseminating their harsh and gloomy tenets through every section of society.

### Scotland

“While England was breaking loose from her most ancient superstitions, and advancing with gigantic strides along the paths of knowledge, Scotland still cowered with willing submission before her clergy. Never was a menial servitude more complete, and never was a tyranny maintained with more inexorable barbarity.

“Supported by public opinion, the Scottish ministers in overawing all opposition, in prohibiting the faintest expression of adverse opinions, in prying into and controlling the most private concerns of domestic life; in compelling everyone to conform absolutely to all the ecclesiastical regulations they enjoined; and in, at last, directing the whole scope and current of legislation. They maintained their ascendancy over the popular mind by a system of religious terrorism, which we can now barely conceive, The misery of man, the anger of the Almighty, the fearful power and continual presence of Satan, the agonies of hell, were the constant subjects of their preaching.

“All the most ghastly forms of human suffering were accumulated as faint images of the doom of the immense majority of mankind. Countless miracles were represented as taking place

as within the land, but they were almost of them miracles of terror. Disease, storm, famine, every awful calamity that fell upon mankind, or blasted the produce of soil, was attributed to the direct intervention of spirits; and Satan himself was represented as constantly appearing in a visible form upon the earth.

“Such teaching produced its natural effects. In a land where credulity was universal, in a land where the intellect was numbed and palsied by these awful contemplations, where almost every form of amusement was suppressed, and where the thoughts of men were concentrated with an undivided energy on theological conceptions, such teachings were necessarily the superstition of witch-

craft.

“Witchcraft was but one form of the panic it produced; it was but the reflection by a diseased imagination of the popular theology. We accordingly find that it assumed the most frightful proportions, and the darkest character. In other lands the superstition was at least mixed with much of imposture; in Scotland it appears to be entirely undiluted. It was produced by the teaching of the clergy, and it was everywhere fostered by their persecution. Eagerly, passionately, with a thirst for blood that knew no mercy, with a zeal that never tired, did they accomplish their task.

“Assembled in solemn Synod the College of Aberdeen, in 1603, enjoined every minister to take two of the elders of the parish to make ‘a subtle and privy inquisition’, and to question all the parishioners upon oath as to their knowledge of witches. Boxes were placed in the churches for the express purpose of receiving the accusations. When a woman had fallen under suspicion, the minister from the pulpit denounced her by name, exhorted his parishioners to give evidence against her, and prohibited anyone from sheltering her. In the same spirit he exerted the power which was given him by a parochial organisation, elaborated perhaps more skilfully than any other in Europe.

“Under these circumstances, the witch-cases seem to have fallen almost entirely into the hands of the clergy. They were the leading commissioners. Before them the confessions were taken. They were the acquiescing witnesses, or the directors of the tortures by which those confessions were elic-

# the battles for human freedom

ited.” And to complete the picture for the edification of the reader who believes that the clerical gentlemen who now so loudly about being the sole repositories in Ireland of traditions of freedom, perhaps this picture from the same source bearing on and attesting the slavish spirit fostered by Episcopalianism may also be of value:

“Created, in the first instance, by a Court intrigue, pervaded in all its parts by a spirit of the most intense Erastianism [2], and aspiring at the same time to a spiritual authority scarcely less absolute than that of the Church which it had superseded, Anglicanism was from the beginning at once the most servile and the most efficient agent of tyranny. Endeavouring by the assistance of temporal authority and by the display of wordly pomp to realise in England the same position as Catholicism had occupied in Europe, she naturally flung herself on every occasion into the arms of the civil power. No other church so uniformly betrayed and trampled on the liberties of her country.

“In all those fiery trials through which English liberty has passed since the Reformation, she invariably cast her influence into the scale of tyranny, supported and eulogised every attempt to violate the Constitution, and wrote the fearful sentence of eternal condemnation upon the tombs of the martyrs of freedom. That no tyranny, however gross, that no violation however flagrant, can justify resistance; that all those principles concerning the rights of nations on which constitutional government is achieved are deadly sins, was her emphatic and continual teaching.

“A rebel’, she declared, ‘is worse than the worst prince, and rebellion worse than the worst government of the worst prince hath hitherto been’. ‘God placeth as well evil princes as good’, and, therefore, ‘for subjects to deserve through their sins to have an evil prince, and then to rebel against him, were double and treble evil by provoking God more to plague them!’

“St. Paul counselled passive obedience under Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, ‘who were not only no Christians, but Pagans, and also either foolish rulers or cruel tyrants’; nay, the Jews owed it even to Nebuchadnezzar, when he had slain their king, nobles, parents, children, and kinsfolk, burned their country – yes Jerusalem itself, and the holy Temple – and had carried the residue into captivity.

“Even the Blessed Virgin, being of the royal blood of the ancient natural kings of Jewry, did not disdain to obey the commandment of a heathen and foreign prince’; much more, therefore, should we ‘obey princes though strangers, wicked and wrongful, when God for our sins shall place such over us,” unless; indeed, begin anything contrary to the Divine command; but even ‘in that we may not in anywise withstand violently or rebel against rulers or make any insurrection, sedition, or tumults, either by force of arms or otherwise, against the anointed of the Lord, or any of His officers, but we must in each case patiently suffer all wrongs.”

These extracts, coupled with the well-known hostility shown by the Catholic Church towards all forms of intellectual freedom outside of its own rule, should convince all but the most bigoted or unreflective that accusations of intolerance do not come well from the lips of any religious body. Still less can we accept without a very substantial grain of salt and a bucket of sea water the claim of any body of ecclesiastics to be champions of political freedom or social advancement.

## Mob

As our best comment on such a claim, permit me to quote from my answer to the learned Dublin Jesuit, Father Kane. The following will be found on pages 37-38 of the pamphlet, *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, stocked by the Reformers’ Bookstall, Glasgow:

“What is the political and social record of the mob in history as against the record of the other classes? There

was a time, stretching for more than a thousand years, when the mob was without power or influence, when the entire power of the Governments of the world was concentrated in the hands of the kings, the nobles and the hierarchy.

“That was the blackest period in human history. It was the period during which human life was not regarded as being of as much value as the lives of hares and deers; it was the period when freedom of speech was unknown, when trial by jury was suppressed, when men and women were tortured to make them confess crimes before they were found guilty, when persons obnoxious to the ruling powers were arrested and kept in prison (often for a lifetime) without trial; and it was the period during which a vindictive legal code inflicted the death penalty for more than 150 offences – when a boy was hung for stealing an apple, a farmer for killing a hare on the roadside.

## Sectarianism

“It was during this undisturbed reign of the kings, the nobles, and the hierarchy that religious persecutions flourished, when Protestants killed Catholics, Catholics slaughtered Protestants, and both hunted Jews, when man ‘made in God’s image’ murdered his fellow man for daring to worship God in a way different from that of the majority; it was then that Governments answered their critics by the torture, when racks and thumbscrews pulled apart the limbs of men and women, when political and religious opponents of the State had their naked feet and legs placed in tin boots of boiling oil, their heads crushed between the jaws of a vice, their bodies stretched across a wheel while their bones were broken by blows of an iron bar, water forced down, their throats until their stomachs distended and burst, and when little children toiled in mine and factory for 12, 14 and 16 hours per day.

“But at last, with the development of manufacturing, came the gathering together of the mob, and consequent knowledge of its numbers and power, and with the gathering-together also came the possibility of acquiring education. Then, the mob started upon its upward march to power – a power only to be realised in the Socialist Republic.

“In the course of that upward march the mob has transformed and humanised the world. It has abolished religious persecution and imposed toleration upon the bigots of all creeds; it has established the value of human life, softened the horrors of war as a preliminary to abolishing it, compelled trial by jury, abolished the death penalty for all offences save one, and in some countries abolished it for all; and to-day it is fighting to take the children from

the factory and mine, and put them to school. This mob, ‘the most blind and ruthless tyrant of all’, with one sweep of its grimy, toil-worn hand swept the rack, the thumbscrew, the wheel, the boots of burning oil, the torturer’s vice and the stake into the oblivion of history, and they who to-day would seek to view those arguments of kings, nobles, and ecclesiastics must seek them in the lumber room of the museum.

“In this civilising, humanising work the mob had at all times to meet and master the hatred and opposition of kings and nobles; and there is not in history a record of any movement for abolishing torture, preventing war, establishing popular suffrage, or shortening the hours of labour led by the Hierarchy. Against all this achievement of the mob its enemies have but one instance of abuse of power – the French Reign of Terror – and they suppress the fact that this classic instance of mob fury lasted but eight months, whereas the cold-blooded cruelty of the ruling classes which provoked it had endured for a thousand years.

“All hail, then, to the Mob, the incarnation of Progress!” □

• From *Forward*, 21 June 1913, and not previously reprinted. Original headline: “The Irish Presbyterians and Home Rule”. Subheads here are ours.

[1] Lecky: William Edward Harpole Lecky (1839-1903) was an Irish Protestant historian and an MP. Initially a Home Ruler, he ended as a Liberal Unionist. He wrote a great *History of Ireland*, triggered in part by the knowing dishonesty of J A Froude, a disciple of Thomas Carlyle, who wrote a three-volume history of *The English in Ireland*.

[2] Erastianism: the belief that the state has and should have supreme power over the church in doctrine, and all other ecclesiastical matters.



## Our videos!

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

- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- Black Lives Matter
- Socialist commentary on the Covid-19 crisis
- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- An introduction to Marx’s Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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



## Corrections

Oops! I was mistaken (*Solidarity* 614) when I attributed the truncation of “Yellow Unions in Ireland” to the Irish Communist Organisation, which republished it in 1968. I apologise. The villain in this piece of bowdlerisation of James Connolly, while simultaneously treating him as oracle and prophet, seems to have been the Cork Workers’ Club, which republished the article in 1972 in a pamphlet *Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, establishing a version reprinted since and available on the web. □

# Taliban bans women actors



## Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The Taliban have banned dramas and soap operas which include women actors. This comes as part of newly announced directive from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The Taliban also called on women television journalists to wear the hijab when presenting.

The Ministry called for banning films or programmes that were against Islamic and Afghan values, a vague formulation. "These are not rules but a religious guideline", ministry spokesman Hakif Mohajir told AFP.

Afghan television channels have offered a wide range of programmes – outside of news the most popular

have been "American Idol" style singing and dancing competitions and foreign soap operas.

### Media

Under the last Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001, there was very little Afghan media. Television, movies and most other forms of entertainment were banned under immorality laws. Ownership of a video player was punishable by public lashing. There was little underground TV or radio. There was only one legal radio station, Voice of Sharia, and it broadcast propaganda and religious content.

Since 2001 there have been two decades of flourishing independent Afghan media. Before August 2021, there were dozens of TV networks and more than 170 FM radio stations. Most Afghan homes now have access to TV and radio. The widespread use and interest in TV and radio meant returning

to a nineties-style shut down of all independent media was going to be extremely difficult for the Taliban. Instead they are limiting content. Already many media outlets have closed.

### Journalists

According to a survey by the Afghanistan National Journalists Union, over 70% of Afghan journalists have lost their jobs since August and 80% of media organisations have ceased functioning. Foreign governments and donor organisations have slashed funding to Afghanistan since the Taliban's takeover. Health care and food supply have suffered, but the media was also one of the industries most reliant on foreign aid.

Journalists in Afghanistan also face violence. The day the media guidelines were announced, a news anchor was beaten by armed men. Dozens of incidents of violence and threats of vi-

olence against Afghan journalists have been recorded in the last two months, with nearly 90 percent committed by the Taliban, says the journalists' union.

More than 40 percent of the cases recorded by the Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU) were physical beatings and another 40 percent were verbal threats of violence, according to a report in October.

Constraints on women in media follow other attacks on freedoms for women and girls. Women have been removed from many workplaces and university until "secure" "Islamic" environments can be established, including segregated classes. The Taliban have said their restrictions on women working and girls studying remain "temporary". □

• A feminist speaks from inside Afghanistan, *Solidarity* 607: [bit.ly/fem-af](https://bit.ly/fem-af)



## Half price offer!

Special Christmas and New Year offer: all solder books (all except *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?*) half-price and post free for the next few weeks! Pay at [workersliberty.org/payment](https://workersliberty.org/payment) and email your order, with delivery address, to [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org).

Regular orders at [workersliberty.org/publications](https://workersliberty.org/publications). □



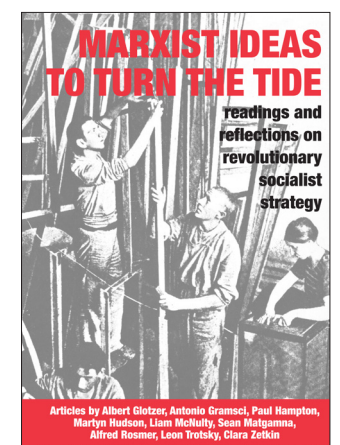
Lessons for socialist and left activists. 60 pages, £4



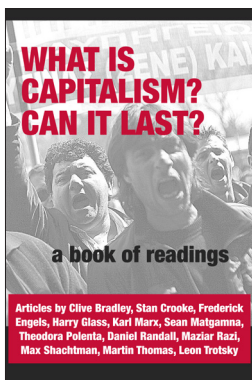
Rühle's abridgement is a good intro. 131 pages, £6



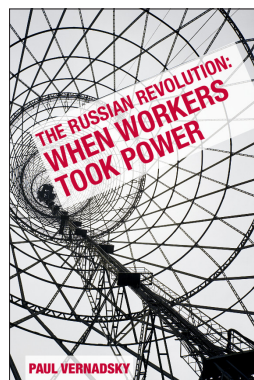
Tackling anti-socialist ideas. 182 pages, £5



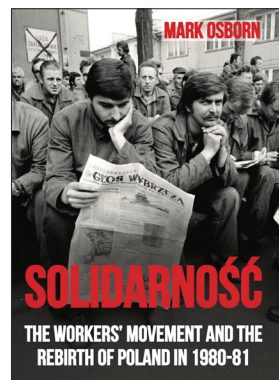
Revolutionary socialist strategy. 138 pages, £5



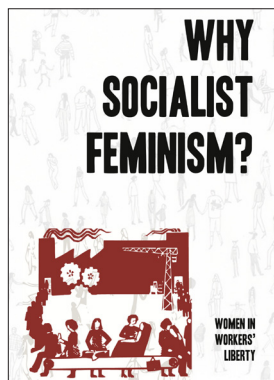
Socialist readings to understand and fight capitalism. 128 pages, £5



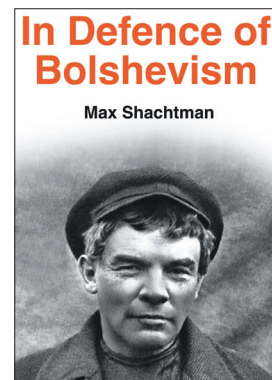
The 1917's revolution's real history, and lessons. 374 pages, £12



The history of Solidarność, from its dawn until the coup. 116 pages, £5



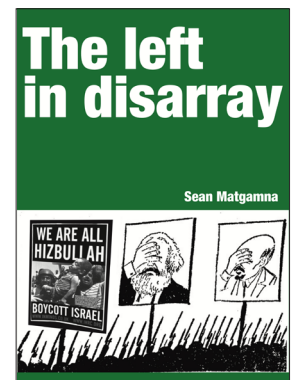
A socialist approach within recent "waves" of feminism. 102 pages, £5



Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today. 312 pages, £10



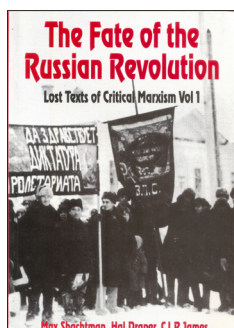
A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more. 107 pages, £5



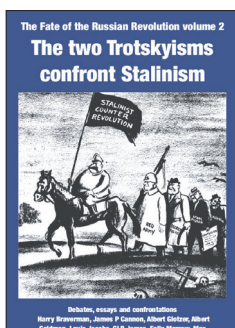
Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward. 408 pages, £12



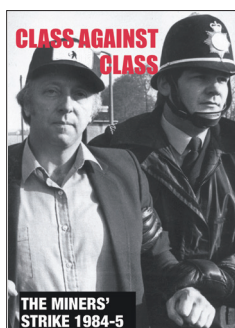
Can Socialism Make Sense? £8



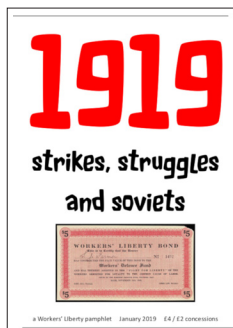
Fate of the Russian Revolution vol.1 £8



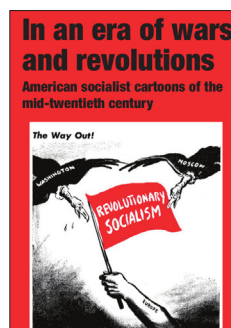
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms £20



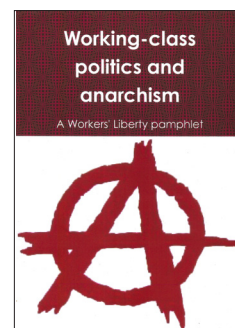
The Miners' Strike 1984-5 £9



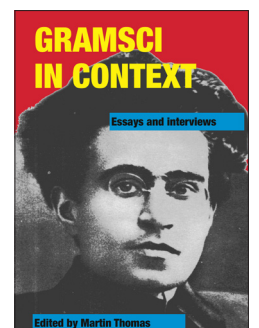
1919: Strikes, struggles, soviets £4



In an Era of Wars and Revolutions £9



Class Politics and Anarchism £5



Gramsci in Context £6

# Couriers to strike from 6 December

By Michael Elms

Sheffield's JustEat food courier workforce – employed by gig-economy firm Stuart – is set to demonstrate on Sunday 28 November and strike from 6 December, against a 24% pay cut.

JustEat couriers, organised in IWGB, were previously able to win a postponement of this pay cut, in Sheffield only, following a militant response. As gig-economy firm Stuart is clearly in turmoil, having lost a big chunk of their JustEat contract to competitor Scoober, drivers now hope to be able to defeat the pay cut once and for all.

Sheffield Labour MPs have spoken out in support of the IWGB couriers, including Olivia Blake, Louise Haigh, Paul Blomfield and Gill Furniss. While their words are welcome, more support is needed from the Labour Party and the socialist and trade union movement. Workers' Liberty members and friends in Sheffield have been central to this organising effort from the start and are now appealing for help from across the whole movement.

From 6 December, low-paid couriers will maintain picket lines outside all Sheffield McDonalds stores from 5-10pm to shut down delivery business at peak times. Weekly meetings of



couriers will decide on expanding and extending the action to cover more clients of JustEat and Stuart.

The IWGB needs broad support in building up a large strike fund. Please pass the model motion at [bit.ly/stuart6](https://bit.ly/stuart6) or make donations: [bit.ly/iwgb-clb](https://bit.ly/iwgb-clb) □

- Sheffield bin workers have voted to accept a pay deal. *Solidarity* understands that they have accepted a 3% pay award in 2021, plus a £250 one-off bonus payment; followed by a 3.5% pay award in 2022. This falls far short of the 6% they had voted to demand. Sheffield's Labour-Green coalition council should be held to account for their failure to prevent the employer, Veolia, from hiring agency labour to serve as scabs. A Labour-led Council should have worked to secure a better outcome for refuse workers. □

## Goldsmiths out for three weeks

By Cathy Nugent

Three weeks of strike action began at Goldsmiths University of London on Tuesday 23 November with picketing, a strike rally and the start of an extensive teach-out programme. The first day of action was the culmination of weeks of preparation, and the product of a determination to beat redundancies and damaging restructuring at the college.

The day before the strike, Goldsmiths Warden (top manager) Frances Corner issued a disingenuous message (one of many) urging University and College Union (UCU) members to call off their strike, claiming that she is listening, and implying UCU are being obstinate and unreasonable and were specifically refusing an offer of talks with ACAS. The fact is, as the UCU's reply says, "GUCU officers have been attending negotiations with SMT's [Senior Management Team] 'change managers' for months, whereas Frances Corner has not attended a single meeting." Reasonably, UCU are "not prepared to enter into protracted third party talks while our members' jobs and livelihoods remain on the

line." SMT has threatened to cut 52 jobs this academic year – 20 academics in English and Creative Writing and History and 32 professional services staff. More cuts will follow. They claim the cuts are needed to stick to a deal they have made with banks to reduce the college's deficit. All the details of those claims have proved flimsy and, in any case, their plans are unjust.

UCU's firm line is working. The threat of strike action has, the union branch says, spurred the SMT to make "significant concessions, including in a reduction in the number of redundancies being proposed for staff in student-facing services." Until all redundancies are off the table and the restructure (including the centralisation of services) is halted the fight goes on.

The branch needs to raise a lot of money for the hardship fund, especially to help the most precarious and low-paid staff. Please help: [bit.ly/sf-g](https://bit.ly/sf-g); or send cheques/make a transfer to "UCU Goldsmiths College Hardship Fund", Account number 20392303, Sort: 60-83-01, UCU, Office 4, 18 Laurie Grove, London, SE14 6NH. Live updates on Twitter: [@GoldsmithsUCU](https://twitter.com/GoldsmithsUCU) □

## Victory at Sage care home

By Ollie Moore

Strikes by care workers at the Sage care home in north London have won significant pay increases.

From 1 December, care workers, domestic, and maintenance staff will receive a pay increase to the London Living Wage, currently £11.05 an hour. This represents a minimum pay increase of 11%. All other staff will receive a pay rise of 5%.

The dispute at the care home began in March 2020, and has seen workers, who are members of the United Voices of the World union (UVW) strike several times, most recently in October 2021. Trustees of the care home include property magnate Benzion Freshwater, who has a net worth of over £2 billion. Freshwater is also a prominent philanthropist, donating to charities whose aims include "the alleviation of poverty", but until now had opposed workers' pay demands.

Care worker Julia said: "We held picket lines, distributed thousands of leaflets to the local community; 70,000 people signed our petitions; mem-

bers of Parliament signed an early day motion. We delivered this win, but the battle is not over. We are clear we must keep fighting to get what we want and what we – and the residents – deserve."

Care worker Bile, who is also a member of UVW's Executive Committee, said: "We went above and beyond to stand for what we deserve. We know that none of us acting alone can achieve success and we understand that there is still a way to go. We need to correct the legacy of past injustice and insist upon the will to change. Let there be work, bread, water, and water for all!"

Workers have vowed to continue fighting for other demands, including full occupational sick pay, and greater parity with NHS workers' terms and conditions. □

Sage care home striker Julia Veros Gonzalez will be speaking in the closing plenary of our 27 November day school, online and at Camden School for Girls, Sandall Road, London NW5 2DB: [bit.ly/wl-newleft](https://bit.ly/wl-newleft)

## Unison battles heat up

By Katy Dollar

On 2 November the left narrowly won the Labour Link National Committee elections in the public services union Unison. With union President Paul Holmes suspended, we expected a dead heat in votes between left and right at the first Labour Link Committee meeting on 16 November.

In fact, the right narrowly won all contested votes, because the Labour Party had expelled (for links to Socialist Appeal) Lilly Boulby, who was elected to the Labour Link Committee from the union's National Executive (NEC).

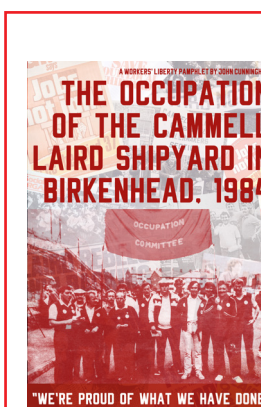
The right won Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, and the casting vote where votes are tied. The left have a majority on the Unison NEC and should be able to replace Lily with another left NEC member. Paul should be no longer suspended by the next Labour Link committee meeting. So the left should soon have a one-vote majority unless there is further disciplinary action taken by Labour or Unison to the benefit of the right and its masters, Unison's unelected officials.

The right in Unison is crowdfunding. A gofundme has been set up in the name A Voice For Members which at the time of writing has raised £2772. The fundraising initiative states: "Unison democracy is under attack. We are raising funds for our campaign to save our democracy and give Unison members a voice. #fightbackforUnison."

Public donors include initiator and

former Unison president Maureen Le Marinel; Wendy Nichols, who lost her Unison NEC seat but still sits on the Labour NEC from Unison; and Keith Vaz.

Also on 16 Nov, Unison's Industrial Action Committee (a subgroup of the NEC) met. Unison's left NEC have made their first big achievement in transforming the union. Strike pay in Unison will be raised from £25 to £50 and will be paid from day one of action instead of day four. The Action Committee also agreed to review the Industrial Action Handbook which lays out procedure for industrial action, in order to prevent current blocks and delays on balloting members for strike action. The improvement in strike pay will make action in small disputes, especially those involving low-paid members, easier to achieve and easier to win. □



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. □

[workersliberty.org/publications](https://workersliberty.org/publications)

## 6699 What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• [workersliberty.org/join-awl](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)

# Trying to do the sensible thing



## Diary of a Tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

"Well, you are early," the Train Manager says to me as I come downstairs to ask what is happening with my train. "I could just call you on the platform if there is an issue".

"I am giving myself plenty of walking time, my meal relief has finished but I can see my train number isn't running yet". I wonder why me trying to do us both a favour is so controversial...

"I have no idea. I will call service control... Hello controller, I am ringing about Train 420. I have the driver here... Oh right, yeah, I did make a note. OK, that's fine".

She hangs up and goes over to a

sheet of paper. "Yeah, sorry, actually it won't be on the platform. Go to the depot and bring it out for your time going east". "So it was worth me coming down and asking then?". "Well, I still could have just rung you on the platform". "But if it had been in the sidings then that would have just slowed everything down, but anyway..."

I see J on the platform and moan to him about the pointlessness of trying to do the sensible thing. "I think what it is, drivers have been called to the desk before when their relief isn't over, and then they have a row, so they just don't like doing it".

"Yeah, they aren't wrong to ignore it then, but the point is here I had finished my time and went down on my way to pick up. I know they aren't great, but sometimes you do wonder how much they actually get of the job".

J laughs. "You expect too much.

Some of them don't even know what the station abbreviations all are or what the Duty Book is actually telling us. Anyway", as a train comes in, "this one is me. Have a smooth one". □

• Jay Dawkey is a Tube driver.

## Ireland on film: Strumpet City



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The recent articles in *Solidarity* on James Connolly and other aspects of Irish labour history bring to mind what some have called the "great Irish novel": James Plunkett's *Strumpet City*, adapted for TV by Hugh Leonard and broadcast in Ireland in 1980 and then the UK. *Strumpet City* covers the period from 1907 to 1914, taking as its central event the Dublin Lockout of 1913. Connolly doesn't make an appearance (he was in the USA for some of this time) but we are offered a surprisingly bravado performance from Peter O'Toole as the famous labour leader Jim Larkin. For me, however, the TV adaptation is stolen by David Kelly's portrayal of the irascible destitute Rashers Tierney.

This epic historical drama takes us through Edward VII's (Peter Ustinov) visit to Dublin in 1907 and the Lockout, where we follow the worker Fitz and his family as they struggle to survive

In 1914 Fitz, who is now blacklisted, is seen in his British army uniform waving goodbye to his wife Mary as he takes the boat to England. We never find out whether Fitz survives the war, but the stage is already being set for the 1916 Easter Rising. □

## Ireland: Tories seek to crash their own deal

By Micheál MacEoin

Speculation is mounting that the UK, as part of its ongoing wrangle with the EU, may trigger Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol, plunging its whole Brexit agreement into doubt.

The Northern Ireland Protocol was agreed in October 2019 and signed in December 2020 as a means of avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. Instead, Northern Ireland would, in effect, remain part of the EU's Single Market for goods. Checks would take place between Northern Ireland and Great Britain – creating an Irish Sea border.

Despite initially agreeing to this, Unionists and the Tories are now agitating against their own deal, one which formed a central plank of the December 2019 general election. It seems, as Dominic Cummings recently suggested, that the UK Government signed the deal in order later to try to break it.

Article 16 of the Protocol allows either party to suspend the arrangement if it is likely to create serious "economic, societal or environmental difficulties". This is not strictly defined but the UK is arguing that the threshold has been reached.

The UK Government has been sending mixed signals, in turns taking a hardline position and then adopting a more conciliatory tone.

Beneath the diplomatic noise, it is clear they wish to renegotiate the Protocol and the parts of the overall Brexit Agreement which give the European Court of Justice an arbitration role. The EU has made offers to lighten and

reduce checks, but the UK has said they're not enough.

In July, as part of a negotiating gambit, the UK published a Command Paper which set out one possible approach. It would suspend Article 16 and several other provisions of the Protocol. It described an arrangement where there would be "no need for certificates and checks for individual items that are only ever intended to be consumed in Northern Ireland".

This would be incendiary as it would effectively end the Sea Border and create a backdoor into the EU Single Market.

The UK would be gambling that after an initial period of turmoil, the EU would assent to a radically more light-touch regime.

The EU could retaliate. It would be able to take measures to "rebalance" the situation. Ultimately, after a period of arbitration, it could impose tariffs on UK goods. More immediately it would block UK access to certain research programmes.

Even more explosively, the EU could serve notice on the whole Brexit deal, or its trade aspects, and set a course for a "no deal" Brexit, with full-scale tariffs and border checks between the UK and the EU.

Once again, Northern Ireland is a mere pawn in a UK power play. In Britain, we should argue to wind back Brexit and keep the whole UK within the Single Market and Customs Union. More fundamentally, the solution is a United Ireland (with minority protections) to cut loose from the Brexit debacle. □

## Join Workers' Liberty!

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

## Royal Parks: an interim advance



**John Moloney**

Outsourced cleaners and attendants in the Royal Parks have voted to accept a settlement in their dispute. A vote was held at a meeting on 18 November, with a follow-up check of members who couldn't attend. It vastly improves sick pay arrangements, and enhances holiday pay. It also recognises the union, and several workers have come forward to be elected as reps. Although a clear victory, this is an interim settlement. There are many outstanding issues and other demands that workers want to press for, including issues regarding their contracts, health and safety and other matters. Another key issue is job cuts: the threat of significant job losses was one of the issues that sparked the dispute. The immediate threat of job losses has been removed, which is a win, but the employer says they will be reconsidering the issue in the new year, so we could see a renewed dispute over that. The settlement is a truce more than a cessation of hostilities. We have submitted a new charter of demands to the Department for Transport around our members' workplace safety and working conditions at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea. We're waiting for their response. If they don't meet those demands, we'll build for renewed ballots. As we missed the threshold in our last aggregated ballots, renewed ballots will likely be disaggregated, balloting different sections of workers at the complex individually. For example, the call centre, which is a key workplace there, has hundreds of members in it. That could be balloted separately to other key parts of the organisation. The aim will though to win each of the ballots so that we can have as much united action as possible. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the civil service workers' union PCS. Personal capacity here.

### Contact us



020 7394 8923

solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

Production team: George Wheeler, Martin Thomas (editor), Sacha Ismail, Simon Nelson, Sara Lee □

# Night Tube strikes from 26 Nov

**Abridged From Tubeworker**

Rail union RMT has again announced strikes over Night Tube "grade consolidation". Management are intent on destroying work-life balance and bumping up dangerous fatigue-inducing shift patterns in order to save themselves some cash.

The first 24-hour strike is on 26 November, followed by strikes during Night Tube hours every Friday-Saturday until 17-18 December, with a further 24-hour strike on 18 December. Attendees at Workers' Liberty "After Corbynism" event on Saturday 27 November will be joining the picket lines that evening.

Train operators in both unions, RMT and Aslef, now have a simple choice: respect picket lines and fight to defend work-life balance, or don't, and signal to management that their opening salvo in the plan to remake the post-lockdown Tube workplace has been a success.

Grade consolidation isn't just management tinkering. An entire grade, the part-time TO23 role, was scrapped; longstanding agreements reached at Acas were ripped up; and drivers, many of whom have worked for LU for decades, have said that they would now be working significantly more

weekends and night shifts. It's no overstatement to describe the plan as a betrayal of a grade who worked full shifts throughout Covid lockdowns, imposed by a senior management team who had the luxury of coming up with these schemes from the comfort and safety of their own homes.

A recent company bulletin from senior bosses shows the disdain and lack of respect they have for us, who they insist on patronisingly referring to as "our people".

The bulletin states: "We've continued meeting with [RMT] to hear their concerns, but we've been presented with no realistic alternatives [to grade consolidation]". *Tubeworker* knows that one "realistic alternative" is the model that was in operation for three years before Covid. Another "realistic alternative", even within a consolidated model, is to make Night Tube shifts voluntary. If bosses need some certainty over coverage, this could be done with a fixed-link system, with a notice period or waiting list required to withdraw. The reason management don't want to make the Night Tube shifts voluntary is that they know most full-time drivers don't want to work night shifts.

The bulletin goes on to say: "Grade consolidation was a positive change for [...] our people. It allowed us to [...]"

become a fairer place to work." *Tubeworker* knows though that any driver forced to work a night shift they don't want to work, and didn't have to work before grade consolidation, will struggle to see how it is "fairer" or a "positive change".

The RMT-organised Night Tube strikes are the first opportunity we have to demonstrate to management, to the Mayor of London, and to the Tory government, that we won't stand by and let them attack our terms and conditions in this way.

Aslef members left wondering why their own functional council reps chose not to consult with them on the changes should do the right thing and not to join the picket lines. All drivers should respect the picket lines and be a part of a fight against this first round of cuts and attacks on our work-life balance.

Train operators must send a strong message, via solid strikes and well-supported picket lines. Going forward all Tube workers, in all functions and grades, should prepare for joint action so we can show management what we, the workers, see as being "fair" and "realistic" for giving up a massive chunk of our lives for London Underground to keep the system going during the pandemic. □

## Take midwives' cause into labour movement

**By Sacha Ismail**

Thousands of midwives, a significant proportion of the 50,000 in the UK, joined demonstrations across the country on 21 November, along with other birth workers and supporters.

They want more resources to improve overstretched maternity services, the working conditions of midwives, and the care they provide to mothers and babies. It is all part of the [wider NHS squeeze](#).

The map of protests put together by the new [March for Midwives](#) social media group which called the action indicates there were at least 80, all over the UK. There were substantial turnouts even in places you might not expect, for instance 75 in Winchester (where they cheered Winchester Labour Party when it identified itself as backing the protest). Lots of younger midwives and birth workers.

These are workers' protests, but not organised through the labour movement. Neither the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), the main union among midwives, nor Unison, nor any other health union promoted them, mobilised people or even sent representatives. In Leeds, some union branches took banners, but no health unions.

We must demand the organised labour movement stirs itself, makes links



with midwives organising and actively supports future protests.

A socialist midwife who spoke to *Solidarity* said the protests seemed to be leading to a welcome stepping up of connections and organising among midwives and birth workers. The RCM, though affiliated to the TUC, is in some respects is more a professional body providing education and guidance than a trade union. In 2014 RCM members struck for the first time in its history, over pay, but that did not lead to many further struggles or a more lasting militant culture. Even compared to other unions, the RCM has been distinctly vague and tentative about fighting the government's NHS pay offer. There is much work to be done there.

The comrade we spoke to stressed that while pay is an issue, the protests are about working conditions, staffing levels and growing national shortfall of

midwives. She said they are inspired by a very positive consciousness of the connection between working conditions and the care provided to mothers and babies. What they currently lack is clear demands and perspective of mobilising the unions for a fight over these issues.

The crisis in maternity services is heavily connected to the wider emergency in the health service. Mobilising the labour movement for a serious fight over NHS pay and to defend and rebuild the health service will create better conditions for the midwives' struggle. □

### Get Solidarity every week!

Trial sub (6 issues) £7; Six months (22 issues) £22 waged, £11 unwaged, €30 European rate.

Visit [workersliberty.org/sub](http://workersliberty.org/sub)

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



## Bernie Sanders slams USA's huge military budget while social spending stalled

While the US administration labours to squeeze a now-much-reduced social-spending plan through Congress, on 17 November the Senate voted by a big bipartisan majority to expedite procedure on a huge military budget. That budget has already gone through the House of Representatives by a big majority, with Cori Bush, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others from the "squad" voting against. In the Senate, Bernie Sanders spoke out against the budget and for at least a reduction.

Day after day, here on the floor and back in their states, many of my colleagues tell the American people how deeply concerned they are about the deficit and the national debt.

They tell us that we just don't have enough money to expand Medicare to cover dental care, eyeglasses and hearing aids; we can't guarantee paid family and medical leave; we can't provide two years of free community college; and we can't build the amount of affordable housing the country desperately needs; or address the climate crisis to the degree that we should if we want to protect the well-being of future generations.

Yet, today, the Senate will begin consideration of an annual defence budget that costs \$778 billion – \$37 billion more than President Trump's last defence budget and \$25 billion more than what President Biden requested.

Meanwhile, Congress has spent month after month discussing the Build Back Better Act, which on an annual basis costs far less than the Pentagon budget, and whether we can afford to

protect the working families of our country, the children, the elderly, the sick and the poor, and the future of our planet.

If there was ever a moment in American history when we needed to fundamentally alter our national priorities, now is that time.

But instead of addressing the major issues that impact the working families of our country, Congress comes together, Democrats and Republicans, with minimal debate to support an exploding Pentagon budget which is now higher than the next 13 nations combined, and represents more than half of our discretionary spending...

The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan concluded in 2011 that \$31-\$60 billion spent in Iraq and Afghanistan had been lost to fraud and waste.

Separately, in 2015, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reported that the Pentagon could not account for \$45 billion in funding for reconstruction projects...

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. warned us that "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defence than on programmes of social uplift is approaching spiritual death".

The time is long overdue to listen to Dr. King.

At a time when, in the richest country in the history of the world, half of our people are struggling paycheck to paycheck, when close to 40 million Americans are living in poverty, and when over 500,000 Americans are homeless, we are approaching spiritual death. □

# Covid: resist the far right!

By Martin Thomas

Crowds of several hundred torched cars, set off fireworks, and threw rocks during protests against Covid curbs on 19 November in Rotterdam. Police opened live fire, injuring three.

The Netherlands, with a running Covid case count which has multiplied by 11 since early October, and death count multiplied by seven, has closed shops and cafés after 8pm. In Austria, thousands marched on 20 November against the government's plan to make vaccines compulsory for all from February. Austria has a new lockdown (shops closed, etc.) from 23 Nov.

There have been similar protests in countries with milder curbs: mostly, as far as we know, dominated by the far right. (Guadeloupe, where a general strike started on 15 November and unions are demanding wage and job improvements as well as rejection of Covid-pass rules, seen as a metropolitan imposition, looks like an exception). In Australia, the left-wing paper *Red Flag* reports "one of the most sustained and militant series of street marches of the far right in decades".

Yet covid-distancing and mask measures, though clumsy, are still the only quick-fix measures for curbing Covid spikes. The labour movement should stand against the far-right outcries.

*Solidarity* makes no claim to public-health expertise on designing Covid curbs and boosting vax rates. We defend civil liberties. There is sense in trying mild measures first and in good time: mask mandate, vax-or-test entry requirements, more work-from-home.

Our focus remains on getting vaccination spread worldwide and on the social measures which can make Covid curbs effective and minimise the toll over the longer term: full isolation pay for all; workers' control of workplace safety; requisitioning resources and boosting pay for the NHS; bringing social care into the public sector with staff on NHS-level pay and conditions; housing improvements to ease overcrowding and allow effective quarantining; social equality generally.

The Covid spike in Israel from late July to mid-September showed that the Delta variant can spread fast even in high-vax populations. Vaccination is effective against severe illness and



Far right protestors in Austria holding a sign reading "Control the border, not your people"

death, but not 100%; and only semi-effective against mild infection. A big Covid surge coming through widespread mild infection among the vaccinated can bring a heavy death toll among an unvaccinated minority, and a few of the vaccinated, too.

In Israel, booster jabs (from early August) tamed the spike, but only after about six weeks.

With the Delta variant, the reproduction rate R without curbs or vaccinations or prior infections may be above 6. Vaccination, immunity from previous infection, and Covid-curbs or voluntary caution reduce R. In Western Europe they kept counts low even after Delta became established there (early August: in the UK it was late June). Now winter approaches. Early-Nov R-estimates ranged from around 1.5 in the sharpest-spiking countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Czech Republic) to below 1 in the UK (as yet).

With R=1 case-counts are (roughly) level. With R=1.1, they may double over a month. But with R=1.5, they may double in a week, or multiply by 16 over a month. After a while, the spread of infection brings a spread of immunity and a decline in infections. That has happened with Delta in India and Romania and Bulgaria, with relatively low vax rates. But in the meantime many died. Thus the case for Covid-curbs now.

In Africa (less subject to winter seasonal effects) Covid rates are for now going down. But the rates were low in Europe in the summer. Africa needs vaccines before its next Covid surge, and is currently getting only 0.1 jabs per 100 people per day (the world, 0.4/ 100/ day). Requisition Big Pharma for speedy worldwide production and distribution of vaccines! □





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## SUPPORT THE UNIVERSITY STRIKES!

By a UCU activist

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) across fifty-eight universities will strike on 1-3 December in two parallel national disputes. In some (primarily older, pre-92) institutions the strike is over a cut to pensions that could see members lose up to 35% of guaranteed benefits on top of previous substantial cuts. In others the focus of the dispute is on the "Four Fights":

pay, equality, casualisation, and workload. Some universities are striking in both disputes.

Over the past twelve years, pay has fallen twenty per cent in real terms due to below-inflation rises, at the same time as many younger staff have been hit by increases in student loan repayments. The gender pay gap is 15%; only 27% of professors are women; and only 1% of professors are Black (as against 3% of the UK population).

A large proportion of university staff are employed on casual contracts: more than half of teaching staff, in some institutions. Precise numbers are hard to come by, because many institutions don't keep central records. It can often take five years or more to secure permanent employment in academic jobs after qualification.

These first three strike days are just the start of what's likely to be a long campaign. They'll



be followed by an indefinite "work to contract". One in five academic staff report working an extra sixteen hours a week on top of their standard hours, and 79% say they "often or always" need to work very intensively. Strict working to contracted hours has potential to cause significant disruption in teaching preparation, marking, personal tutoring and admissions.

Many branches are already planning regular meetings to make sure staff don't feel isolated after the initial run of strikes, and this will be essential to keep up momentum. Student solidarity action will also be im-

portant – both on strike days and beyond. Many student unions have offered vocal support to the dispute, although some have not. It's vital to get the message across that teaching from exhausted, underpaid staff is not good for students. Joint action to organise "teach-ins" can help build support.

Also key to the success of the disputes are the re-ballots that will soon be taking place in those universities that missed the 50% thresh-

old for action. Some institutions missed out by only a handful of votes: getting the number of university staff eligible to strike up from the current 60% to 80% or more in the New Year is a realistic prospect.

We encourage all staff and students to join picket lines and get involved in strike meetings, and others to show support. UCU national Fighting Fund, sort code: 60-83-01, account no: 20179432, ref: "Fighting Fund Voluntary Levy", and some local branches will also be fund-raising. □

• Campuses with industrial action in December: [bit.ly/uni-d](http://bit.ly/uni-d)

### After Corbynism: Building a new left

**Saturday 27 November, 11:30am-5:30pm**  
Camden School for Girls, Sandall Rd, NW5 2DB or online  
via zoom

Tickets (including online option): [bit.ly/wl-newleft](http://bit.ly/wl-newleft)