

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

# SUPPORT UNI STRIKES



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# Support the university strikes

6699 Editorial

On 4-5 November the University and College Union (UCU) announced the results of two national ballots. Higher Education (HE) sector members were balloted on two disputes: the long-running "USS" pensions issue, and the "Four Fights": pay, workload, casualisation, and inequality. Most of the workers involved are on insecure jobs, with long hours and modest pay. Their cause is essentially the same as that of the NHS workers consulting on action to improve their 3% pay deal, the local government workers voting on strikes against the 1.75% offer, or the bin workers now and recently in dispute in Brighton, Glasgow, Sheffield. Share prices have been booming since mid-September, as capitalists calculate their "recovery", but workers are dealing with high inflation, squeezed wages, and squeezed public services.

Pensions in HE have been systematically attacked over the past decade, so much so that the average member of the USS pension scheme is now £240,000 worse off. During the Covid-19 pandemic, a pensions scheme revaluation was conducted by USS, which significantly underestimated its worth. This is now being used by the scheme's management to cut thousands more from the retirement pots of USS pension holders.

## Reinstate Crispin Flintoff

Crispin Flintoff, well-known for organising "Stand Up for Labour" comedy events and gigs and hosting the online "Not the Andrew Marr Show", has been suspended from the Labour Party [because...](#) as Henley constituency secretary he circulated his CLP chair's resignation letter to members. In August National Executive Committee (NEC) member Ann Black reported "nearly 100 members still suspended after more than 18 months... more than 1000 complaints... unresolved". Most of those suspended we don't know about because unlike (to his credit) Flintoff, they are intimidated by former general secretary Jennie Formby's ruling that public complaint about suspension is a disciplinary offence. The more fuss, the more likely we can reverse unjust suspensions and begin to turn the tide to win due process and democracy in Labour. □

Across the sector, workers have had a real-terms 20% pay cut since 2010. The gender pay gap in HE sits at a staggering 16%. In some institutions this exceeds 30%. Analysis in 2019 showed this was in many instances widening. UCU research has consistently found members work over 50 hours per week. Shifting teaching online during the pandemic made this even worse for many. Thousands of university teaching staff are on zero-hour contracts. Thousands more are have no contract at all. Researchers and academics often have to work multiple short-term contracts before being offered permanent employment. As universities have increasingly been managed as businesses, precarity, stress, rising workloads and low pay are now widespread.

### Ballots

No surprise then that UCU members voted in their tens of thousands to fight back in the two ballots. 37 branches now have a legal right to strike to defend their pensions, and 54 branches over the Four Fights. Some branches were balloted on one dispute, some on both, resulting in about 60 unique branches now being able to strike. Those with mandates are in disproportionately larger branches: one-in-three UCU branches can now strike, but these cover a solid 60% of the union's 130,000 members.

That represents a lower-limit on the action that will be taken next term. We are now half-way through the first semester of the academic year. The first strikes will be 1, 2, and 3 December. By then university terms will be coming close to an end. This means university workers have to be ready to escalate the fight as early as possible in the second term.

The union has decided on targeted reballoting of some branches which missed the thresholds. This could see a huge increase in membership numbers walking out. In 22 branch USS ballots and 37 branch Four Fights ballots, turnout thresholds set by the anti-union laws mean that despite getting 40-50% turnouts, they cannot yet join in. Some of the union's largest branches, UCL and Manchester University, missed out by a handful of votes. If targeted re-ballots cover those 40-50% turnout branches, and succeed, we could see

## 24 pages

This issue of *Solidarity* is 24 pages, not our usual 16, because of a build-up of articles held over for lack of space. Our apologies to the writers whose articles are still held over... We'll get there. □



nearly 90% of members able to strike by the end of January.

UCU has shown that the turnout thresholds set by Tory laws can be beaten, winning strike mandates across the UK in 2017, 2019 and 2021. Universities are some of the biggest employers in many towns and cities in the UK. Cambridge, for example, is a sizeable city, with a population of 130,000: the two universities in the city employ over 13,500 people, far more than other employers. The total HE workforce across the UK is over 400,000, over twice as many as the automotive industry, and almost twice as many as rail. Manufacturing, transport, logistics, utilities and such still have great strategic weight, but sheer numbers make universities important places to organise.

### Liverpool

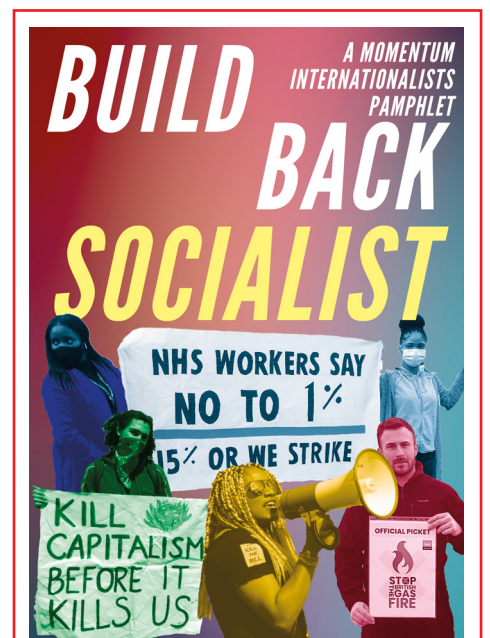
Victory is far from guaranteed. Many of the issues for the strikes are ones that university workers have fought back over before. Through either the machinations of the union's leadership (with ex-General Secretary, Sally Hunt, selling short the 2018 USS dispute) or past weaknesses in building leverage on the ground, the union is now left fighting again. Rank-and-file members will need to organise to ensure success, and alongside others. Successful action by the UCU over spring-summer this year at the University of Liverpool should however encourage UCU members that they have the power to win when they organise and fight.

UCU is just one of several HE unions (with Unite, Unison, the GMB and IWGB organising other sections of the HE workforce). Campus unions should be calling meetings to maximise opportunities for cross-union solidarity action. Given how the pay and conditions of all HE workers have been eroded by continual market-reforms, privatisation and outsourcing, a victory for the UCU in its fights will help build the organising strength of the "sister" HE unions.

Student solidarity is also key. In 2018,

waves of university occupations helped grind campuses to a halt. Although UCU should have fought on, that action did at least help stop the employers closing the "defined benefit" element of the pension. History has shown us that university-worker leverage is enhanced when coupled with student sit-ins and solidarity action.

Wherever you are in the UK, in the next few months you shouldn't be far from a UCU strike. If you're in the UCU: mobilise your colleagues, build the picket lines, and help UCU branches win their re-ballots. Otherwise join the pickets, encourage campus cross-union organisation, and build student-staff solidarity networks. The sector is in crisis, but the disputes could unleash a new wave of militant trade unionism; the type needed to fight back against marketisation in HE and to rebuild the labour movement. □



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)

# Sudan: resistance committees and unions against the coup

By Mohamed Elnaiem

UK-based Sudanese socialist and student activist Mohammed Elnaiem, who took part in the 2019 revolt in Sudan, spoke to Solidarity.

On Saturday, we had a “March of Millions” in Sudan, part of a schedule of protests called by the resistance committees – neighbourhood committees leading the rebellion. Two days before it, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan announced the composition of the new, post-coup “sovereignty council”. This added fuel to the fire. People in many cities not only demonstrated but rose up, building barricades.

There is ongoing civil disobedience, with strikes in various segments of the public and private sectors, and arrests of strike leaders.

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors and the Socialist Doctors’ Association have been providing information on deaths. At least nine were killed on Saturday, including 13-year-old Remaz Hatim al-Atta, shot while standing in front of her house. All those killed were under 35; the majority teenagers. Over 200 have been reported injured in Khartoum alone, many with very severe injuries. At least ten are in intensive care.

The internet is still shut off, but people have been using VPNs and other means of getting access. This is how horrific footage of military violence has got out. There were also demonstrations by people in the Sudanese diaspora and our comrades in hundreds of cities across the world.

The next march is most likely on 17 November.

## Tell us about the resistance committees?

The committees were formed in a first wave of revolts in 2013, by a collection of unemployed youth with organising experience from university, working-class activists, civil society organisations opposing the regime like Girifna and Change Now, and members of cadre-based organisations including the Communist Party and the social-democratic Sudan Congress Party.

The committees came to national prominence in 2018/19. They worked very closely with the Sudanese Professionals Association [SPA] – a middle-class but militant group of journalists’ and doctors’ unions, which continued to grow and encompass various professions. If the Sudanese Professionals Association became the face of the Sudanese revolution, it was the resistance committees which did the work on the ground, including organising barricades, providing mutual aid, organising processions, providing political education, and helping to politicise the funerals of martyrs and keep

their legacies alive. For a long time, the resistance committees subordinated themselves to the Forces of Freedom and Change, a coalition of mainstream political parties with the SPA. More recently they have staked their own independence.

The policy of most committees is to refuse to negotiate with the junta and even with the deposed prime minister and UN officials. They have broken with the politics of backroom deals. This is incredibly refreshing.

The committees are organised on a geographical and not a class basis. Yet they linking up between themselves more and more, and working in tune with the trade union movement. If they can unite along organisational and ideological lines, we may have the prospect of a socialist revolution – but only if the urban-rural divide is overcome. This is beyond the current mandate of the committees and even the trade unions.

## And the Sudanese Professionals Association and trade unions?

It is important not to equate unions with the SPA. In this new revolt, it is independent unions and the resistance committees which are the true protagonists and leaders. The struggle has never been more intertwined with the interests of the working class, although it is still an urban-led revolt – a huge weakness in a society dominated by rural capitalist agriculture.

Some fascinating proposals have been circulating. The most radical came from the resistance committees of the city of Sennar, which called for a joint government of the committees and trade unions, organised from the ground up in a federation of workers’ and neighbourhood assemblies. On 11 November the Solidarity Alliance of Sudan’s Trade Unions was formed, representing 25 union bodies, including workers in the Kenana Sugar Company, employees at the Central Bank, the leader of the Petro Energy union (who was subsequently arrested) and the union at Sudan Airways.

We have much to learn from our brethren in Myanmar, but one difference here is the growing confidence among working-class organisations that rather than other bodies – for instance the National League for Democracy in Myanmar – being the solution, they themselves are.

The Sudanese Professionals Association, responding to the demands of the street to be more radical, has called for the constitutional agreement it previously brought into being to be scrapped, with no more military-civilian partnership. It has also suggested representation for resistance committees and unions in the government.

However even when the SPA speaks good sense, people are angry with them, for good reason.

The agreement of joint civilian-military rule, in 2019, was followed by the country descending into an IMF-mandated austerity hell. The SPA drifted away from the mandate it had received from the streets and striking workers, and into sitting around the negotiating table. This was partly connected to the liberal and technocratic vision they had for Sudan.

The SPA sidelined the grassroots movement, but found itself sidelined by political parties. Then it split because various parties wanted to sway it to their interests. The irony is that the parties, many of which in one way or another capitulated to the Bashir regime at various times, only won newfound legitimacy because the “Forces of Freedom and Change” banner the SPA gave them.

Meanwhile for people who have lived through horrific austerity, many deaths in the pandemic and bread and gas lines, the SPA lost legitimacy. That is why today the Sudanese people have turned to resistance committees and other trade unions. Where this will go next is uncertain.

## What about austerity, economic policies and so on?

Sudan was closed from off from most of the global economy under the old Muslim Brotherhood-led Islamist dictatorship [1989-2019], because the country was a pariah state. The US imposed sanctions; even after the revolution overthrew the dictatorship, it blocked Sudan from joining the global economy until it paid reparations for the bombing of the US embassy in Kenya in 1998. Sudan, a very poor country, was forced to pay \$335 million compensation.

In June the executive boards of the World Bank International Development Association and the IMF declared that Sudan had taken the necessary steps to receive debt relief. This was a proud achievement for the liberal sector of Sudan’s elite. Sudan’s external debt



was reduced from \$50 billion to \$30 billion. If it completes further steps in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme, it will be reduced to \$6 billion. It’s unclear what the new regime wants to do.

None of this was for free. It meant sharply devaluing the currency, lifting fuel subsidies (the issue which triggered the revolution in the first place), and the introduction of a floating exchange rate. Inflation was 400% at one point during the civilian-military partnership. For Sudanese workers, this meant huge bread and gas shortages, a country ill-equipped to deal with the pandemic, and a feeling the revolution had done nothing to change economic circumstances.

When Burhan took power, he thanked [deposed and jailed civilian Prime Minister Abdalla] Hamdok – and in this case he was quite sincere – for bringing Sudan into the fold of the global capitalist economy. The process was very violent for the Sudanese people, and jeopardised much hope in the revolution. Something similar happened in Egypt, which meant many Egyptians were happy with the state capitalist regime of the military, to bring “stability” where civilians supposedly could not. I’m proud that the Sudanese people have not lost hope in revolution in the face of austerity and have, like the people of Myanmar, rejected the coup. □

• Full, much longer interview: [bit.ly/me-sudan](https://bit.ly/me-sudan)



## Upcoming meetings

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

**Saturday 20 November, 5-6.30pm:** Labour Left Internationalists: Housing emergency: make Labour act

**Wednesday 24 November, 7-8.45pm:** SW London Workers’ Liberty meeting – Workers and climate change. Park Hill Housing Co-op SW4 9QA

**Wednesday 24 November, 7.30-9 pm:** Lewisham Workers’ Liberty: We need socialism, how do we get it? New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS.

**Wednesday 24 November, 7.30pm:** Workers’ Liberty Scotland: Confronting Antisemitism on the left

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

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 □



# When to love authoritarians



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In the early days of the pandemic the *Morning Star* (24 March 2020) carried two articles, side by side on the same page: one called upon the British government to “learn from China ... and adopt the Chinese approach that saves the maximum number of lives”; the other warned about the emergency powers being enacted in the UK and “Britain’s record of creeping authoritarianism.”

The fact that the paper’s editorial team evidently saw no contradiction between the two articles tells us a great deal about the people who run the *Morning Star* (primarily the Communist Party of Britain): democracy and human rights must be defended in Britain and the west, but are unimportant – undesirable, even – elsewhere.

With its apparent success in reducing new infections and deaths, China has presented itself as a model for mobilizing state resources to fight Covid and the *Morning Star*’s adulation has been unbounded. The 13-14 Nov edi-

tion even carried an article headed “Xi hailed as the ‘people’s leader and great helmsman’”.

Other recent articles have included International Editor Steve Sweeney’s uncritical pro-Ortega coverage of the Nicaraguan election, describing the ruthless crackdown on all opposition and critics of Ortega (including former Sandinistas) as legitimate measures against “figures [who] face serious charges, including money-laundering ... [and who] have acted as informants as part of attempts to destabilise the country and overthrow the Sandanista government.”

Most of the time comrade Sweeney seems to have quite an easy job, repeating the press releases and official statements of regimes he approves of. With Russia, though, things become more difficult. The *Morning Star* clearly likes Putin’s approach to geo-politics, quoting him with approval as he denounces the west, threatens Ukraine and backs the Assad regime in Syria. The paper’s Nicaraguan coverage included (12 Nov) congratulations from the man himself and a denunciation by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov of “unprecedented pressures” on Ortega from the US.

However, there’s a problem: the Rus-

sian Communist Party doesn’t like Putin. In its coverage of September’s elections, the paper reported: “Communist Party (KPRF) leader Gennady Zyuganov said his party – which is the largest opposition group in the Duma – had mobilised 300,000 election observers across the country and that these were reporting “widespread violations ... He reported ‘ballot stuffing’ in Kletnyansky district and similar violations in the greater Moscow, Saratov and Samara regions, as well as reports of public-sector employees being marched by their bosses to polling booths to vote for United Russia, the electoral vehicle which supports President Vladimir Putin”.

There can be little doubt that it’s only the stance of the Russian CP that prevents the *Morning Star* from being openly pro-Putin.

Which brings us to the tragic and disgraceful scenes on the border between Poland and Belarus. Quite rightly, the *Morning Star* has denounced the brutality of the Polish authorities towards the migrants who are dying in sub-zero temperatures. And quite rightly, the paper has pointed out that Poland has the full backing of the EU and is simply enforcing the policy of “Fortress Europe”. But coverage of Lukashenko’s



use of migrants as pawns in a cynical diplomatic manoeuvre to destabilise the EU, and the obvious support he’s receiving from a gloating Putin, is notable for its absence.

All of which raises a question to which there is no clear answer: does the *Morning Star* (and the CPB) approve of authoritarianism as a matter of principle and despise any form of democracy as inimical to the glorious, Chinese-style “socialist” future? Or is it cruder than that – simply “my enemy’s enemy is my friend”? □



Activist Agenda

The Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) conference on 7-9 November voted to seek a union demonstration in spring 2022 around Labour’s [“New Deal for Workers”](#), which includes many good points (which the Labour leaders themselves are quiet about), but no clear demand for repeal of all anti-union laws.

The recent AGM of the rail union RMT voted: “To call a national demonstration to resist the [new anti-union “minimum service”] law... to approach other transport unions to collaborate with us on planning this demonstration”.

The policy conference of the big general union Unite resolved “to call on the TUC to organise a Saturday London demonstration demanding repeal of all anti-union laws”.

And policy passed by TUC Congress in September called for a “joint union rally” against curbs on the right to protest and strike.

How all these overlapping but different calls will work out to produce an actual demonstration or demonstrations remains to be determined. Free Our Unions is working with people across the unions to press for the most active outcome. □

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

## Barry Gardiner’s support for far right



Letter

Brent North Labour MP Barry Gardiner has been prominent opposing “fire and rehire”. He has joined demonstrations at the Clarks dispute in Somerset, far from his constituency.

He has good connections in the unions, and in the Corbyn years he seemed to have a surprising amount of support from people who saw themselves as part of the Labour left.

Yet as far as I can see Gardiner, who loyally served Tony Blair as a minister, is a self-serving opportunist. That is bad enough, but far from the worst of it. After all, a Labour MP who backs a strike for opportunist reasons can still help boost the dispute.

Gardiner is also a close ally and advocate of India’s far-right prime minister Narendra Modi. This is [well-established](#). Gardiner has featured a quote from Modi in his election literature and appeared in India’s media to attack those



who raise his ally’s role in anti-Muslim massacres. When Modi’s far-right government won re-election in 2019, Gardiner tweeted:

*As Indian Prime Minister @narendramodi wins a second term we congratulate him for his message: “Our alliance represents India’s diversity and our agenda is India’s progress” celebrating the country’s diversity. I look forward to deepening our friendship and trade.*

At Labour Party conference this year I encountered Gardiner at the Labour Unions meeting launching Andy McDonald’s [“New Deal for Working People”](#) document. As everyone left, I approached him and politely asked about his support for Modi and the Indian far right.

Gardiner told me he doesn’t “agree with Modi on everything”, but they are “friends”. He told me very clearly that he does not support the Indian [farmers’ and workers’ movements](#) opposing Modi’s government and that he supports that government’s pro-corporate agricultural [measures](#).

He promised to send me something more detailed explaining why, and I gave him my e-address, but never got anything.

Imagine if in 2019 a Labour MP had tweeted praising Trump or Netanyahu’s commitment to “diversity”, and defended himself against criticism by saying they are friends. □

Sacha Ismail,  
London

# Lillian Lane Murphy 2003-2021

By Janet Burstall

Lilly Murphy, who died from cancer on 4 November 2021, joined the Socialist Alliance in Melbourne when she was in high school. I knew her through Richard Lane, her proud dad, and my comrade in Workers' Liberty in Australia.

Like many other children of socialists, Lilly was in agreement with her parents' general worldview. Her parents, Richard Lane and Maureen Murphy, met through left politics, and share a similar commitment to anti-capitalist, democratic, working class, revolutionary socialism, that fights for the rights of all oppressed people. Richard Lane has been a supporter of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and predecessors since 1981.

Lilly, unlike most children of socialists, and to Richard's surprise, took a step further at only 14 years old by joining a socialist organisation, and contributing to its activities, for example the Socialist Alliance and Victorian Socialists election campaigns in the Moreland area in 2018-2019. Sue Bolton from the Socialist Alliance said that it was "after studying the different parties, [that] Lilly decided that she wanted to join a party but it had to be a socialist one."

Richard asked Lilly, six weeks before she died, about her priorities if she had been able to continue her political activism. He says "Lilly was excited to have that conversation – to talk about something other than her condition,



to be looking forward, I think to leave a legacy."

She said climate change was her top priority. Lilly had already boldly helped to lead others in demanding climate action, in the School Strike for Climate protest on 30 November 2018. Lilly was among a group of students who tried to negotiate with the Principal for the date of a maths exam to be changed from 30 November.

The principal, obeying the instructions of the Education Department, refused. Lilly and several fellow students disobeyed the Principal, and took strike action to attend the protest. Richard said "I was so proud of the political leadership she showed there, and her determination that participating in that world-wide political statement was

more important than missing a maths test!" Lilly spoke about School Strike 4 Climate to [Solidarity](#) and to [Green Left](#).

Lilly's other priorities were "gender equality-women's rights, LGBT rights, BLM (against the cops) and indigenous struggles." Lilly "noted these were very 'social' issues but capitalism has an impact on them all."

Lilly's family has established a memorial fund to reflect her priorities.

Richard had discussed with Lilly how to use the sum of money in her trust fund, suggesting a memorial fund in her name. "She didn't want that – never wanting to be in the spotlight. But she was OK about having one in her name and my sister Jenny's." So Lilly's aunt, Jenny is honoured together with Lilly in the memorial fund. Jenny disappeared

in 2004 near Alice Springs, soon after Lilly was born, and "had similar activist goals, especially around women and indigenous people."

"To honour Lilly's legacy, I ask you to consider donating to the memorial fund." [bit.ly/lil-fund](https://bit.ly/lil-fund)

Speaking at Lilly's funeral Richard asked that even more importantly than donating to Lilly's fund, we consider our own political activities. "In particular we are at a crucial turning point around climate change (Lil's first priority), and our federal government has been embarrassingly slow in responding. Please think about ways you can engage around climate change and social justice issues, wherever is appropriate – in your faith and other community groups; and for the ALP [Australian Labor Party] members here, hold your leaders to account on their policies."

Richard concluded "Lilly has gone, and we have lost a wonderful person who would have continued to make a difference both personally and politically. Let's carry her message forward."

Lilly will be deeply missed in many, many ways beyond her political contributions. She was a talented performer, a music lover, a trusted friend and a much loved member of an extended family. On behalf of AWL, we send our condolences to Lilly's family, Richard, Maureen, and Alexei, and we mourn the loss of the further contribution that Lilly would have made to the struggle for socialism, had she lived longer. □

## Moral panic over advice to sex workers



By Katy Dollar

Durham University has come under fire for organising safety training for students also working as sex workers. The university brought in the external "Students Involved in the Adult Sex Industry" in response to calls to ensure students who may be at risk "are protected and have access to the support to which they are entitled".

The decision was criticised by the Tory Minister for higher and further education, Michelle Donelan, and Labour MPs including Diane Abbott, following *The Times* newspaper's online coverage under the headline "Durham University trains its students to be sex



workers". The newspaper has since changed the headline to "Durham University offers safety training for student sex workers".

Abbott wrote: "Horrific that Durham University is offering training to students who want to be sex workers part-time. Sex work is degrading, dangerous and exploitative. Uni-

should have nothing to do with it."

The local Labour MP Mary Foy, also a member of the Campaign Group, has rightly criticised the moral panic and backed the University.

"The Minister for higher and further education, Michelle Donelan MP, and *The Times*, have categorically failed Durham University and its students.

"Following contact with the Vice Chancellor, Director of Advancement, and the Durham Students' Union this afternoon, I feel confident in offering my support to the University.

"The university consulted carefully before deciding to provide this support, engaging with student representatives, members of the university's sexual misconduct and violence operations group, equality, diversity, and inclusion unit,

counselling and mental health service and safeguarding representatives.

"This was not a decision made on a whim or to promote sex-work. The safety and well-being of students in Durham is paramount and I would urge the Minister to reconsider her comments."

A survey by Save The Student found three percent of students have done sex work. A further nine per cent said they would turn to sex work in a financial emergency. Fees and expensive housing mean many students are facing financial emergency and the survey likely underestimates numbers who have engaged in sex work.

The survey suggests there are hundreds of thousands of student sex workers who face particularly risks and universities are right to promote safety, legal advice and sup-

port. Along with Durham, the University of Leicester, Newcastle University, and Manchester University all offer advice and safeguarding resources to their students who are sex workers.

Abbott expresses concern about "degrading, dangerous and exploitative" work, but closing off support for such workers makes them far more vulnerable to degrading, dangerous and exploitative conditions. Student sex workers need the rights and means to organise, and moral panics about "legitimising" sex work only make that more difficult.

There will continue to be student sex workers and universities and student unions should do all they can to protect their health and safety.

The labour movement should be promoting organising these workers, not joining in with Tory attacks. □

# Cop and the credibility gap



## Environment

By Zack Muddle

Every shop, cafe, and business; every billboard and bus stop; numerous new, temporary, adverts and building-high canvases – all screaming the same, discordant, message.

Glasgow during COP 26: divergent corporations, some flashy NGOs, and the UK government; all competing to reassure us that they're taking serious action on climate change. The environmental protestors across the city generally recognised that for the greenwashing it is. Yet our actions were in orbit around the opaque and exclusive negotiations themselves, in which delegates lived inside such a polite, reassuring fiction – that capitalist societies, our corporate overlords, are solving the crises.

The conference recognised “that the impacts of climate change will be much lower at the temperature increase of 1.5°C compared with 2°C, and resolves to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C [requiring] rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, including reducing global carbon dioxide emissions by 45% by 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to net zero around mid-century, as well as deep reductions in other greenhouse gases”.

This (slightly stronger) restatement of a 1.5°C goal by 2100 is welcome. It could have gone further: 1.3°C would be an immeasurably better outcome. Today's extreme weather comes as early impacts of just over 1°C. Yet what actually counts isn't net global aims, it is the concrete actions to realise such aims. Here, we find a series of “emissions gaps”, built one upon another.

If every country met all their promises to the COP process, “Nationally Determined Contributions” (NDCs) for 2030, plus all promises of “net zero”, the planet would, on [some calculations](#) peak at 1.9°C mid-century and level out at 1.8°C by the end of the century: with an upper estimate of 2.3°C. This is dangerously above 1.5°C. Yet most commitments for 2030 would *not* even put governments on a path for their [net zero targets](#). Assuming the former alone are all completed, we would find ourselves on a path to 2.4°C (up to 3.0°C).

New net zero, NDC, and other climate commitments announced around COP 26 shaved around 0.2°C off earlier projections: the picture was even bleaker mere months ago.

Yet actual policies promised by gov-

ernments, if fully realised, would not even reach the net 2030 NDC's reduction. Instead, they would take us to 2.7°C by the end of the century, with an upper bound of 3.6°C, over three times the warming to date. Climate impacts are not linear. Three times as much heating, and with more time for environmental destruction to build, likely places us in a planet more than three times as dangerous, with more than three times as much devastation, and with much greater risks of dangerous feedback loops.

This nonetheless sounds unimaginably better than predictions we may make based only on policies before the 2015 Paris Agreement, which put us on track for 4°C. Are we finally seeing “flattening of the emissions curve”?

The next gap, a “[very big credibility gap](#)” for promised specific policies is probably impossible to quantify internationally. Yet it is likely even bigger than the above.

### Biden

Less than a year after election, Biden's “climate and environmental justice” promises have been shattered by a series of *pro-fossil fuel policies*.

Two years after their election, the Tories' meagre promise of planting 300km<sup>2</sup> of trees per year by 2024 has translated into [22km<sup>2</sup> last year and falling](#). Their “Green Homes Grant” to retrofit 600,000 homes with insulation and “low-carbon heating” was outsourced and mismanaged, and shelved after only 31,900 homes were upgraded. The 2017 government directive for 61 councils to cut air pollution levels as quickly as possible has led to fewer “clean air zones” than I can count on one hand. The UK government's official independent Climate Change Committee found earlier this year a similar picture across the board – [once again](#). Considering the gap between government targets and policy, they found that of 21 key decarbonisation areas only four have “sufficient ambition” and only two have “adequate policies”. None of the 34 adaptation priority areas had seen “strong progress”.

Internationally, one symptom of similar trends is a failure by richer nations to raise the promised \$100bn annual climate funding for poorer nations to transition. For comparison, the – hardly radical – IMF found, two years ago, that [\\$700-800bn](#) is lost per year to tax havens alone. This is before we even consider shrinking other tax loopholes, let alone a real – and necessary – attack on the rich. The ten richest people in the world each has more than [\\$100bn to their name](#).

Bolder promises are welcome, but bigger talk doesn't necessarily translate

into more action. The failures are not primarily due to individual politicians, such as Boris Johnson, who not long ago dabbled in [climate change denialism](#). They are systemic in origin.

Climate action, such as the inadequate promises above, generally costs money, and must be paid for. The bulk of wealth in our society is controlled by our bosses, the ruling class. To fund environmental initiatives, some wealth must be taken or withheld from them. Regulations threaten to place limits upon their insatiable drive for endlessly greater profit. And some particularly powerful sections of the ruling class have great invested interests in continuing to burn fossil fuels and belch out carbon dioxide.

### Negotiations

Formal negotiations were to centre on detailed finalising of the Paris agreement “rulebook”: including new emissions reporting rules from 2024, and “Article 6” carbon markets. Carbon markets theoretically allow countries and companies to sell reductions in carbon emissions, or carbon removal, to more polluting ones, allowing the latter to “offset them”. Previous markets, even their proponents acknowledge, comprehensively failed – often being [worse than useless](#). This new carbon market still financially awards low national targets and historically highly polluting industries: “overachievement” and pollution reductions can be sold. It fails to completely guard against “[double counting](#)” and such creative accounting, whereby “emissions savings” could sometimes be counted twice: allowing twice that which was “saved” to be emitted.

Fundamentally, carbon markets rely on non-existent transparency and slow market forces to try to move toward *net* reductions. We need open, democratic and as fast as possible reduction *everywhere possible*; and as fast as workable an expansion of carbon dioxide removal to tackle historic emissions.

COP26 also agreed processes for *working towards* new goals on adaptation, and on finance for climate mitigations and for “loss and damage”.

Beyond these agreements in the formal processes, around COP 26 many new pledges and deals were announced and agreed to. New NDCs, plus sectoral deals covering coal, deforestation and methane, and a “Glasgow Climate Pact”.

These wider pacts have received far more publicity than the formal negotiations. Intensified environmental campaigning, globally, in recent years, has forced at least more concrete-sounding greenwashing.

In 26 COPs, dating back to 1995,

there has *never* been an agreement on the need to end the burning of fossil fuels, nor even any specific type of fossil fuels. This gobsmacking emission of an almost axiomatic goal, in any form, was *almost* partially remedied this year.

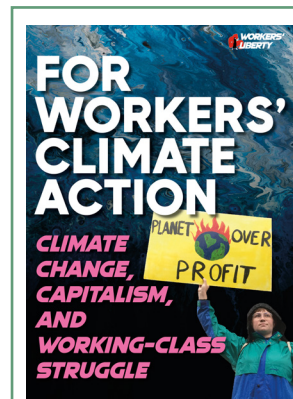
Early drafts would have called for governments “to accelerate the phasing-out of coal”. The commitment was vague, and had no specific date. Coal accounts for just under a third of fossil fuels burned by energy, and is the most polluting form. There has been an explosion of construction of new coal-fired power stations in recent decades, centred on China and India.

Yet – largely symbolic – commitment to ever phasing it out seemed too much. This was diluted to a “phase-down” of only those coal power stations which aren't “abated” through Carbon Capture, (Usage,) and Storage. Yet CCS would only ever capture a proportion of carbon emitted. Worse, really existing schemes are overwhelmingly for CCUS whereby the carbon is used for “Enhanced Oil Recovery”: an energy-intensive process to pump CO<sub>2</sub> underground and squeeze even more oil out, [to then burn](#). That is worse than useless.

At least 23 countries made new commitments to phase out coal power. Yet these do not include China, India, or the USA; nor Australia which is by far the largest exporter. They only include five of the top 20 burners of fossil fuel.

Oil and gas combined make up over two thirds of fossil fuels: yet they were not mentioned. Further substitution of coal power with gas – a comparatively cheap replacement – would not be a cause for environmental celebration. The agreement did call for a “phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies”, but again, it is not fleshed out with dates or specifics.

I don't have space here to cover the COP26 outcomes on transport, deforestation, or finance for the global South, but will report on those next week – plus more on the protests around COP 26. □



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

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

# Minneapolis votes down police changes

By Sacha Ismail

On 2 November Minneapolis residents voted [56.2-43.8%](#) to reject a relatively moderate [version](#) of the idea of “ending the Minneapolis Police Department and creating a new transformative model for cultivating safety in our city”.

Minneapolis, where George Floyd was murdered and a new surge of Black Lives Matter protests began in May last year, has been at the centre of US debates about the police. Longstanding local campaigns have gained new support and momentum since Floyd’s killing. Later in 2020 the city’s council [began](#) a process aiming to transform the city’s public-safety provision.

## Stalled

Momentum for reforms has stalled, and perhaps in some respects reversed. At the end of September Democratic Party leaders in the US Senate declared that talks to put together an adequate majority for even minimal national legislative reforms had come to nothing.

Republican intransigence means that federal laws mandating even minor changes like restrictions on physical restraint will not happen any time soon. Republicans have aggressively opposed proposals to remove police officers’ “qualified immunity” (immunity from financial liability when sued for violation of constitutional rights in the course of duty, unless a specific law has been violated).

Joe Biden has used executive power to introduce some reforms, including limits on when *federal* officers can use chokeholds and “no-knock warrants”. That does not apply to local police departments, which employ the great majority of police.

Minneapolis is not the only recent setback for local police-reform activism. On 2 November also, Byron Brown, the incumbent mayor of New York state’s second city, Buffalo, running as a “write-in” candidate, defeated Democratic Socialists of America member India Walton, who had beaten him in the [Democratic primary](#) in June. Agitation against Walton’s plans to divert funds from policing to social provision and make the police more accountable seems to have been an important factor.

And on the same day, heavily Democratic and liberal Seattle narrowly elected a Republican city attorney (chief public prosecutor), Ann Davison, over self-described prison-and-police “abolitionist” Nicole Thomas-Kennedy. Thomas-Kennedy campaigned to halve the city’s police budget. Another high profile “abolitionist”, Nikkita Oliver, was defeated in the city council election. These trends suggest socialist Seattle councillor Kshama Sawant, subject to



a big business-funded recall vote next month, is in danger.

There is big money and institutional support behind opposition to police reform measures. It is also true that since the Black Lives Matter protests died down, public support for change has died down too. In June 2020, shortly after George Floyd’s murder, 60% told [pollsters](#) they trusted “the Black Lives Matter movement”, against 56% for “law enforcement”. By March this year it was 50% for BLM and 69% for the cops.

Whereas black support for BLM, already a big majority, ticked up after Floyd’s death and then stayed roughly where it was, a plurality of white Americans said they supported the movement only very briefly – and then opposition rose sharply in the months that followed. There has been a right wing-driven backlash, feeding off hostility to anti-racist struggles but also concerns about crime and insecurity in the context of the pandemic.

Some local initiatives have made progress. Also on 2 November, Texas’ state capital, Austin, rejected by 68.9-31.2% a well-funded right-wing campaign to increase police numbers.

## Austin

Austin has made some of the biggest [changes](#) in the US, cutting almost a third from its 2019-20 police budget and reallocating the funding to community safety and social provision – including emergency medical services, community medics, mental health first responders, homelessness services, substance abuse programs, food access, victim support, abortion services and parks.

As in many places, police unions have been at the core of the right-wing resistance to such measures. Before Austin’s measures were even implemented, the Texas Municipal Police Association put billboards on the roads into the city with slogans including “Warning! Austin Police Defunded, Enter at Your Own Risk”.

Dozens of cities and towns across the US have reduced and redirected police spending to some degree, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Baltimore. Seattle, though its council backed away from an earlier pledge to cut 50%, did

reduce spending by 18%. Unlike Seattle, some cities have recently elected “progressive prosecutors”. The most prominent, Philadelphia’s Larry Krasner, easily won re-election two weeks ago, despite a drive by police unions to stop him.

US socialists have criticised the election of such prosecutors as a political strategy, but their rise is indicative of a leftist trend.

When a clear majority of Minneapolis’ council voted for changes to policing last year, the language was radical, and there were reports suggesting that the city police department would somehow be abolished. As we [wrote](#) last year: “To demand that the capitalist class abolish its own state machine makes no sense. On the other hand, the breakdown or withdrawal of parts of that machine in favour of expanded private security, or private vigilante groups, would not be a step forward.

“Immediately, we should fight for radical measures to curb police power, introduce stronger elements of accountability and democracy over them, expand public social provision and limit the spheres in which the police operate”.

Amidst much unclarity, Minneapolis shifted 4.5% of its police budget to social spending, then this year it boosted police funding again.

The referendum [measure](#) defeated on 2 November would have removed the wording in the City Charter requiring a police department, with minimum funding levels and mayoral control. In its place it proposed a “Department of Public Safety” accountable to the mayor and the council – a body that “employs a comprehensive public

health approach... which could include licensed peace officers (police officers), if necessary, to fulfill its responsibilities for public safety”.

What this would have meant if the measure had passed would no doubt have been the subject of many arguments and struggles.

There was heavy institutional opposition – from Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey (who won re-election, defeating a more police-critical Democrat challenger); from prominent national Democrat politicians in the state; and from the leadership of Minneapolis PD itself, including its black chief, Medaria Arradondo.

## Public opinion

Public opinion in the city seems to have divided in complicated ways, with some [evidence](#) suggesting black residents, while more critical of the police, were also more sceptical of talk about abolishing or “defunding” the police department. Age seems to have been a crucial divide. Young black people are more radical.

The reality driving demands for police reform has not changed much. According to [mappingpoliceviolence.org](#), 1,217 people were killed by police in the US in 2020. So far this year it is 923. The numbers have stayed constant for many years. Black people are 13% of the US population, but 26% of those killed this year.

It may be that it will take a revival of large-scale protests to shift things more rapidly. Let’s hope that happens soon. A US court [may be](#) about to acquit a far right-sympathiser, Kyle Rittenhouse, who last August shot and killed two anti-racist protesters in Wisconsin. □

## 26 November mobilisation in India

By Mohan Sen

In one of the biggest general strikes in history, on 26 November 2020, hundreds of millions of Indian workers and farmers protested against neo-liberal reforms by the country’s far-right government.

The workers’ strike was over quickly. But that day launched one of history’s biggest mass movements, Indian farmers’ struggle [against agricultural reforms](#) in the interests of giant corporations.

Six hundred protesters have died (mainly from camping out in harsh conditions, but some from violence) during this remarkable movement, the strongest and most sustained challenge to Modi’s regime so far.

It subsided somewhat during India’s vast Covid surge earlier this year, but since the summer has been rising

again. The 26 November anniversary will see big mobilisations to renew the movement against Modi’s farm laws, with demonstrations, mass meetings of farmers, workers and supporters across the country and then an ongoing, gradually building protest outside the national parliament in Delhi.

When she spoke to us in mid-November, working-class activist Nodeep Kaur, imprisoned in January for leading precarious workers to demand their rights, stressed the significance of 26 November and the importance of international solidarity.

Nodeep Kaur will be speaking by Zoom at our “Building A New Left” event on 27 November, at 3.30pm. [Facebook event](#) □

• More: [workersliberty.org/india](#).

# Academic freedom: we must fight for it

By Camila Bassi

Academic freedom is contingent on the epistemologies and politics of the time.

A case in point are the past debates in the University and College Union (UCU) for an academic boycott of Israel, which premises that Israel's curbs on academic freedom for Palestinians should consequently negate academic freedom for Israel. A paper co-authored by the left-wing Israeli academic Oren Yiftachel and the Palestinian academic Asad Ghanem was submitted to the journal *Political Geography* in the spring of 2002.

The paper, which identified the state of Israel as "dedicated to the expansion and control of one ethnic group" and thus could not be substantively considered a democracy, was returned unopened. The explanation: *Political Geography* cannot accept a paper submission from Israel (Beckett, 2002).

## Boycott

One of the journal's editors, David Slater, stated that he did not read the paper, but because he was familiar with some of Yiftachel's earlier work, he "was not sure to what extent [Yiftachel] had been critical of Israel". The paper was eventually accepted for publication after substantial revisions were made, including the comparison of Israel to apartheid South Africa (Beckett, 2002). Slater (2004: 646) later stated that an academic boycott of Israel is a "legitimate and necessary" response to the Israeli state's curbs on academic freedom for Palestinians, but that his original "total boycott" was a "maximalist" position that he no longer held.

Intersecting with the epistemologies and politics of the time, academic free-



dom is dependent on research funding and the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

The REF effectively discourages academic diversity "because universities tailor their submissions to what they think REF panels want, and REF panels reflect disciplinary hierarchies" (Sayer, 2014) and the power of particular academic cultures (Stockhammer, 2021). The "continued narrowing of [the discipline of] economics", for example, is "bolstered by the REF"; with "[n]on-mainstream approaches that rely on different ontological or methodological premises hardly ever [...] published in the top journals" (Stockhammer, 2021). Thus, academic dissent, debate and innovations of thought are limited.

In principle, academic freedom is the freedom of academics to conduct teaching and research without political or commercial interference or institutional censorship; this must be balanced with, UCU notes, "the responsibility to

respect the democratic rights and freedoms of others" and must "refrain from all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination".

## Miller

The sacking of David Miller in October 2021 was, according to the University of Bristol, the outcome of a disciplinary hearing that found Miller had failed to meet the standards of behaviour that the employer expects from its staff. If Miller did breach the staff code of conduct, then a genuinely independent, open and transparent process was needed.

Academics should not be dismissed for their political views. Discriminatory or harassment behaviour, which may or may not follow from political views, could be considered grounds for dismissal but only after a due process and where alleviation without further harm to the victims is not possible. Academic freedom is conditional on wider soci-

etal forces.

The resignation of Kathleen Stock from the University of Sussex in October 2021, under her lament that she was a victim of a "medieval" "witch-hunt" (cited in Hayes, 2021; Adams, 2021), has since provided her with an extraordinarily high platform in mainstream media. This platform reflects both the dominance of the socially traditionalist ideas that Stock holds on the sex-gender binary and transgenderism, and the fact that she falls on the Conservative government's side of its culture war on so-called "woke" academia. Stock has used her hegemonic platform to question the right of students to protest and to discredit gender scholars such as Alison Phipps (see: BBC Women's Hour, 2021; Un-Herd, 2021).

Under the guise that her own academic freedom has been infringed, Stock appears to be consciously seeking to infringe the freedom of others – students and academics in support of transgender rights based on gender identity – at precisely a moment in society when the rights of transgender people are under attack through the conservative notion of biological sex as destiny.

Academic freedom has never been sacrosanct, we must fight for it. It is a site of struggle shaped by competing ideologies, forces and conditions of existence and relations of power. Democratically-organised academic agency, which is active in critical thought and debate, is essential for its survival and necessary advancement. □

• All references at the online version: [bit.ly/cb-af](https://bit.ly/cb-af)

# CWU calls for demonstration for New Deal for Workers

By a CWU member

At the Communications Workers' Union (CWU) virtual Special General Conference on 7-9 November, motions passed on the "New Deal For Workers" (published by Labour when Andy McDonald was shadow minister) called for a mobilisation in the Spring of 2022 for a New Deal demonstration with other unions. There was also confirmation from the leadership that the CWU would remain a stand-alone union (rather than merging into a bigger general union).

There has been no national discussion of General Conference business (i.e. what affects the whole union, not



the industrial policies of differing sectors, post, telecoms, and financial services) since the pandemic began in 2020, apart from a virtual Rules Revision that took place before the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections earlier this year and allowed for extra seats for equality representatives on the NEC.

There is due to be an in person CWU Annual Conference in April 2022 (pandemic permitting). Calling this Conference six months before that is an indication of the need that the Union leadership felt to show a clear direction for the future now.

## Themes

Key themes of the Conference included the relationship with the Labour Party, developing recruitment and organising, and supporting policies that arise from the industrial experiences of the membership.

On the first day the leadership's motion on maintaining affiliation to the Labour Party (but putting greater energy into local and regional activ-

ity) was overwhelmingly supported, roughly nine to one. A motion that called for stopping of national funding to the Labour Party from Kingston branch was roundly defeated. The vast majority of delegates who spoke in the debate made clear that they thought the political work of the Union and the link with the Labour Party were important.

The discussion on recruitment and organisation led to open criticism from telecoms branches of the betrayal of the Telecoms Executive on the Count Me In Campaign in BT, with speakers asking how we can promote recruitment when the Union has failed to fight compulsory redundan-

cies or stick out for a consolidated pay rise this year.

In the policy discussions on the last day of Conference, a comprehensive motion on campaigning on the public ownership of the telecoms industry was passed, with support from the NEC. This emphasised the importance of this long-standing policy after the experience of the necessity of remote working and virtual access during the pandemic.

It also reaffirmed the commitment that the Union obtained from the Labour Party in the 2019 general election campaign for public ownership and control of broadband provision in the UK. □

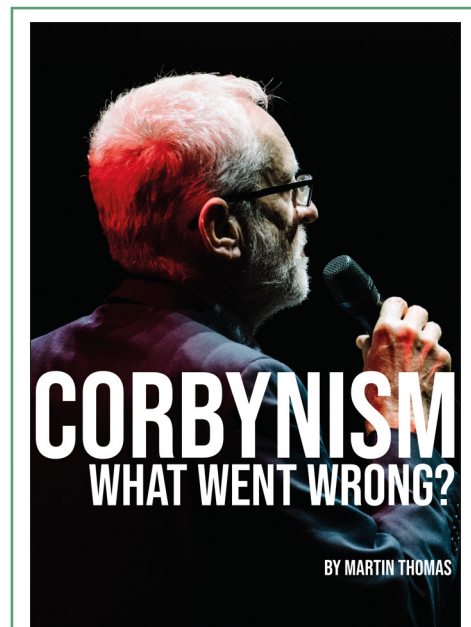


# The fundamental failure was on campaigning

Mike Davis reviews *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?*

This is a thoughtful if polemical book charting the rise and fall of the Corbyn project. The essence of the analysis is that Corbynism ran aground on two political issues: antisemitism and Brexit. The remedy for which could have been debate and education. Additionally only a meagre culture of political discussion was developed. Membership mushroomed with Corbyn's election in 2015. However, the older rejoinders were already "formed" and youth were not drawn into regular activity and education—youth and student activity declined, while the right maintained control of Labour student organisation, argues Thomas.

The bulk of the book is a journey through the Corbyn years to electoral defeat in 2019. Acknowledged are the constant attacks from right-wingers in the PLP, the mass media and party machine. There were no fundamental changes in organisation, which could have helped remedy the latter. The LOTO office could have countered the Party HQ but didn't. The Seamus Milne, Andrew Murray and Steve Howell team were old Stalinists and tilted Corbyn to have little interest in Brexit, antisemitism or democracy in the party. "Much of the structure and culture of the Blair years remained".



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

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

Momentum figures large in the analysis. Born out of the insurgence around Corbyn's election, Thomas argues the organisation "had no wish to push policy debates" at conference, focussing instead on a fringe festival (The World Transformed), although he acknowledges the left was weak at the 2016 conference in terms of delegates. By 2017 Corbyn had signalled he would not push for Trident non-replacement or NATO withdrawal. He was good on social spending and taxing the rich but said little on Brexit, immigration or trade union rights. Further, Momentum is criticised for a failure to develop democratic structures or conferences for wider political debate.

## 2017

The near success in the 2017 General Election is little acknowledged. Because Brexit had been a secondary issue in that contest Corbyn was able to outline a broader left alternative (little mention of socialism in the manifesto we're reminded), mount an effective social media and street level campaign enabling the Party to do well in drastically reducing the Tory majority, though not well enough to win.

Thomas is highly critical of Corbynism on campaigning. Certainly on Brexit, this is justified. We'd agree the arguments for working in the framework of the European Union (akin to working in Westminster or local government structures in our book), for free movement of people and the benefits of the Customs Union were not fulsomely made. Support for invoking Article 50 were over hasty and Brexit was kept off the agenda in 2016, 2017 and fudged in 2018. Too much ideological ground was ceded to the Tory Brexiteers and the leadership missed the boat on campaigning for a second referendum or joining the huge demonstrations making that call.

The wider criticism of Corbynism's lack of street protests and mobilisation is less justified. Comparisons are made with Michael Foot who supported protests against unemployment and actively supported CND. Corbyn is even compared unfavourably to Hugh Gaitskell and Labour support for mobilisations against Suez intervention in 1956. However, Corbyn supporters were prominent in the People's Assembly Against Austerity and its Labour offshoot, its various conferences and demonstrations. True, Labour did not



Corbyn launching the 2017 manifesto

organise any major demonstrations in its own right or seek to coordinate campaigns against cuts in local government. The latter was in part due to the lack of militant leadership among Labour councils and the need to painstakingly build a grassroots opposition as had begun to develop in the 1980s against Thatcherite rate-capping.

## Socialist Organiser

This criticism has echoes of 1979/80 when Socialist Organiser was formed as a cross-Labour left united front including Chartist, Workers' Action (predecessor of Workers' Liberty), the newly formed London Labour Briefing and independent leftists like Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight and others. Alongside the independents, Chartist took the longer view of the struggle against cuts stressing that the groundwork to build a broader movement had still to be done and that heroic martyrdom of councillors would not assist struggling working class families. This "dented shield" approach was deemed unacceptably accommodating to the Tories by WA/WL and led to a split. There is some inaccuracy on Socialist Organiser. This author was co-editor until the split and several Chartist EB members were signatories to the letter.

Corbyn's election and re-election to the leadership of the Labour Party undoubtedly represented a huge opportunity to forge Labour as a popular, activist party, developing a mass movement and educating members in a new socialist politics, capable of reaching out to wider communities. No mention is made of the large conferences organised by John McDonnell's team to debate alternative economic strategies or the initial consultations with members on policy priorities. These did represent a new course and some new thinking. Sadly the Leader's Office was

overly influenced by a narrower politics not far removed from the more orthodox Stalinism of the *Morning Star*.

## This Land

Owen Jones in his analysis, *This Land*, unfolds a detailed picture of dysfunctionality and an inward-looking mentality emanating from many of the figures Corbyn surrounded himself with, echoed in this book. The slowness to tackle the issue of antisemitism in the party, the evasions and lack of an apology for comments on an antisemitic mural wounded the leadership. Left antisemitism is identified as a big problem. Thomas links this to a false left analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, it's not necessary to subscribe to his less than pro-Palestinian stance to accept the damage done on this issue.

The fundamental problem with Corbyn's tenure as leader was the failure to reproduce the intense campaigning of the 2017 general election using the streets and social media over a sustained period of time. The promise of regular mass meetings across every town and city in the country never materialised... Involvement of members in policy development faced a similar fate.

The book finishes with a defence of revolutionary socialist politics and organisation using this reviewer as foil. Never say never, but the left has failed to date to push capitalism to its limits and beyond through the democratic institutions created by the working class and its allies, using the Labour Party and trade unions as major vehicles. Those vehicles certainly need renovation but are the best ones we have just now. Any revolution is nine-tenths completed in the womb of the existing society. We still have way to go to that end. □

# The flaw was unity with the right, not Stalinism

Urte March reviews *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?*

At the outset, the pamphlet correctly identifies the “real lost promise” of Corbynism. Rather than building an independent socialist movement in workplaces and communities which could have ousted the right in the Parliamentary Labour Party and in local government, propelled Labour to power and held the leadership to account on its promises, Corbyn kept the membership as an auxiliary social movement only to be mobilised at times of leadership or parliamentary elections.

There are indeed essential points about democracy and independent socialist organisation contained within Martin Thomas’s tour through the Corbyn years. But his location of Stalinism as the principal source of bureaucratism and anti-Zionism as a modern form of antisemitism – both shibboleths of the AWL – means the pamphlet fails to expose that Corbyn’s resort to bureaucratic methods and failure to fight the right’s smear campaign directly derive from his reformist strategy.

The AWL’s pamphlet relays the weaknesses hampering the movement from its spontaneous beginnings: the vacuum in the grassroots left both within and outside Labour, the lack of a pre-existing group of thinkers around Corbyn or even people with the right skills to lead his office. The surge in left members and activity in Labour was mirrored neither in the unions, the universities nor communities.

Thomas points out that even when Corbyn had consolidated his position after 2017, the leadership did not initiate any demonstrations, evaded support for strikes, did not campaign against local government cuts, did little to build up student Labour clubs and rarely talked about socialism by name.

Then there was the “Momentum coup” of January 2017, which decisively blocked the development of an independent, democratically organised left inside Labour. An added factor was the inexperience of the youth who rallied around Corbyn in the leadership elections of 2015 and 2016 and in the 2017 general election; they were organised neither in the constituencies, Young Labour nor Momentum.

This, along with the weakness of the British far left, most of whom stood aloof from the mass Labour Party, made it easier for Team Corbyn to promote a bunker mentality of loyalty to the leadership, without the challenge of a critical debate.

As Thomas points out, those that did try to combat this trend, including the AWL, were witch hunted by Chairman Iain McNicol’s party bureaucracy, receiving little or no support from the Corbyn leadership. Unfortunately, the AWL’s at best half-hearted “defence” of



many members suspended or expelled on trumped-up charges of antisemitism also put them on the wrong side of the battle lines in many cases.

## Stalinism

Yet just as much if not more than the historical weakness of the left, Thomas repeatedly blames Stalinism for the anti-democratic behaviours of leading cliques in parts of the Labour machine. It is the “Stalinist-heritage Leader’s Office” which “tilted Corbyn noxiously on issues like Brexit and antisemitism”, the “Stalinistic trends” within London Young Labour which “became a dead weight against the possibility of recruiting youth into Labour”, and so on. The vagueness of Corbynite socialism left it “vulnerable to ideological colonisation by the ‘false socialisms’... shaped by Stalinism”.

Of course it is true that the Stalinist political tradition, represented by the *Morning Star* and the Communist Party of Britain, has significant influence in the trade union and labour movement today, and that some of Corbyn’s most senior advisors – Seumas Milne, Andrew Murray and others – were associated with it. It is also right to point out the unprincipled, anti-democratic methods employed by various bureaucratic cliques to shut down discussion and debate within Momentum, London Young Labour and other campaigns.

However, the real question is not so much the genuinely Stalinist past of key LOTO members, but rather – what kind of politics led Corbyn to compromise on democratising the party, to discourage the formation of an independent left and to zigzag on Brexit? At every turn, from the inclusion of disloyal right-wingers in the first Shadow Cabinet to ditching open selection under pressure from Unite, to acceptance of local authority cuts, Corbyn’s strategy was to maintain unity with the right at all costs.

Setting itself the singular goal of winning an election to transform society from the top down, rather than viewing this as one battle in a wider class struggle, the leadership had to prioritise electioneering over members’ democracy. It was the party’s contortions over Brexit, more than any other policy, that, as Thomas points out, eventually

“destroyed its claim to represent new principle and consistency in politics”. The leadership attempted to satisfy both pro- and anti-Brexit voters, and both wings of the party, without actually engaging with the underlying social schisms.

## Insufficient

But it isn’t sufficient, as Thomas does, to ascribe these dynamics principally to “Stalinist” political culture. Any reformist political strategy based exclusively on electoral calculation will always be antithetical to rank and file democracy, because it is based not on a conception of class struggle but on winning state power by playing by the parliamentary game. This method was in existence in Labour from its birth and before that in the Fabian Society and in the trade union bureaucracy that founded Labour.

Genuine Stalinism is a constituent part of this political landscape – the bureaucratic degeneration of the ideals of Bolshevism into Stalinism meant abandoning internationalism and adopting the theory of socialism in one country, which necessarily meant an accommodation to the world capitalist system.

By pinning the blame for the Leader’s Office machinations on an external political force, Thomas lets left wing social democracy off the hook. But to win the rank and file of the Corbyn movement to revolutionary socialism, we have to explain to them that their own tradition is fundamentally flawed. This the AWL has failed to do.

There is no room here to provide a full rebuttal of the AWL’s position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is rehearsed in full within the section of Thomas’s pamphlet dealing with antisemitism. There can, however, be no doubt that the claims that Corbyn and many of his supporters were either antisemites or soft on antisemitism fatally discredited Corbyn and his supporters.

Corbyn did initially stand up to these smears but crucially failed to educate the membership about either antisemitism or the historical development of Zionism into a racist ideology that denied the Palestinians equal rights.

Without such a strategy, the leadership was unable to combat the hegemony of Zionist-influenced ideas about

Israel and antisemitism, and ended up accepting the core charge against them, even actioning the expulsion of prominent anti-racists and Jewish anti-Zionists on trumped up charges. This compounded the media discrediting of Corbyn as the principled anti-racist he is.

## Israel/Palestine

The root of the AWL’s problem is their claim that Israel merely represents the right to self-determination of the Israeli nation. That this “self-determination” necessarily denies self-determination for the Palestinians is not a contradiction for the AWL. “Left antisemitism”, as it appears according to the AWL, is not so much hatred of or agitation against Jews, but opposition to Israel’s denial of the Palestinians’ rights.

It is not antisemitic to point out that Israel was established by driving out a large proportion of the Palestinians and continued this process both wholesale in 1967 and piecemeal by settlements on the West Bank. Opposition to this ongoing process does not mean “driving the Jews into the Sea” or denying Israelis the right to live with full and equal rights in a secular democratic Palestine. In fact, Jeremy Corbyn has the same position as the AWL – indeed most of the non-Israeli world, including the Stalinists – for a two-state solution.

Thomas’s insistence that Corbyn should have capitulated to the right’s antisemitism smears even sooner, and the AWL’s refusal to fight for the right to self-determination for all nations, is in fact a concession to the interests of the British imperialist state, which backs Israel because it is an ally against the surrounding Arab nations. The Labour right have always been happy to join in with the establishment’s slander against the left and the AWL in this instance are willing to be their bag-carriers.

In this pamphlet, Thomas has even added his own smear: “Corbyn was a long-standing associate of people around the Stop the War Coalition who plainly supported wiping out Israel”. This is a blatant slander by insinuation when Corbyn has never condoned this view or those on the fringes of the anti-war movement who hold it.

Thomas’s claim that no other group on the left will seriously debate them on antisemitism or engage with the topic is also disingenuous. Interested readers can refer to our [Workers Power’s] book on Palestine which contains two appendices dealing with the AWL’s position, our [recent debate](#) with the AWL on the topic, or to the numerous long-form articles we produced on the subject during the Corbyn years (examples [here](#) and [here](#)).

Those who are serious about understanding the failure of Corbynism and the parliamentary road will want to look further. □

# The hinge of the downfall

By Martin Thomas

Martin Thomas, author of *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?*, responds to the reviews of the booklet by Mike Davis and Urte March (in this issue) and earlier ones by Richard Price and Andrew Coates ([online](#)).

**S**olidarity and Workers' Liberty work to transform the existing labour movement, not to create "our own" labour movement alongside it. We do our work by organising and educating for the battles of today, which, as yet, perforce, are "reform" struggles.

That far we agree with Mike Davis – that nine-tenths of the work for the socialist revolution is "in the womb of the existing society", and we have to push through the "institutions created by the working class and its allies... Labour Party and trade unions". Or with Andrew Coates: "a serious reform minded Labour government was worth campaigning for".

But the pushing requires an organised "we" to do it. "We" see every little edging-back of capitalist aggression in terms of its building-up of the potential of the working class to overthrow capitalism outright. If we limit our horizon to the little edgings-back immediately visible, then we progressively lose sight of the longer-term realities.

"The fundamental problem with Corbyn's tenure as leader was the failure to reproduce the intense campaigning of the 2017 general election... over a sustained period of time", writes Mike Davis, and it is some of the truth.

After that election the Labour right was demoralised. The Corbyn leadership could have built up an active labour movement, starting with anti-cuts, pro-NHS campaigning and expanding as the working class responded. It didn't. Instead its public message was dominated by its floundering and equivocation on Brexit and antisemitism.

Urte March's claim that Corbyn's fault was always to seek unity with the Labour right doesn't fit the facts here. His Leader's Office replaced Iain McNicol as General Secretary by the Corbynite Jennie Formby, and put its people into the Compliance Unit (renamed Governance and Legal). Tom Watson's attempt to organise a "Future Britain" faction of right-wing Labour MPs collapsed. Watson himself resigned.

Richard Price is nearer correct to suggest that Corbyn's most damaging compromises were with the unions (and in fact when Urte cites specifics, they are usually of compromises with Unite, whose political links were shown by its Chief of Staff being also, part-time, a leading figure in the Leader's

Office). The canker was within the Corbynite core.

To move the unions quickly would surely have been difficult. But the best chance was through campaigning. Campaigning that was not just vote-for-us, but also demonstrations, support for strikes, building youth movements, so as to bring forward new activists in workplaces and revitalise older ones.

## Labourism

To put the problem down just to "Labourism", as Urte March does, is too general. Of course the tone of Corbynite Labour was electoralist and reformist. It emerged through the rallying to a reformist figure of older leftists ground down by 30 years of doldrums, and younger leftists who had grown up with NGOs as their most visible reference point for left-wing contestation.

Future left surges in Britain will surely be initially "Labourite", too. To look for a new mass movement, revolutionary-Marxist from the get-go, to emerge pristine and unhampered by the ideological dead weight of the past, is to look for miracles rather than do politics.

The question is not why we did not get that miracle, but why the left developed so little in the Corbyn years, out of Labourism but inevitably from "within" Labourism, in the way of political education and democratic organisation, especially of young people?

Some of that, and my booklet says so, is down to the weaknesses of ourselves, the Marxists. Some, I also wrote, to new difficulties created by the rise of social media and the smartphone (though no reviewer has commented on that).

The going was made harder for us by Stalinism at the top of the Corbyn movement. Many "Labourites" who wanted something more left-wing, and so might have moved, through discussion and experience, towards revolutionary ideas, were short-circuited. Stalinists were in pole position to offer them an alternative which was radical-looking but less demanding, one which told them that change could be made "from above", through the Leader's Office, through union and MPs' backrooms. The circles round the Leader's Office saw little need to organise young Corbynites, and probably were scared of what would happen if they allowed scope for democratic organisation there. Stalinism was the hinge through which the generous impulses of Corbynites, their wish for something more radical than routine Labourism, became soured, crabbed, or dispersed.

To blame Stalinism, writes Urte, is to "let social democracy off the hook". On the contrary: to excuse the actual political operators who manipulated, cramped, and diverted the movement,



in favour of blaming epochal generalities which could hardly be jumped over anyway, is to let everyone off the hook.

Stalinism is not just an episode of the 1930s. For decades it was the great "actual existing" alternative to capitalism. Today many think that Cuba is "actually existing" socialism, and they have politics based on that (more demoralised, more incrementalist, than "high Stalinism", to be sure). The strength of those political forces is based on large-scale democratic working-class action seeming remote, but is also a factor to perpetuate that remoteness.

I blame the Stalinistic Leader's Office for tying Labour to discreditable floundering on Brexit and antisemitism.

## Brexit

Only Richard Price disputes my indictment of the Leader's Office over Brexit, but his alternative ("Norway-plus", or such) was opposed by the Leader's Office just as much as our straightforward anti-Brexit stance. He gives no argument why anti-EU people would be convinced by a programme of unchanged compliance with EU economic and freedom-of-movement rules, with only this difference, that they would now have no even notional democratic input to the rules.

Was it just "the right's antisemitism smears"? Was the real aim to outlaw criticism of Israel within the Labour Party? Well, as its supporters boast, the motion on Israel-Palestine passed by Labour conference 2021 was more anti-Israel than any passed in the Corbyn years.

The Labour right used the antisemitism issue against Corbyn, of course. That was because they had a real issue to use. In April 2016 Ken Livingstone (speaking as a recently-promoted Corbyn deputy) went on TV to justify Naz Shah's social media post about "solving" the Israel-Palestine conflict through "relocating" Israel into the USA by exclaiming that "Hitler supported Israel in 1932".

Richard Price chimes in by referring to a Gestapo report in 1934 on its "efforts... oriented to promoting Zionism as much as possible". Richard got that from David Cesarani's *The Final Solution*, p.96. In 1934 the Nazis were worried that 1933's flight of Jews from Germany was petering out. A few Jews

facing difficulties where they had fled were even returning. Within the Jewish community Reichsvertretung the Gestapo used its manipulative powers on the side of those who advised Jews to flee Germany, against German nationalists who talked up hopes of liveable adjustment to the Nazi regime. Whatever that proves, it is not that Zionism is "hereditarily" Nazi-like.

Richard exclaims that Ken Livingstone must have been a "secret antisemite". Nothing secret about it. Livingstone was suspended from office as London mayor in 2006 for antisemitism. In the early 1980s he collaborated with Gerry Healy's WRP and *Labour Herald*, widely exposed as having been paid to be antisemitic by Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein. Richard knows that, since he was in the WRP at the time. In any case, to damn Israel's Jews today by concocted "inherited sin" from 1932-4 is to operate in terms of good and bad peoples, not democratic politics.

Richard and Urte also adduce "inherited sin" from 1948. Zionist forces committed crimes and drove people to flight in 1948. By now coverage of that is even in Israel's high school syllabus.

It was a war. The other side committed crimes too, and if fewer only because they conquered less territory for it. Most nation-states have been defined and consolidated by war. Nations still have the right to self-determination, whatever their great-grandparents and grandparents did.

Urte charges us with "refusal to fight for the right to self-determination for all nations".

Yet Urte is for the right to self-determination for all nations *except one*, the Israeli-Jewish one. The exception comes, she writes, because "this 'self-determination' necessarily denies self-determination for the Palestinians". It does not. There is (and has been for generations) a part of the pre-1948 British Mandate territory which is 80% Jewish, and a part which is over 80% Palestinian Arab. Practical and economic arrangements for the two neighbouring peoples both to thrive are difficult, but the political answer on national rights is straightforward: end the occupation! Grant the Palestinians their right to a state alongside Israel!

Nothing other than military subjugation of Israel can suppress the Israeli Jews' right of self-determination. To aim for that suppression is no help to the Palestinians, since it condemns them to hopeless waiting on Iran or some such military power to conquer the territory. And to support it on grounds of "inherited sin" passed down through Jewish inheritance from 1932, or 1934, or 1948 is, like it or not, antisemitic. □

# James Connolly on Yellow Unions



## The unexpurgated Connolly

By James Connolly

Our readers who have read in the Socialist press of the doings of the "Yellow Unions" of the Continent know that the said unions are organisations of workers under the control of the Catholic Church, as distinct from the ordinary non-sectarian unions which the experience of the workers everywhere have proven to be the only safe and effective form of industrial combinations. If they are conversant also with the industrial history of these yellow unions, our readers will also know that they for the most part have acted the part of blacklegs or strike-breakers in every great conflict, and that under the cover of protecting religion, they have ever been the first to betray the cause of Labour.

### Ancient Order of Hibernians

There have been several attempts in Ireland to introduce this evil spirit of religious discussion into the Labour movement, all happily unsuccessful. On two occasions the Ancient Order of Hibernians was the moving force in the dirty work. An attempt was made to establish a railway servants' union under the aegis of the A.O.H., but although supported eagerly by the Home Rule press, and endorsed by several Members of Parliament, the effort was a complete failure. At the beginning of the tram strike last year, the Hibernians

## Introduction

Slightly more than half the original text is missing from the version of this article in circulation, in the Cork Workers' Club pamphlet *Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table* and on the [web](#) – the first part, detailing an attempt to set up a "yellow" union in Catholic Ireland. It contains a valuable portrayal of the use by a Home Rule politician of pseudo-nationalist cant. The article was first republished in truncated form in 1968 by an Irish Stalinist-Maoist organisation. They would go on to become champions of Ulster Unionism and of the democratic validity of the Six Counties, but at that point they were Stalinist pseudo-nationalists attempting to set up James Connolly as an Irish Mao or Stalin. □

Sean Matgamna



Jim Larkin at the Dublin lockout in 1913

were again at their fell work organising a Tram Men's Union with one of their head office clerks as General Secretary, but apart from helping to disorganise the strike in its inception and so prevent the necessary complete tie-up, it also failed, or at least has since sank into its well-deserved oblivion.

### Priests

Now another attempt is being made, this time not directly by the Hibernians, but directly under the control of the priests. We reprint from the *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, passages in a report of the meeting held in Kingstown to establish this Yellow Union under the title of the "Kingstown and South County Dublin General Workers' Union":—

Rev. Father Flavin, C.C., Kingstown, presided at a most enthusiastic meeting of labourers held in the St. Mary's Hall, Kingstown, in connection with the establishing of the Kingstown and South County Dublin General Workers' Union, Bands from Cabinteely, Newtown Park, and Kingstown attended, and many men were unable to gain admission. Amongst those on the platform were:— Rev. Father Lockhart, C.C. [Catholic Curate], Rev. Father Healy, C.C., Rev. Father Sladen, C.C., Rev. Father Hogan, C.C., Rev. Father Sheehan, C.C., Messrs. J. J. Kennedy, Chairman, Kingstown Council, J. Walter, U.D.C., James Smyth, C. J. Reddy, solicitor, etc.

Letters of apology were received from Mr. Field, M.P., Mr. M. F. O'Brien, U.D.C., Rev. Father Ryan, C.C., Westland Row, and Mr. M. J. M'Allister, Co. C.

The Rev. Chairman said that there were one or two things that he wished to say at the beginning, before he dealt with the Union proper. As they were aware, a provisional committee had been formed to take charge of the destiny of this Union until January,

when a general meeting would be held, and each one would have an opportunity of voting for the committee, who would continue the work which they had begun that evening. In making this provisional committee and committee of management, he guaranteed that in the name of the priests of the locality that he would be responsible for the initial expenses. Very honourably at first, the men declined the offer, but on the second occasion he persuaded them to allow him to be responsible in the name of the priests for the initial expenses, and so he was in the position to command £10 – (applause). Of that amount he got £2 from Canon Murphy, Kingstown; £2, Canon Murray, Glasthule; £1 each, Father Hogan, Father Sladen, Father Ryan, Westland Row; Father Lockhart, Glasthule; Father M'Geogh, Father Healy, Dalkey; and Father Dwyer, Dalkey.

The Union shall be governed by an hon. president, a chairman, treasurer, secretary and a committee of management. It shall have at least four trustees. The entrance fee for the first six months shall be 6d., and their contribution would be 4½d. per week (½d. being to the burial fund), and 2d. per quarter to the contingent fund. The conditions of entrance, after the first six months, shall be: First, that you be men of good conduct, character, and health. Second, you must not belong to any other Trades Union without the sanction of the Committee of Management. They were not going to have backsliders in that Union. Every man must be a man, because if they allowed backsliding, it simply meant that men who were in as good a position as they were put their hands down into their pockets. They were not going to allow that. Members in arrears shall be suspended from benefits as follows:— 8 weeks in arrears, suspended

from sick and accident benefit for 2 weeks; 13 weeks in arrears, excluded from all benefit. The sick benefits would be 7/ per week for the first week, and every additional week up to twelve, 4/. On the death of a member the sum of £8 would be paid, and on the death of the wife £3 would be paid; if a child under three years, £1 10/, and over three but under twelve years, £2 10/.

### Strikes and Lockouts

Strikes and lock-outs:— A strike may be declared only when all other means of redress had failed, and when, by a ballot of a specially convened meeting of all the members, and two-thirds of those present declare for it. The society shall always be willing to submit their case to arbitration, and shall abide by the award. The union is an exclusively Irish organisation. It may open branches in any part of Ireland, but not outside of it, and it shall not be associated with, nor affiliated to, an union of an irreligious or Socialistic character". (Applause.) He was glad they had applauded that, as he was sure they had been taught a wise lesson in recent times.

Mr. James J. Kennedy, Chairman of the Kingstown Urban Council, proposed – "That the Kingstown and South County Dublin General Labourers' Union deserves the sympathy and support of all honest Irishmen, and that this meeting pledges itself to carry it triumphantly to success". The band outside, he said, had played "A Nation Once Again", and by the grace of God and the votes of the Irish Parliamentary Party, their nation was a nation once again – (applause) – but to preserve it and make it a lasting and creditable nation that would be respected, every man was required to do his duty. How could they make their nation successful and prosperous, or make their own homes comfortable and happy? By joining together as brothers, and by being honest Irishmen. (Applause.) This was going to be an organisation of their own. Did they not think that Irishmen were well able to mind their own business and carry an organisation of their own to success? Where was the use of sending their money across the Channel to be distributed for them? Didn't they know, looking back over the century that had passed, that their truest friends and best advisers were their priests? (Applause.) Their fathers in dark days, they stood behind the people. Were they going to be wise – were they going to pin their fate to somebody they knew nothing about, and send their money away, while their priests were by their side, and wanted them to do the right thing for Faith and: Fatherland. (Applause.) They knew their

# How Unions in Ireland



James Connolly, Jim Larkin and the rest of the executive of the Irish TUC and Labour Party, 1914

chairman. He had nothing to gain, and he was going to give them the best advice that he possibly could give to the undertaking. He had done so in the past. It lay with the workers of Kingstown, fathers of families and young men, who wanted to be respected and hold their heads high, to render the organisation a success, and make their country what it should be, a nation. (Applause) It rested with them, and the best advice he could give them, as chairman of the district in which they lived, was "Follow the lead of their priests." (Applause.)

## Religious bigotry

How well the enemies of the advanced Labour movement know how to utilise the spirit of religious bigotry against the hopes of those who wish to unite Labour is well exemplified in the foregoing report. Never did the priests of Kingstown attempt to organise the labourers of Kingstown in all the weary years of the past when the Capitalist class ground them to the dust, when the landlord robbed them, and every agency in the country conspired to make the labourers' life a hell. It was only when the Irish Transport Workers' Union had taught them the value of organisation, had raised them from the dust of self-abasement; taught them to rely upon their own efforts, and had put heart and hope into their lives that the clergy came along to endeavour to disrupt and destroy, the organisation which found the labourers of Ireland slaves, and made them men and women fit for great deeds.

How little difference there is at bottom between such priests and the Ulster Orangemen in their hatred of Labour may be judged from the following report of part of the proceedings of the Irish Trades Congress. I extract this from the chief Orange organ in this City – the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* –

Before the Irish Trades' Congress concluded, Mr. James Connolly called attention to a circular which, he said, had been issued to their employees by the firm of Messrs. Davidson & Co. Ltd., Belfast, who were Government contractors. It was much on the same lines as that which had been issued to their employees by the employers of Dublin, and which had caused so much trouble in the city last year.

The employees were asked by Messrs. Davidson to sign a declaration that they were not members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, or any similar unskilled Union, and that they should not become members of any such Union while in their employment.

That Congress Mr. Connolly contended, could not adjourn without taking action upon this matter. In the firm of Davidson & Co. they had contractors carrying out Government contracts; the circular was in direct contravention of the spirit under which Government contracts were given out.

This circular had been issued by a man who had been displaying great zeal in recent times for civil and religious liberty. For the last few days they had been discussing the question of Home Rule there, and when it was being considered it was well to remember that in the yards of this firm of Messrs. Davidson & Co., drilling for the defence of civil and religious liberty was going on every night; but here they had in this circular the conception of this firm of civil and religious liberty, and could better proof be afforded to them of the littleness of their action?

He moved – That this Congress condemns the attempt of Belfast employers to introduce a ban upon the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and all other Unions of unskilled labourers, calls upon trade unionists everywhere to take action against all employers

taking such action against their fellow members, and demands that all firms taking this course against trade unions should at once, be struck off the list of contractors for public bodies.

Mr. Johnson (Belfast) said this circular was no new thing with this firm, and on that ground it was sought to be excused. He held in his hand a copy of a similar form dated 29th April, 1906. Perhaps Mr. Davidson was the most virulent and unrelenting antagonist of Home Rule in Belfast. Deputations of trades unionists coming from England and Scotland were got hold of and brought to his works, and there introduced to his anti-Home Rule workers, and he sent abroad to trades unionists and others the statement of the industrial case against Home Rule in Ireland. That was the man who had issued that circular to his workers in Belfast in 1906, and repeated it in 1913 and 1914.

The motion was put and carried unanimously.

A reporter from the *Telegraph* called upon Mr. S.C. Davidson, of the *Sirocco Works*, in reference to the statements by Mr. Connolly and Mr. Johnson, published above.

## Resolution

Mr. Davidson said he thought Mr. Connolly could not have had before him a copy of the resolution passed by the House of Commons, on 10th March, 1909, which applied to contractors for the Government. If he had he would have seen that this resolution was applicable, not to the class of labour that Government contractors employ, but only to the rates of wages which workers engaged upon Government work shall receive.

The question, he said, was raised by one of the Labour Members of Parliament some years ago when a representative of the Government was sent over to Belfast and fully investigated the matter at the *Sirocco Works*. The result of this report was that the Government were entirely satisfied that everything was perfectly in order and in accord with their requirements.

Mr. Davidson informed our representative that the firm has always, and at present, employs a very large number of trade unionists in different departments of the works, but while strictly recognising all real trade unionist societies and rules, the firm do not recognise a society which would foist on to them, as trade unionists, men who have acquired no knowledge of any trade whatever.

Here is an exact copy of the declaration above alluded to as being enforced upon the labourers employed

by this firm:

Declaration: – "I, the undersigned, hereby state that I am not a member of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, or any similar Unskilled Labourers' Society or Union; and that so long as I am employed by the firm of Davidson & Co. Ltd., I will not join or become a member of any such Unskilled Labourers' Society or Union."

Date .....

Signed .....

Here you see the Catholic priest and the Orange employer meeting upon common ground, brothers in the hatred of our Union. And to complete the picture, I need only mention that the recent annual national conference of the National Transport Workers' Federation at Hull, when I sought permission to appear before the delegates and explain that their affiliated Unions – the Seamen and Firemen's Unions, and the Ardrossan branch of the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers – were still working the boats of the Head Line which is victimising our members in Belfast and Dublin, I was refused permission to state our case, or to appear before the delegates at all.

What a mix-up of a world! □

• *Forward*, 20 June 1914. Subheads here are *Solidarity's*. The previous [reprint](#) had only the last part of this article, from "How little difference there is at bottom between such priests..."

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# China 1949: What a



**Book  
review**

By Paul Hampton

The year 1949 is pivotal in modern Chinese history. The military victories of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, who for brevity I will describe as the “Communists”, although in my view they were not communists in any sense used before the 1930s) and the foundation of the People’s Republic of China constitute key components in the “creation myth” of today’s China. The events furnish the current regime with its legitimacy. Many aspects of the Communist seizure of power in 1949 form part of the “furniture” of Chinese politics today.

Graham Hutchings’ book, *China 1949: Year of Revolution* (2021) brings welcome clarity to the events of this history. The book clearly shows how Mao Zedong’s Stalinist People’s Liberation Army (PLA) established its own state, without any active role by the working class as an independent class force. China after 1949 was Stalinist, not a workers’ state. The foundation of today’s exploitation and oppression were laid in 1949 and despite important developments, particularly after 1978, clarity about its origins is vital for today’s working-class socialists.

## Preparation

During 1948, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained the upper hand in its civil war against the nationalist Guomindang after two decades of conflict. Since 1928, the CCP had formed a peasant-based Stalinist army and won control of territory. By the beginning of 1949, the CCP’s forces were ready to conquer the cities and seize state power throughout China.

On 8 April 1948, Mao drafted a telegram to the headquarters of the Luoyang front, instructing on urban policy: “do not confiscate all the industrial and commercial enterprises run by Guomindang members... do not lightly advance slogans of raising wages and reducing working hours... do not be in a hurry to organise the people of the city to struggle for democratic reforms and improvements in livelihood.”

On 22 August 1948, Zhou Enlai issued a blunt CCP central committee



Mao proclaiming the formation of the People’s Republic of China

directive, entitled “Cool-Headedness and Flexible Tactics – Requirements of the Struggle in Areas Under the Chiang Regime”, which stated, “it is out of the question to promote unsupported armed uprisings of workers and other inhabitants in Guomindang cities”.

## Takeover of the cities

The CCP’s takeover of the cities varied according to the degree of resistance by the Guomindang. The PLA took the cities of Changchun and Shenyang by long and bloody siege. It conquered Tianjin by storm. It subjected Beijing to “a form of calibrated suffocation that finally persuaded its defenders to surrender and accept ‘peaceful liberation’”. Nanjing would be taken by “vacant possession”. But whatever form the takeover of cities took, Hutchings is clear that “In none of them was the urban working class large or well organised enough to overthrow the old political and economic order. They had to be conquered from the ‘outside’ by peasant armies...”

The port of Tianjin was a major commercial and trade hub for whole of north China. On 14 January 1949, the PLA launched a fierce assault on the city centre, which fell in just over twenty-four hours. “We have all passed through a very hectic time”, wrote Mary Layton, a young missionary with the Salvation Army, after a month of what she described as “day and night bombardments”. “All day on 14 January from early morning the din was terrific and continued non-stop for 24 hours.

The southwest corner of the city was razed to the ground.”

## Beijing

Beijing was handed over to the Communists in bizarre circumstances. The Guomindang commander Fu Zuoyi’s position was compromised by the fact that his daughter and her fiancé were Communist Party members, and his own command had been infiltrated: the Communists were listening in to his military communications. On 1 January 1949 the CCP announced the formation of a “shadow government” – the Beijing Military Control Commission.

Although the CCP underground had been active for some time, “the Party had neither the intention nor the capacity to foster an uprising among Beijing’s relatively small, poorly organised proletariat. Neither did it promise that property would be transferred to them once the city was ‘liberated’. It was thinking along different lines. Mao wanted to gain control over Beijing intact rather than in a state of insurrection”.

On 31 January, PLA troops marched into the city. *Time* magazine reported that normal life resumed as rapidly as possible: “A few days later, 20,000 smartly uniformed Communist troops marched in, with two brass bands. They had left their Russian trucks outside the city, displaying only the US ones, which they had captured from Chiang’s armies. Picked Nationalist soldiers grimly guarded the Reds’ line of march. Beneath pictures of Communist boss Mao Zedong (none of Joseph Stalin), sound

trucks blared: ‘Long live the liberation’. Crowds watched the Reds in silence.”

Doak Barnett, a young US scholar who witnessed the takeover, found the imagery to capture events. Beijing had been “plucked like a piece of ripe fruit”, he wrote. The old regime had been “placed in receivership. The Military Control Commission acted as receiver and was the supreme local authority during bankruptcy proceedings”. Its job was to “take possession of the Nationalist’s assets and then pass them on to the Beijing People’s Government”.

## Nanjing

Nanjing had been the Guomindang capital city for two decades. It too fell with little resistance and without working class intervention. “In the streets and squares

of Nanjing, the Communists were orderly”, reported *Time* (2 May 1949). “They sang or listened to harangues from their officers. They looked no different from their Nationalist brothers, except they were fresher, more soldierly... people grouped around them and, with unaffected curiosity, stared at the invaders from the north.”

Hutchings describes the ease with which Communist forces occupied the capital. It was “matched by the competent way in which they took over the established organs of power and influence, rapidly ‘re-casting’ them so they could fulfil the new regime’s revolutionary purpose”. This was the work of the Nanjing Military Control Committee, dominated by the PLA. It was tasked with suppressing resistance, maintaining order and generally running things until a new “civil” administration could take on the job.

In addition to assuming the main functions of government, the Military Control Committee was quick to bring to heel the leading financial institutions. They became property of the Communist authorities. The Nanjing police force, some of whose leaders fled with other senior Nationalist officials, was promptly reorganised, though many of those who had elected to remain behind were retained.

One of the new municipal government’s first moves was to introduce a curfew with a view, as the *Nanjing Daily* put it, “to restore normal conditions and order, to maintain public peace

# about the workers?

and to avert destructive activities of the remnants of the reactionary KMT in the city”.

## Shanghai

The capture of Shanghai was the single most important “symbolic” episode in the rise of “Red” China, given its status as a citadel of capitalist enterprise. The general advance was launched on 23 May 1949. Troops responsible for taking over the city centre were forbidden to deploy artillery or explosives so as not to damage buildings and so on. The PLA quickly overwhelmed the city’s two main airports. The next day the PLA breached the city’s unimpressive defensive perimeter.

In the early hours of 25 May, Communist soldiers in green fatigues penetrated to the city centre. Their entry was largely uncontested. Most of those in authority under the departing regime handed over responsibility to the new regime. The smooth takeover of the police force was particularly striking. Troops who lacked maps were assisted by 50 postal workers in uniform.

“The changeover was like nothing that had been imagined”, wrote Randall Gould, editor of the *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*. “We had feared days or lawless disorder. Nothing of the sort occurred. One day the Nationalists, next day the Communists, while our erstwhile defenders rode down the Yangtze River and over to Formosa. It was as simple as that.”

The CCP’s New China News Agency

reported that half of Shanghai’s privately owned factories were operating by 9 June and that all of them were expected to do so by the end of the month. Mayor Chen Yi held a series of meetings with senior business leaders, promising to assist them and reminding them of the difficulties they faced under Nationalist rule. The Shanghai Military Control Committee quickly took over public enterprises, including many schools and leading universities.

## Guangzhou

Guangzhou (then known as Canton) was the major city in south China. Lester Knox Little, the Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service described the familiar pattern: “After all the talk and boasts, not a shot was fired by the ‘defenders’ of the city, who skedaddled as fast as they could – after needlessly blowing up the great Pearl River Bridge. Like a spoiled child who destroys a child’s sand castle just to be nasty.”

A section of the municipal police remained on duty, “having been warned by underground cells to continue their services”, according to *The New York Times* (14 October 1949). *Time* magazine (24 October 1949) adopted a breezier tone: “With scarcely more than a quiet sigh, Guangzhou last week passed under Communist rule. There was no resistance in the city that had given refuge to China’s dying Nationalist government... A million Chinese carried on impassively while the Red

underground among them emerged for jubilant street parades”.

## Labour and capital

The conquerors spelt out the roles of capital and labour in the New China. Mao insisted: “Our present policy is to restrict capitalism and not to eliminate it.” Visiting Tianjin in the spring of 1949, Liu Shaoqi upbraided local party leaders for their heavy-handed treatment of commercial activity in the city. His remarks, “eased some of the anxieties of business leaders across the country. On the other hand, they did not offer much comfort to the country’s proletariat in whose name the CCP had seized power”.

As early as April 1949, the Central Committee complained about spontaneous strikes in cities. The party urged owners and workers across the country to end labour unrest under the slogan, “private and public interests, labour and capital must both benefit”.

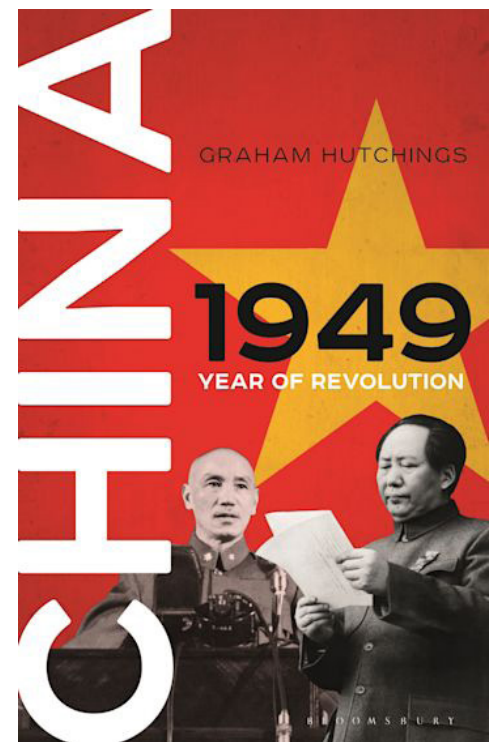
Li Lisan told the WFTU Trade Union Conference, November 1949: “The special feature of the Chinese revolution is not the occupation of the cities through the uprising of the urban workers, but the seizure of the cities after the extermination of enemy forces by the People’s Liberation Army... However, the demands of the workers were sometimes too high. Their actions and forms of struggle were in some cases inordinate... we carried out education... so as to correct the ‘Left’ deviation of excess...”

## Mao’s Stalinist state

The new government at first exercised a form of military rule. No clear separation was made between party and state in the new polity: Mao was chairman of both the Central People’s Government and the Party, Liu Shaoqi was vice-chair of the government, while Zhou Enlai was premier and foreign minister. From the first, the party was what mattered in the People’s Republic.

Every urban centre underwent household registration, undertaken by the municipal police, renamed the Public Security Bureau. Local committees were organised for strict control. Before long, every urban citizen acquired a personal dossier on entering the workforce that would stay with them for the rest of their lives. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions ensured production and civil peace in the factories.

Hutchings describes the takeover in 1949, using a wide range of Chinese and English-language sources. The book combines careful research with a highly readable narrative. It does not



delve into why the CCP won, nor does it tackle the social nature of the new regime. However it makes clear that the takeover was not carried out by the Chinese working class. The CCP may have claimed to speak in the name of the Chinese proletariat, but workers were never the self-conscious agents of change in this revolution.

The totalitarian tyranny established by the Maoists from the beginning was the opposite of socialism. This book provides a service to activists trying to understand the roots of modern China and why Maoism was never a model for authentic working class militants. □



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# Building organisation at Barnoldswick

By Ross Quinn

Workers at the Rolls Royce site in Barnoldswick have voted to accept a new offer from the company in their dispute over staffing at the site. Ross Quinn, a Unite officer involved in the dispute, spoke to Solidarity.

The key concession in the settlement is the extension of the no-compulsory-redundancies guarantee to five years. That's a three-year extension on what was on the table previously. The deal also includes an agreement for a company furlough scheme for up to 70 workers, which is a kind of baseline insurance policy if work streams dry up in future. But that's not something either party would want to use, and will be holding the company to its commitments on ensuring minimum staffing levels and securing new work streams.

The deal does unfortunately include a 1.8% reduction in the basic rate of pay, but that's something we hope to address via renewed campaigning in the very near future.

There are two bargaining units at the site, "works", which is the shop floor staff, and "staff", which is engineers and supervisory grades. Works have voted to accepted the settlement unanimously, 100%. Amongst staff it was a 66% majority to accept.

The campaign has been led by the shop stewards, with a high degree of involvement from the rank-and-file membership. At every stage, there's been regular communication – from WhatsApp groups, to newsletters, to regular mass meetings where dispute strategy and the various offers from the employers were discussed. There were regular report-backs from all ne-



gotiations. The negotiating team has included different people at different times, including myself as an officer, other national officers from Unite, as well as national Unite convenors from Rolls Royce, and the Barnoldswick shop stewards themselves. The shop stewards are extremely well organised, and their role has been key. The site convenor is on full-time release, but the other shop stewards aren't, so they're there on the shop floor, day in day out. Having them at the centre of the campaign was vital for building the campaign on the ground, and ensuring the voice of the workforce was being heard.

When we put management's previous offer, which only had a two-year no-compulsory-redundancies guarantee, management thought the tide was flowing their way. Our most recent set of industrial action ballots were, although still high, slightly down on previous results – around 80% amongst works, and 60% amongst staff. Management thought confidence and determination was ebbing, and they were putting it about that they believed workers trusted management over the

union. But because of the organised core of shop stewards and the work they were doing on the ground, and the discussions we were having in mass meetings, we knew the reality was different. That offer was rejected by 100%, and that was a real turning point. That rejection showed management there was a lot of fight left in the workforce, and that forced the move from two to five years in the deal.

In every mass meeting we've had, we've spoken about the issue of transition to sustainable production. This is part of what's becoming a wider push in Unite, with workers at other Rolls Royce sites and at GKN starting to de-

velop plans for alternative production based on transition to zero-carbon. The company has its plans and strategy for what it wants to do; we're putting our own agenda forward as a workforce and a trade union.

Rolls Royce's use of a global supply chain has a massive impact on its progress towards its net-zero target, as different parts have to be transported around the world to be assembled. Increasing local jobs is a more rational and climate friendly way of organising production.

The campaign has definitely had a positive impact on union organisation at the site overall. In the staff bargaining unit, we've had new reps coming through as a result of the dispute. And I've had members say to me that, despite being long-standing members in a relatively well-organised site, they didn't really "get" what trade unionism was until this dispute and the strikes.

The action they've taken, and all the campaigning alongside it – the active, vibrant pickets; the car rallies; the international solidarity we organised; the social media campaigning we did... it gave them a totally different perspective on trade unionism. They now see it as something active, combative, and assertive. □

## John Deere strikers face re-vote

By Angela Paton

A re-vote has been announced on the defeated deal in the dispute at John Deere agricultural equipment factories, in Iowa and Indiana and elsewhere in the USA. 10,000 workers had vowed to continue, but union officials from the United Automobile Workers (UAW) announced on 12 November that there would be a re-vote on the agreement already overwhelmingly voted down on 3 November, with only small alterations made.

This is reminiscent of the UAW actions at Volvo trucks earlier this year, where 3,000 workers voted down three UAW sell out agreements. It takes the total UAW backed contracts rejected by workers across America this year alone to seven, including John Deere; Dana, the parts supplier for John Deere, where workers almost unanimously rejected a deal this autumn; and Volvo.

There was a 55% overall vote against the agreement when the UAW officials tried to ram in through on 3 November, the second such agreement that was rejected. The first was rejected by 90% on 10 October. Five pages of legal-ese was shown to strikers only two days in advance of the vote, another tactic to ram through the agreement, and there has been an information

black out by the UAW.

Both agreements put forward have failed to meet demands to reinstate retiree health benefits, to tackle 25 years of eroding wages, and to win a substantial improvement to working conditions.

John Deere is already organising strike-breakers, as it goes into the fifth week of the first strike in 35 years in the company.

This comes against the background of a federal corruption investigation into the UAW. Seventeen officials have indicted so far, the latest on charges of embezzling \$2 million of members' dues to fund a gambling habit.

We should support the Unite All Workers for Democracy, the UAW grassroots campaign to weed out corruption in the union and support workers in winning their demands of their employers without being sold down the river or suffering back room deals with the bosses. We support the John Deere strikers who will not be bullied into accepting shoddy deals and seek to wrest control of the strike out of the hands of corrupt UAW bureaucrats.

There is an urgent need for rank and file strike committees to break the hold of corrupt union bureaucrats and to mobilise workers to force management to meet their fair demands. □

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"Primitive Antisemitism and the Contemporary Left", (abridged/adapted chapter from the book), Logically: [bit.ly/log-abr](https://bit.ly/log-abr)



# The Dreyfus-deniers of the French far right

By **Barrie Hardy**

The Dreyfus Affair, which began in 1894, is a cause célèbre that refuses to go away. The framing of Captain Alfred Dreyfus on espionage charges split public opinion in France into pro and anti Dreyfusard camps.

What gave the case added resonance and placed it high on the list of historic miscarriages of justice was the overwhelming stench of anti semitism surrounding the entire episode. France was recovering from the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71) and the German annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. Ultra-nationalists in particular were out for revanche (revenge) against Germany to win back the "lost" provinces.

The paranoid atmosphere at the top of the French military establishment was heightened by the discovery that one of their number was passing secrets to the German embassy. The top brass had little hesitation in deciding that the Jewish Dreyfus was the person responsible, largely due to their antisemitic belief that Jewish citizens could not be "true Frenchmen". That Dreyfus had earned his post through merit rather than aristocratic connections was another reason why he was deemed "not one of us".

Dreyfus was found guilty of treason, sentenced to life imprisonment, and

packed off to the dreaded penal colony of Devil's Island. A year or so later the real culprit, a certain Major Ferdinand Esterhazy, was unmasked, yet the military hierarchy tried to suppress this and fabricated documents to further frame Dreyfus.

The efforts of investigative journalists and the incendiary "J'accuse" article by Emile Zola attacking the French President for failing to exonerate Dreyfus eventually led to his complete rehabilitation in 1906.

*Paris Police 1900*, an eight-part TV series created by Fabian Nury and shown recently on the BBC gives a reasonable approximation of what the political climate France was like at the time. It is largely accurate in terms of historical detail, including a salacious opening scene where President Felix Faure succumbs to a heart attack whilst his mistress performs fellatio on him.

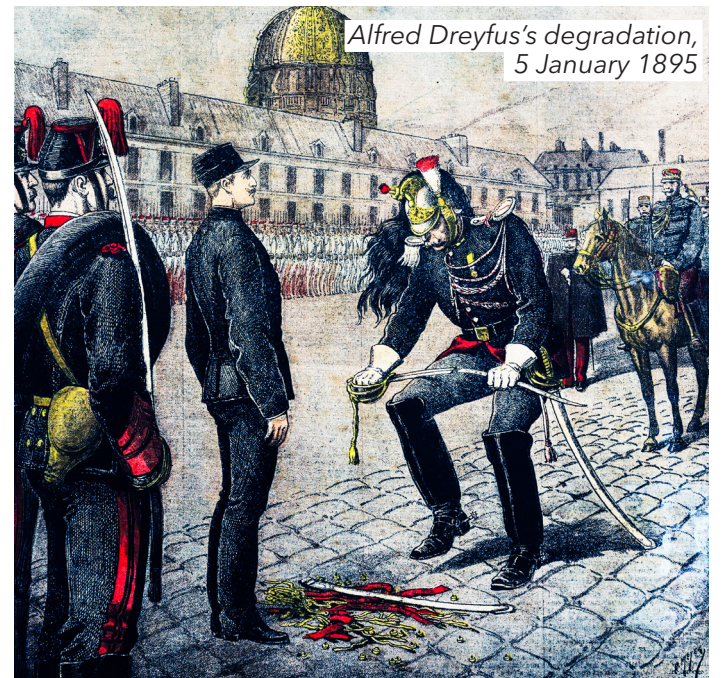
A significant focus of the series is Jules Guerin, leader of the Antisemitic League, which published a weekly newspaper charmingly entitled *L'Antijuif*. Guerin and various other characters on the far right including royalists conspired for a coup against the Republic. They hoped that organising anti Dreyfus riots in Paris would encourage the army to intervene and establish a military dictatorship. Their attempt was foiled by Louis Lepine, Prefect of Paris

Police, whose officers besieged Guerin's fortified house on the Rue Chabrol for 23 days before he surrendered.

Reminding us of the Dreyfus case is particularly timely in the run up to next year's Presidential elections in France, as a new candidate of the far right may very well be standing. He is Éric Zemmour, who has been given considerable space on French TV to style himself as an anti-establishment "truth teller" with a heavy focus on stoking hatred against the Muslim community.

Zemmour is essentially a French version of Trump. He has promoted the "great replacement" scare that the established white and Christian population will become a minority (while his far right rival Marine Le Pen has avoided doing that so far). Dipping even further into history's poisoned well, Zemmour has cast doubt on the innocence of Dreyfus, saying it was "not obvious".

Zemmour has defended the fascist wartime regime of Marshall Pétain,



claiming it had actually saved Jews from the Nazi death camps!

Zemmour's remark concerning Dreyfus and Pétain seem particularly bizarre considering that both his parents are Jewish. He is living proof, though, that you can be both Jewish and antisemitic. (Likewise, Zemmour rages against immigration, though his parents are migrants from Algeria).

No doubt he reckons his "contrarian" rants will maintain his high media profile as well as chiming in with the traditional prejudices of a significant minority of the French population. Add Zemmour's polling numbers to those of Le Pen at they come out at around 34%, which is probably not far short of the size of the anti Dreyfusard camp at the turn of the last century.

My main criticism of Nury's series is that there's not all that much focus on the pro-Dreyfus forces. There are some shadowy anarchists who confront the antisemitic rioters, but they are a bit cardboard cutouts. The strong support of most of the French population for civil rights and secular values doesn't really get much emphasis in the drama.

I asked a French friend if she'd been watching the series and she related a remark that had been handed down in her family that was made by a relative who would migrate from Poland to France. "What! Fifty percent of the people support the Jews! And they allow Jews to join the army! I want to go and live in Paris!" □

• *Paris Police 1900* is available on BBC iPlayer, [bit.ly/p-1900](https://www.bbc.com/iplayer/program/p1900)

## The MP banned for being an atheist

By **John Cunningham**

It could be a question in a pub quiz: which MP was consistently denied his seat in the House of Commons for six years, between 1880 and 1886, despite being elected by the voters of Northampton? The MP in question is Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891) and the reason for his exclusion is simple – he was an atheist.

His experience led him in 1866 to found the National Secular Society, which is still going strong today (I confess to membership). He was also prosecuted for publishing information about birth control, and advocated the abolition of the monarchy.

However, he was staunchly anti-socialist (he was a Liberal). Karl Marx referred to him once as a "cheap jack tub thumper". Bradlaugh was very crit-



ical of Marx's pamphlet *The Civil War in France* and his support for the Paris Commune

Some of Bradlaugh's admirers today seem to have adopted the policies of

the far right if the Charles Bradlaugh Society website is anything go by, reprinting a favourable review of Richard Wurmbrand's deranged book, *Marx and Satan*.

Bradlaugh, whatever criticisms Marx had of him, deserves better than to be linked, however tenuously, to this brand of far-right idiocy.

He was, in his day, an enormously popular figure. He had some influence in shaping the early politics of the Fabian Society and its anti-Marxist, reformist agenda.

Nevertheless, we should honour the better parts of his life, particularly his advocacy of the separation of church and state. His recently restored grave and a new commemorative statue have just been completed and can be found in Brookwood Cemetery, near Woking. □



# The campaign against Stonewall's "Diversity Champions"

By Simon Nelson

A sustained campaign against the LGBT rights charity Stonewall has been fuelled by anti-trans campaigners.

Stonewall has long represented the mainstream of the LGBT movement. It is a charity which since 2001 has provided a "Diversity Champions" scheme of support for businesses and organisations on workplace bullying and LGBT inclusive policies. 900 organisations are members of the scheme.

Many of the policies it advocates have become standard-issue corporate equality, and it is now much easier for LGB people to be out at work and protected from losing their jobs or discrimination. Yet official statistics show that one in eight trans employees has been assaulted by other staff or customers while at work. A 2021 survey for total jobs indicated that [65 percent of trans employees](#) hide their identity at work.

## BBC

A [podcast](#) by BBC journalist Stephen Nolan and then a [tabloid-like exposé](#) article on the BBC's website sought to cast Stonewall as having an undue and pernicious influence that went beyond its remit as a charity. Those are part of a sustained campaign to place the LGB Alliance, founded in 2019, as the alternative to Stonewall.

Stonewall started including trans rights in its programme only in 2015. Its own account is that it was slow to take the issue up. Since then, however, there has been a growing wave of dissent and criticism from former Stonewall supporters, including *Times* columnist and ex Tory MP Matthew Parris, who was one of the founders of Stonewall, claiming that Stonewall has become part of a "trans rights extremist" network of organisations. The LGB Alliance wants more than a return to the pre-2015 Stonewall (silence on trans rights). It claims that "all the LGBTQ+ groups

around the country are now essentially homophobic".

The campaign to attack Diversity Champions is also about Stonewall's funding. Through the scheme organisations pay for the training, advice and other activities that are part of the buy-in to the scheme. Ofcom, Channel 4, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission have already pulled out of the scheme. On 10 November the BBC announced it would leave the scheme. Tim Davie, the Director General, said the BBC would never be "impartial on human rights". But, he said, there is a debate about trans rights, unlike on gay rights or climate change, and if the BBC is part of the scheme it will fail to be "impartial on public policy debates".

Vice News quotes a BBC staff member, before the decision was announced, saying that they believe the BBC aims to be "impartial on LGBTQ lives". The desired "neutrality" or "impartiality" seems to be a tacit siding with trans-sceptic campaigners. Within the same 12 months, the BBC has announced that its workers should not attend Pride marches if they will get involved in "politicised or contested issues". These days most Pride marches are increasingly corporate and anti-political, so the most visible area of controversy is trans rights.

Nolan's suggestion in the podcast is that Stonewall exerts undue influence and is in effect "lobbying" for something pernicious. Stonewall's lobbying in fact consists of providing advice on equality policies. Stonewall was indeed reported as having provided incorrect advice to Essex University on the Equality Act (but it contests that), and possible mistakes have been pounced upon by the trans-sceptic campaigners.

Most of the evidence presented by those wishing to undermine Stonewall is flimsy. They say that since the proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act were announced in 2018. Stonewall's reports and press releases

have featured the words "trans" and "transgender" far more than "Lesbian", "Gay", or "Bisexual". It is hardly surprising that during a period where major legislation affecting trans and non-binary people was being considered, while same-sex marriage has been legal since 2014 and is now little challenged, that Stonewall's attention turned to the new issues.

## Peter Tatchell

Speaking to the *i* newspaper, the human-rights, LGBT, and socialist activist Peter Tatchell said: "Stonewall has the support and confidence of the vast majority of LGBT+ people. Even if people criticise some aspects of Stonewall's policies, overwhelmingly it does positive work and has transformed LGBT+ people's lives for the better.

"Its Diversity Champions programme has helped massively reduce workplace discrimination, harassment and invisibility of LGBT+ employees. Creating inclusive, safe employment opportunities is a wholly commendable achievement by Stonewall. It is helping fulfil the law of the land – the Equality Act.

"The current hue and cry against Stonewall has a whiff of conscious or subconscious bias. Similar criticism would not dare be made about or-

ganisations challenging racism and antisemitism. This dispute is a manufactured culture war that is doing the whole LGBT+ community great harm. We feel under attack."

There have been numerous attempted court cases and reviews (which have failed) against public sector bodies including the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) relating to their inclusion in Diversity Champions which have failed. In the first four months of 2021 alone, public-sector bodies were flooded with more than 900 cut-and-paste Freedom of Information requests about their work with Stonewall.

Stonewall was founded as a charity in 1989, out of the opposition to the Thatcher government's "Section 28" legislation to ban supposed "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities. Until very recently, it looked set to become very much the establishment authority on LGBT equality. Now it faces perhaps its most significant backlash yet.

While remaining critical of the limits of "corporate" equality policies, it is right for the left to resist the attacks on Stonewall. They can only serve as a lever to roll back and undermine trans rights.

Especially in workplace equality. □

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# 1888: Rio Tinto and Spain's first climate strike



## Environment

By Wilson Gibbons

In 1888 thousands of miners and farmers, along with their families, marched through the streets of Riotinto, in the province of Huelva, and stood against the most powerful company in Spain. Led by anarchist trade unionists, this was Spain's first climate strike and the beginning of a nascent environmental movement, demanding better pay, conditions, and, crucially, an end to open air copper refining (calcination).

The valley of the Rio Tinto river in southern Spain has been used for ore mining for approximately 5000 years. Sections of the river flow bright red and orange due to the presence of heavy metals and iron. Its water is so acidic it is essentially barren and devoid of life beyond algae and extremophiles. Whilst this phenomenon is partially a natural one, scientists believe that drainage from the region's long history of mining has also played a role in the river's toxic chemistry.

In the 1870s the mining industry in the region was in a lull, the majority of Huelva's inhabitants still survived on fishing and agriculture and the copper mine was haemorrhaging money. However, this changed in 1873 when the Rio Tinto copper mine was sold to a British owned syndicate which then formed the Rio Tinto Company, today the world's second-biggest metals and mining corporation. They developed the industry in the region and turned the failing copper mine into a commercial success and the largest open pit mine in the world at the time.

Though the development of the re-



"La Massacre" by Antonio Romero Alcaide, depicting the shooting

gion's industry brought about technological innovations like railways, it also sparked a litany of environmental, labour and health issues for the residents of Riotinto and surrounding towns. Chief among these was "the blanket", an enormous black cloud which formed over the region as a result of the copper refining process in use at that time.

### Sulphurous fumes

Miners, including children as young as ten, would dig up pyrite and then burn it in huge piles to extract the copper from within.

Hundreds of tonnes a day was burned, churning out huge amounts of sulphurous gases which poisoned the workers, other residents and livestock, and created acid rain throughout the region. Some days the blanket of smog over the region was so bad that miners and farmers could hardly leave their homes and couldn't work, losing them days of pay.

Residents persisted in their opposition to the open air refining process

and began attempting to pressure officials. In one letter to the Spanish Queen the Anti-Smoke League described the process, which had been banned in England 24 years prior, as, "the most primitive metallurgical process, already discarded by science and banned in the civilised world."

On 1 February 1888 miners in the Rio Tinto copper mine began a strike which grew over the next two days. At the same time farmers prepared a march on Rio Tinto to demand the mayor take action and end open air calcination.

### 4 February

On 4 February, both demonstrations came together, numbering 12,000, at an entrance to the town. They united and marched to the town square chanting the slogans "Down with the fumes!" and "Long live agriculture!"

Upon entering the square the political leaders of the movement gave speeches and spoke to the mayor, attempting to negotiate. However, the civil Governor of Huelva, Augustin Bravo, arrived and attempted to "restore order". He refused to let the local government restrict the calcinations and headed to the balcony to rebuke the protestors.

He asked the workers if they were happy with their wages and, when they replied that they weren't, said he would negotiate with the mine owners. The workers chided him that they had been unemployed for three days and needed the result soon.

*El Socialista* newspaper reported that the mayor returned again with the Colonel of the Pavia Regiment. Waiting for him to speak the crowd "remained silent as at mass. Then the misfortunes occurred."

In the silence, a shot was discharged with little clear indication of where it had come from or who gave the order. Another volley of shots, was then fired into the crowd at point blank range, and then officers began attacking with bayonets. The massacre lasted just fifteen minutes with an official death toll of 13, though many claim more than 150 people died, with witness reports at the time claiming the bodies were dumped or thrown into abandoned mines.

The bloody ending to the strike and protest got the events called "the year of the shots". Much of the media blamed the protestors and downplayed the massacre, with the *New York Times* reporting that the striking miners were "a threatening mob" and that they had fired pistols and thrown dynamite cartridges.

The Spanish Government decreed later that year that there would be a halt on open air calcinations. However, in striking parallel to the disinformation modern fossil fuel companies engage in over climate change, the company sponsored studies which claimed that the sulphurous fumes were not only harmless but could help combat cholera! This led to the repeal and resumed legality of open air calcinations in 1890.

The story of the Rio Tinto protest is a stark reminder that climate politics are class politics. That the world's poor and working classes are already facing the sharpest edges of climate crises as they have done for centuries.

We should remember and celebrate the bravery of the workers who went up against Spain's most powerful company for the environment and mourn their losses by building climate action with workers at its core, to overcome not just the destructive force of climate change but capitalism as well. □

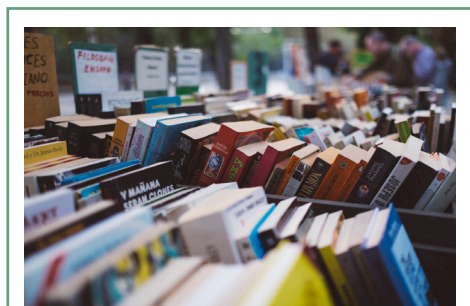


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# Requisition capacity and boost pay for NHS and care!

By Martin Thomas

Thanks to over a decade of budget squeezes, the NHS is already stretched beyond capacity. And it's not yet winter.

A backlog of ailments from nearly two years of intermittent lockdowns, and lack of care-home space for patients who could be moved there, has already flooded hospitals.

In 2020 the government paid for private hospital capacity to help the NHS with Covid. So, now? Immediately requisition all private-hospital capacity and staff, and integrate them with the NHS. The labour movement should also demand that the government boost NHS and care staff levels by immediately meeting NHS workers' pay demands, taking care homes into the public sector, putting their staff on NHS-level pay and conditions, and developing extra care-home capacity.

Flu is still at low rates, and will add to the stretch if it reaches even average-winter levels.

Covid case counts, after a slight downtrend following 21 October, have ticked up again since about 7 November. Portugal, the Netherlands, and Denmark now show us that, with Delta, sizeable case-count spikes are possible even with vaccination percentages which are higher in all those countries than the UK. The toll of serious disease is much less than with lower vaccination; but it is still sizeable.

Maybe the UK now has a wide enough spread of immunity from vaccinations, boosters, and previous infections to flatten the new uptick. But we don't know.

## Evidence

Beyond vaccines, the only established and known way of flattening spikes is Covid curbs. Evidence from the USA, France, and Italy, where limited curbs have been more sustained (mask mandates, distancing rules, entry restrictions to workplaces, cafés, etc.) suggests that limited curbs could be enough, but we don't know.

We are fairly sure that to make such curbs more effective, and limit the virus longer-term, we need social measures: full isolation pay, workers' control of workplace safety (including ventilation), improvements in housing, etc.

The British government has been slower than other European governments on vax mandates. Now England has a vax mandate for care-home workers from 11 November, and will have one for frontline health workers and domiciliary care workers from 1 April.

This is a difficult issue. Covid is infectious before it shows symptoms, and Delta is highly transmissible. Vaccination protects not only yourself, but others whom you might infect, especially if (as with health and care workers) many of those are frail and elderly people with whom you work daily. Socialists are for, rather than against, workplace safety rules.

Trying to impose vaccination of recalcitrant minorities is, however, difficult. Compared to improving pay and

conditions in the NHS and care, it may not be the best use of effort. By April health and care workers who haven't been vaccinated are almost certain to have been infected instead, and to have not-very-different immunity that way.

In France and Italy, sizeable numbers of left-minded workers have objected to vax mandates, but all the big demonstrations against the mandates have been dominated by the far right. In Trieste, Italy, where the protests were biggest and included a strike by some dockers, Covid counts are now three times other Italian cities' (though another factor there is Trieste being so close to high-Covid-rate Slovenia and Croatia).

There is no overwhelming case for socialists positively to back the government's vax mandate moves in England, or to press Wales and Scotland to follow. But there is equally no case to see stopping vax mandates as a good focus for trade-union action. □



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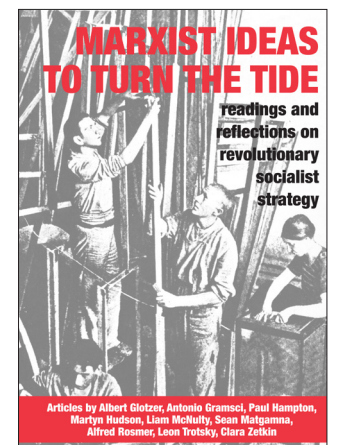
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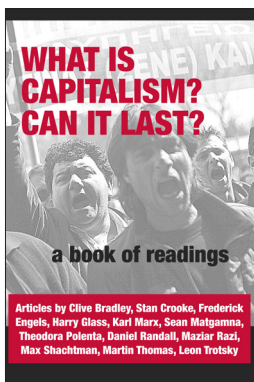
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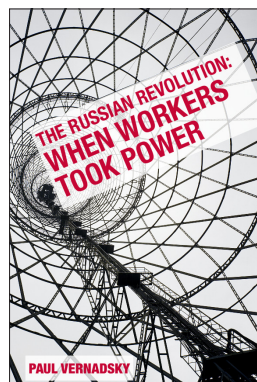
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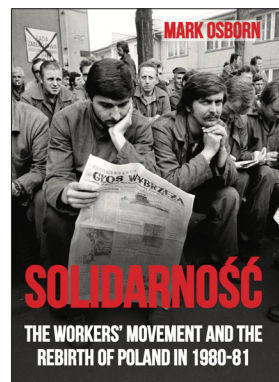
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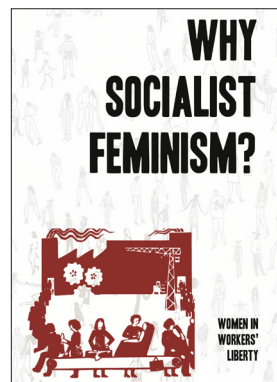
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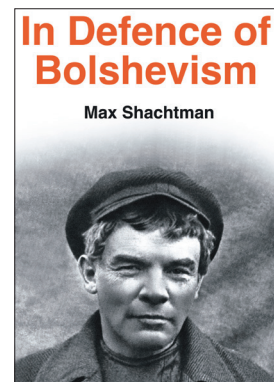
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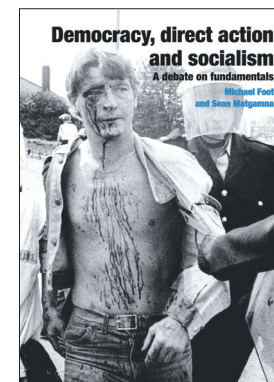
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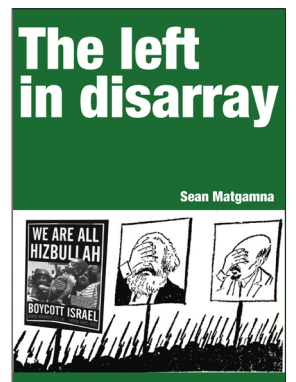
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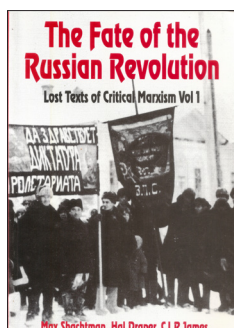
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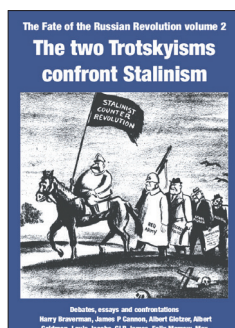
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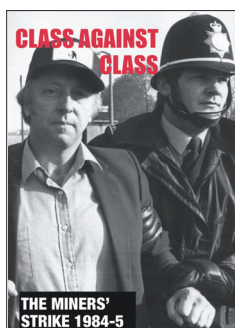
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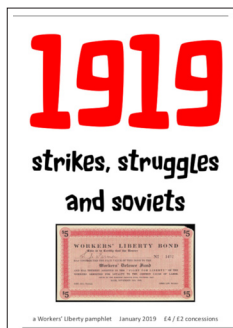
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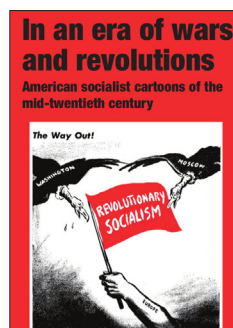
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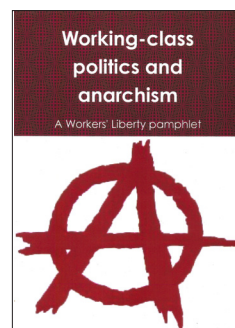
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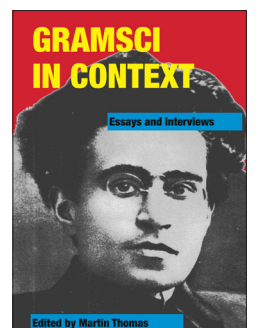
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# Reviewing the ScotRail dispute

By an RMT union rep

When its Annual General Meeting (AGM) unanimously accepted a drastically improved pay offer from ScotRail on the eve of COP26, it came as the first major victory for [rail union] RMT's efforts to bust the rail industry-transport worker pay freeze.

With protracted late-stage negotiations largely taking place between senior union officials and the Scottish Government, it also further exposed the rotten corporatist husk beneath that thin veneer of working-class empathy which the SNP seems increasingly less able to maintain.

## Pay claim

RMT had submitted a pay claim on ScotRail in January 2020, and had been seeking negotiations ever since. Covid-19 came as an opportunity for the failing Abellio, already anticipating a premature end to its ailing franchise.

It deferred pay talks on the basis of flatlining passenger numbers and revenue, and proceeded to eat away at staff terms and conditions, including an agreement on an extra payment for rest day working, in the knowledge that an industrial response to such actions was practically impossible in the pandemic shutdown.

Meanwhile, as the infection rate soared and the risk to frontline workers grew, Abellio resisted changes to work practices and was slow to put proper safety measures in place outside the central hub stations. Internal communications saw attempts to browbeat staff to be thankful that due to government funding nobody had to be placed on furlough.

The initial aim of keeping rail services running for key workers through the lockdown gave way to the reality of trains and stations flooded with young



people, a rise in anti-social behaviour, and limited support from police.

Customer-facing staff became more and more aware that, for all the risk they were placing themselves and their families in, the company had little intention of prioritising their protection, much less recognising their efforts through their pay packets.

The push for a wider pay settlement grew from the solid action of conductors and ticket examiners in their rest day working payment dispute. For months, Sunday services had been almost completely halted, with a skeleton service in the central belt staffed by management "volunteers". Determination strengthened on the back of strong results in the six-month rebalots in this dispute. The resolve of both Abellio and the Scottish Government was clearly impacted.

The leverage presented by COP26 had been massive. Described as the largest summit ever held on UK soil, and with much of the city centre road

network closed to general traffic, the crippling of the rail network in and around the city and across Scotland would have monumental implications for the daily movement of thousands of diplomats, functionaries and campaigners and the overall efficacy of the conference.

## Strike action

Rank and file members at Scotrail viewed this leverage as the opportunity to secure a meaningful pay settlement in the wake of their efforts and sacrifices through the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and voted accordingly to overcome anti-trade union legislation and secure a strong mandate for industrial action. RMT subsequently announced strikes covering the full 12 days of COP26, and requested further dialogue.

As the clock ticked down and the superficial efforts of Abellio to reach compromise floundered, Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government were forced into an active role in discussions. Minister for Transport Graham Dey often appeared out of his depth, unable to demonstrate a real grasp of the issues at the heart of the dispute.

While COP26 would be overseen by the Westminster government, industrial action would have been presented as a massive embarrassment for Nicola Sturgeon's administration by a broadly unsympathetic and unionist UK media.

RMT members at Scotrail had put themselves in a position of power, and held firm against an unchanging offer which imposed detrimental and nebulous efficiencies and productivity conditions in its second year, as well as a percentage increment which would likely be much lower than the rate of inflation come April 2022.

Midway through the RMT AGM, a "final offer" was received from the employer. It proposed a two-year deal, with numerous productivity strings and efficiency savings in the deal's second

year, the "price" for the concessions the employer was making in the deal's first year. ScotRail reps who were delegates to RMT AGM led the debate, making clear that the offer was unacceptable. The AGM voted to reject it, and strikes remained on.

The following day, the breakthrough offer came. It turned out the previous offer wasn't "final" after all. The persistence of the RMT negotiators and the resilience of the membership had won through. The entire second year of the deal, the hill on which Abellio and the Scottish Government had looked set to die, was removed, resulting in a one-year pay deal, extra payment for working through COP26 and a resolution to the rest day working dispute.

Acceptance of the offer came through a unanimous vote of AGM delegates, and this victory for worker power quickly and inevitably received wide acclaim by the wider trade union movement.

Success in this dispute is not unqualified. The efficiency savings and productivity dropped from the deal will have to be dealt with head on in the months to come. Abellio and the Scottish Government have made clear their intention to "streamline" station staffing, to de-specialise grades and to reduce and dilute safety briefings. RMT will need to regalanise and maximise its membership for these battles.

Nevertheless, few would contest the outcome as anything other than a victory for organised labour, a starring-down of the Scottish Government and a failed Abellio, and a testament to the resilience of the RMT membership in continuing to fight on for something better while others settled for less. □

## RMT calls strikes of drivers on Night Tube lines

From Tubeworker

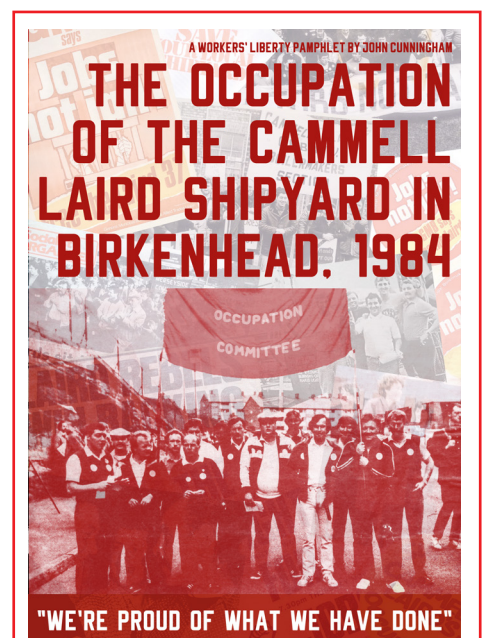
The rail union RMT has called strikes in its dispute to stop the consolidation of train operator grades. LU wants to merge the Night Tube duties, currently worked by a dedicated grade of driver, into the full-time rosters, offering full-time drivers a shift supplement to work them.

Although part-time drivers currently in the role can retain their working hours if they want to, once those drivers move on (e.g., move into a full-time role or leave the job), those positions will be deleted, leading to fewer opportunities to move into the

driving grade for workers who need part-time/Night Tube hours. And of course, the imposition of night working, plus additional extreme shifts, will damage work-life balance and increase fatigue for full-time drivers.

So all in all, it's very much a good thing that RMT has named strikes to resist this! The action involves striking on all Night Tube duties from the re-introduction of the service on 27 November until 18 December, with full 24-hour strikes on 26 November and 18 November.

Details on the [RMT website](https://www.rmt.org.uk). See you on the picket lines! □



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

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- 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
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# When women drivers avoid the messroom



## Diary of an Tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

"She was alright... you'd never know that was his daughter, would you?". I am not sure what I have walked into as I step into the mess room at the start of my shift.

D adds "Yeah, but you look at who we have now and it is no one even worth looking at". I look round at the group of men in their 50s and think I probably know what this conversation is. I am fairly sure I don't want to.

"Yeah, dolly bird, big tits, face like a slapped arse down the other end". "Oh yeah, I know the one, she won't even smile at you, though", K adds.

"Let's not do this", I suggest. "There really is no reason for you to speak about anyone like that, particularly if it's someone we work with." D comes

in again: "They are on stations" [i.e. not drivers]. That doesn't make it any better, I think.

K comes back: "You aren't interested, are you? That's why you don't want this chat. Oh well, we all best shut up then". I roll my eyes and suggest if anyone wonders why some of the women drivers never eat in the mess room when there is a group of men in there.

The conversation moves on while I get a cup of tea. "When are the union going to ask us all about whether we can do overtime? I don't see why we don't have the opportunity to do it when other grades can". "You want to be careful what you wish for", W says when he comes in. "On the buses we got overtime in and then the jobs started going, they rely on it in the end. It helps them really, not us."

D says: "And ultimately you can put forward that we take a vote on it, but you have to come to the branch and do it. And a lot of us are guilty about not actually putting up what we talk about

here. I wanted the condensed four-day week, but people that didn't won that argument because they turned up and put something forward."

People mumble and pick up their bags and go off to pick up trains. W says: "Every year people ask the same thing but no one puts it forward. Maybe this year will be the one..." □

• Jay Dawkey is a Tube driver.



## Fire-rehire battle at Clarks

By Sacha Ismail

Five hundred trade unionists and community members marched through the very small town of Street, in Somerset, on 13 November, to support Clarks warehouse workers' ongoing, all-out strike against being "fired and rehired". Workers' Liberty members and supporters from London and Bristol joined the march.

To donate to the strike fund: Community, account 34042733, 60-83-01. Reference: Clarks strike pay. Messages of support to [drfrancois@community-tu.org](mailto:drfrancois@community-tu.org)

The company that now owns Clarks, LionRock Capital, is based in Hong Kong and controlled by a billionaire capitalist close to the Chinese government. Hong Kong activists in the UK have issued a [statement](#) supporting the workers.

Community has promoted the idea that this attack is a betrayal of Clarks' traditional "Quaker" values.

But as local trades council secretary and longstanding CWU militant Dave Chapple reminded the audience at the rally on the 13th, this is the same kind of struggle as when workers forced the then family-owned Clarks to recognise their union in the 1880s. □



## Life out of balance



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

After the events at COP26 in Glasgow, we are due a film about the environment (and not before time!).

Often, environmental or green films feature an individual fighting against a larger organisation (a corporation or a government) something in the manner of Dr. Thomas Stockman in Ibsen's drama *Enemy of the People*. One popular example from Hollywood is *Erin Brokovich* (2000).

*Koyanaasqatsi* (1982) is very different.

Directed by Godfrey Reggio, with music by Philip Glass, it is a poetic depiction, a collage, of often breathtaking images taken from all four corners of the world, highlighting the impact and interplay of humanity on the natural world.

There is no story, no dialogue, only a periodic chanting of the title which over the running time of the film steadily speeds up. The title is taken from the language of the Native American Hopi people and means "life out of balance".

It is part of a trilogy. The other two films are *Powaqqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi* – *Life in Transformation* and *Life as War* respectively.

These are films which are out of the ordinary and quite unique, definitely worth seeing and easily available on DVD. □

# Sheffield bin workers fight for “going rate”

By Michael Elms

Sheffield bin workers employed by Veolia at the Lumley Street depot struck on Monday 8 November over pay. The company had offered them a below-inflation pay award of 3%, plus a £250 bonus offered on condition that they accepted the offer.

At a 6:30am picket attended by 100 to 200 workers, the workforce voted by show of hands to demand a 6% pay increase plus the £250 bonus back. On 8 November, the action was for one morning: after a march through town and a rally at the town hall, the Lumley Street workers returned to work at 10:30am. But the picket meeting voted that from 22 November (after the 14 days' notice required by Tory law), they would strike for a full week.

Alongside activists from Workers' Liberty, the Veolia workers were joined on the picket line by supporters from the Labour Party including two councillors. Local Labour left-wingers are putting resolutions to CLPs and the Local Campaign Forum to get the ruling Labour Group in Sheffield City Council to put more pressure on Veolia. The picket line was also visited by two representatives of the Sheffield food couriers' union, IWGB. These food couriers explained their own impending pay dispute

to the bin workers and expressed their members' solidarity.

A driver told *Solidarity*, “Drivers get £12.66 an hour while loaders get £11. We have just seen them advertising jobs for an agency for temporary workers at £15 an hour. I don't know whether that is to cover this strike or just for extra clear-up. Whatever they are planning, they have set the going rate at £15...”

“The vote for a week of action was unanimous, so there can be no complaints now, we just have to bite the bullet. Times are hard for everyone at the minute. We have all worked through the pandemic while others got furloughed. 12 months ago these lads were heroes. Now, we are greedy bin men wanting a pay rise.

“We are just trying to keep pace with inflation, for our families. You pay your council tax, you want your bins emptied: we want to be appreciated for it. There are £15, £16 an hour jobs going on up and down the country. This is a trained job. Loaders are on £11 an hour. I know bar and shop work pays more than that. I know these loaders are out in all weathers, coughs, colds: keeping the service going.”

Pay wasn't the only issue. A rep told *Solidarity*: “They have changed the hours of how we get overtime. It used



to be from 2:00pm, now it's 2:30pm. They have changed different terms and conditions, like the tipping bonus... A couple of lads have been brought into the office and the manager has looked at their time sheet and refused to pay...

“They wanted to take certain T&Cs off us as part of the pay award, saying that above a certain percentage they would look at removing certain T&Cs. Bighton [depot], which is also run by Veolia, they received a certain pay award plus a cash bonus. But they wouldn't match that here. As far as we were concerned, that is where it all started, for us.

“How did we organise this? Ob-

viously we kept the lads informed throughout the process. So initially when we went in and looked at the pay deal, we brought that straight back to the lads, they balloted on that and said no. We were called back into another meeting with an improved offer, but still derisory. We brought that back to a show of hands; they said no. We kept everyone informed and that goes a long way – rather than little pockets of people finding out and that spreading out. We would always call a meeting in the morning, and ask where people wanted to be with it.”

At the time of going to press, GMB members at the Lumley Street depot were still consulting over a new pay offer from Veolia. □

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

## Near victory in Royal Parks dispute



John Moloney

Last week I wrote that one of our members in the Royal Parks dispute was facing victimisation. Until that threat was lifted we couldn't settle the dispute. The good news is that the threat of dismissal has now been withdrawn, and the member's probation period has been extended, which is the outcome he was looking for. That means we can move forward with discussion around the employer's offer.

That offer includes the recognition of PCS, significant enhancement of sick pay arrangements, and improvements in many contractual terms. We'll discuss the offer with members at a meeting on Thursday 18, and, if members approve, it will be put to a ballot.

We could therefore be close to a victory in a dispute that has seen outsourced workers, who are dual members of PCS and the United Voices of the World union, launch sustained strikes. The central factor has been their resolve and determination to take the action necessary to win. Fundrais-

ing to ensure adequate strike pay has also been essential.

Less positive is the news that the new ballot of our members at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea, for renewed action over workplace safety, failed to hit the 50% turnout threshold. Around 80% of members voted for renewed action, but we didn't meet the threshold. In any other area of democratic life, that would be seen as a clear mandate. But because of restrictive anti-union laws, we're prevented from calling lawful action. It's not only the turnout threshold, but the fact unions are forced to ballot members individually, by post, rather than being allowed to hold workplace votes or ballot electronically – all these laws are consciously designed to restrict strikes and entrench the power of employers.

The result is obviously disappointing, but we're not giving up. We'll review our demands, and if the employer continues to refuse them then we will consider launching new ballots on a disaggregated basis, balloting the different workplaces and sections at the complex individually.

There's also an ongoing discussion amongst our reps in the Department

for Work and Pensions about possible disputes over workplace safety there. My view all along is that we should launch ballots if possible in the DWP. Any action taken, even if just a handful of branches at first, could galvanise the rest of the department into activity.

We are preparing to launch a new campaign about maternity policy. We've developed a set of demands which we'll be submitting to every civil service department before the end of the year. We're demanding 52 weeks of maternity leave on full pay, the abolition of length-of-service limitations in the current policy, additional extended maternity leave in cases where newborns need neonatal care and end up staying in hospital. We're also demanding improvements to the policy around miscarriages.

If someone miscarries at 23 weeks and six days, they're not currently entitled to any maternity leave. That has to change. If you lose a baby, you should be allowed paid time off. We'll be organising a national campaign around these demands as well. □

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

# AFTER CORBYNISM: BUILDING A NEW LEFT

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# Poland: let the refugees in!

By Mohan Sen

Speaking about the thousands of refugees stranded without shelter on the Poland-Belarus border, a Polish comrade told us:

"There was a pregnant refugee, I think from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Polish border guards took this woman by her hands a legs and threw her back over the border like a sack of potatoes. She lost the pregnancy. The border guards have been made like gods, with power of life and death over people.

"The persecution of the migrants divides people in the area. It is a very conservative region, and many are deeply hostile. But then there are people with good hearts who have gone out of their way to try to help them. Of course many of those organising are activists from big cities, but some are just local people. This is a very brave stand for them to take in those communities.

"We need militant demonstrations, to try to shame our governments. At the same time raising money can make a real difference. You can pay for a sleeping bag to give people who are outside in freezing temperatures. You can pay for petrol so a lawyer can actually get to a camp to talk to people."

The horrors on the Poland-Belarus border show up Alexander Lukashenko's regime in Belarus. They also show up the European Union.

Lukashenko has shamelessly exploited the refugees to exert pressure on the EU for relaxation of sanctions. The EU's response is also shameful and shameful.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell trumpeted the EU's "determination... to stand up to the instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes". But that is exactly what the EU governments are also doing. If the initial cause of the horrors was Belarus shipping refugees to the Polish border, now we see EU governments determined to use every means to exclude a tiny number of migrants, in order to bolster Fortress Europe.

A few months ago the EU hierarchy was criticising Poland's far-right government for its attacks



Child refugees at the border

on human rights and the rule of law. Now it is rallying round the Polish regime as it passes anti-refugee legislation in violation of the Geneva convention.

The EU leaders mostly abhor Donald Trump. Yet there is talk of the EU funding construction of a Trump-style wall along the Polish border.

The European "migrant crisis", blossoming on many of the EU's frontiers, is a result of EU governments' increasing determination to avoid a rational, humane policy of welcoming people in.

Not that Brexit improves anything. The Tories have sent soldiers to support the Polish government's blockade!

The humanitarian and political situations are grim. The left must fight to lower borders and welcome people into Europe. There have been protests in the UK organised by Polish and Iraqi socialists (many of the refugees on the Polish border are from Iraq). We should help organise more.

And support those in Poland organising solidarity. □

- Statement from Polish activists: [bit.ly/be-po](https://bit.ly/be-po)
- The comrade recommends donating to these two Polish NGOs: [bit.ly/FundacjaOcalenie](https://bit.ly/FundacjaOcalenie) and [bit.ly/NomadaStowarzyszenie](https://bit.ly/NomadaStowarzyszenie)





# Solidarity

For a workers' government

## HOW TO CLEAN THE STABLES OF CAPITALISM

By Colin Foster

Corruption. Conservatives. And the other big c-word here, really, is contracting-out.

Contracting-out of public functions has expanded hugely over decades, since the 1980s. It generates lush and repeated profit-chances for those who can make the introductions, drop words in the right ears, or just give inside knowledge on the right notes to strike in applications.

The squall about sleaze set off by the affair of paid-lobbying MP Owen Paterson comes on the back of two great contracting-out scandals which, somehow, so far, the Tories had managed to navigate with little punishment.

The PPE emergency in the early days of the first wave of Covid revealed that the NHS's supply and logistics operation had become a web of contractors and sub-contractors and sub-sub-contractors. Maybe four sets of fingers would draw their slice between the NHS and each actual supplier. The system ran with inadequate reserves and was slow to respond in emergency.

"VIP lanes" gave the well-connected first taste of the profits as the panicky government handed out extra contracts.

Test and trace was set up on



the same contracting-out principles, with vast profits for contractors like Serco and Deloitte and many subcontractors, but (so parliamentary inquiries have found) little to show in actual virus-curbings for all the millions spent.

The first socialist answer is to reverse contracting-out and bring the operations in-house.

To get efficiency and clean-dealing in directly-run public operations: workers' control, election of managers, opening the books (abolishing commercial secrecy).

Keir Starmer's Labour leadership is failing to call even for elements of that. Instead, it hopes to benefit from the in-fighting unleashed among the Tories while committing itself to no more than tweaks to the system of checks on MPs and ministers installed after the cash-for-questions scandals of the mid-90s.

Possibly this bout of scandals

will burst the Johnson bubble, and the minimal tactic will work in the opinion-poll short term.

But remember. New Labour, with its motto (from Peter Mandelson) about being "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" had its own cash-for-influence scandals in 2008-10.

Patricia Hewitt became a special consultant to Alliance Boots in 2008, very soon after retiring as New Labour health minister. In due course she became a special adviser to a private equity company which bought out Bupa's UK hospitals.

In 2010, Hewitt, still an MP, was suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party along with two other ex-ministers and another MP, after a cash-for-influence investigation. Another ex-minister would soon be banned from Parliament.

Yet Keir Starmer's self-proclaimed mission is to bring Labour again closer to "business" and "the private sector".

The working class stands at the opposite pole to the Serco bosses and profiteering MPs and ex-ministers. We need the labour movement to fight to win back the riches they confiscate, and redirect them to restoring public services and benefits, remedying the cuts, and helping workers to catch up with price inflation. □