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Victory in Korea: teachers' union wins 7-year fight for recognition

Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Almost seven years ago – in October 2013 – the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU) came to LabourStart with a problem. The national government had given the union an ultimatum: either it would change its rules to prohibit dismissed or retired teachers from being members of the union, or the union would be deregistered.

At issue were just nine teachers who, according to the government, were illegally members of the 60,000 member union.

Facing the prospect of being outlawed, the union stood its ground. Working together with its national trade union centre, the militant Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the global union for teachers, the Education International, as well as other global and national unions, they launched a LabourStart campaign demanding that the government back down.

International support

Over 10,000 trade unionists from around the world signed up to support the Korean teachers – but the government was adamant. It was intent on breaking a union seen as "left-wing". The Korean President, Park Geun-hye (daughter of the dictator Park Chung-hee) was no friend of the trade unions and had said that "unionised KTU teachers are making this nation RED".

And it was not only the KTU that faced de-registration; the government also refused to register the KCTU-affiliated Korean Government Employees Union as well.

The campaign we ran made the argument that the decision by the Park government to outlaw the teachers' union was arbitrary and illegal. It breached both the Korean constitution and the "core conventions" of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Public sector workers in general, and teachers in particular, and often denied their human right to join and form independent trade unions – and not only in Korea. When I was growing up in New York City, it was illegal for teachers to go on strike, and when they did, their leaders would be sent to jail and the union subjected to punitive fines. The "Taylor Law" which prohibited public sector strikes in the state of New York is still on the books, and union leaders are still periodically jailed for violating it.

Park Geun-hye was eventually impeached and removed from office, and her fall from power was described by Public Services International as "not only the culmination of a political scandal involving corruption" but "also a victory built by the trade union movement which, relentlessly, denounced for years the abuses against workers committed by her regime." The attacks on the teachers union were part of those abuses.

Though the online campaign in 2013 was eventually suspended, the Korean teachers never gave up their fight. And last week, they finally won a historic victory.

Anulled

The Supreme Court of Korea annulled the decision to delegalise the teachers' union. According to the Education International, which announced the victory, "This Supreme Court decision on 3 September follows an appeal filed by the KTU to rulings against it by lower courts in June 2014 and January 2016. In his conclusions on the ruling in favour of the KTU, Chief Justice Kim Myeongsu invoked several times the Korean constitution and international labour standards."

By "international labour standards" the judge was referring to those eight ILO "core conventions" which constitute international labour law and which apply in all countries, even those which have not ratified the specific conventions.

The judge emphasised that the Korean constitution allows all workers to enjoy basic trade union rights. The regulation which cancelled the KTU's union registration was subordinate to the constitution. The judge added that the government could not dissolve a trade union by administrative order. Therefore, he ruled, the delegalisation of KTU was invalid.

Implementation

Immediately following the court ruling, the Ministry of Employment and Labour said it would start a process to cancel the deregistration "as soon as possible," in line with the court decision. Though the Supreme Court has passed the buck to lower courts, according to one Korean news report, "the labour minister has the authority to restore the union's legal status, even before a ruling in a retrial comes out."

When that takes place, the report continued, "the KTU can exercise its rights to collective bargaining, to calling for the government's mediation in labor disputes and to reporting unfair labor practices."

The KTU thanked all those who supported the union in this long fight. In an email I received last week from the KTU's international officer, Hyunsu Hwang, he reminded me that "LabourStart was in the middle of this seven year-long fight."

Martin Luther King famously said that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." It certainly did so in this case. ☐

• Eric Lee is the founding editor of LabourStart. He writes this column in a personal capacity.

Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom. **Until the end of September**, excluding ongoing study courses**:**

Thursday 10 September, 8-9.30pm: start of "Revolution Betrayed" reading group

Sunday 13 September, 12-2pm: Socialist Feminist Reading Group: Hood Feminism by Mikki Kendall

Sunday 13 September, 6.30-8pm: What is left antisemitism, how can it be confronted?

Sunday 20 September, 6.30-8pm: Covid-19: what do we know so far? With George Davey Smith (Professor of Clinical Epidemiology at Bristol University)

Monday 21 September, 7:30-9pm: Racism Today and How to Fight it

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/meetings

Online calendars

Visit workersliberty.org/meetings for our calendars of events: public AWL events, wider labour and social movement events, and more. Subscribe to them on your phone or computer, through Google Calendar, Apple Calendar, Outlook, or Thunderbird, to keep your schedule up to date! ☐

New format, new term!

Agenda

This is our first issue since no.539 (18 March) to be printed in our usual tabloid format. Negotiating as best we could the difficulties of lockdown (no in-person meetings, no demonstrations, few people on the streets), we produced nos.540-561 in a smaller A4 format.

The smaller format had many downsides. For a start, it provided so little space that many articles had to be published online-only. Surprisingly, however, we have found since June, as street protests and street stalls have restarted, that the smaller format has sold as well as the usual one. Some readers seem to prefer a compact-looking publication.

So, as an experiment, we're publishing the first couple of back-to-tabloid issues in "endorse-folded" format. They can be carried round, offered to readers, and stored, in compact form, but open out to give the full content. We'll see how it goes.

In these weeks of still-fairly-low infection rates (for how long we don't know) and still-long light evenings, it's a priority for us to get out to street stalls and protests to make socialist ideas accessible to as many people as possible.

We're also preparing for the start of university term. Even now, we don't know how many students will be on campuses and when. We've set up Workers' Liberty student Zoom meetings for every Monday evening (6pm) from 21 September through to December, and will be putting posters round campuses to publicise them: facebook.com/AWLstudents

Most local Labour Parties will be having their first decision-making meetings since March this month (though online), and union activity is also picking up, with more disputes and the general secretary election in Unison. We recommend the text to adapt for motions at those meetings, on many issues, found at bit.ly/mo-pe ☐

Anti-racist resources

We have compiled various anti-racist resources to learn about anti-racist movements, and arm yourself with ideas to beat back racism: readings and pamphlets, video and audio.

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources ☐

Abolish GCSEs!

By a London teacher

Last year, Ken Baker, the Tory education minister responsible for introducing GCSEs and the national curriculum, said, "I am the author of GCSEs. I established those exams back in the 1980s, bringing together two exams" [O Levels and CSEs].

Baker claimed tests at 16 were then necessary "because lots of youngsters left school at 16," but he went on to say, "Now with the leaving age going on to 18, you don't need to test youngsters at 16. [GCSEs] are redundant." (February 2019).

Head teachers from the Girls' Schools Association – academically selective girls' schools – have slammed GCSEs as "outmoded and draining", forcing students on to a two-year treadmill to prepare them for five weeks of exams in ten or more subjects.

Some students might sit 25 GCSE exam papers under enormous pressure. It is hardly surprising that there is a mental health crisis amongst British teenagers, who are considered to be amongst the most miserable young people in the world.

The Independent noted (2016): "Rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers have increased by 70 per cent in the past 25 years. The number of children and young people turning up in A&E with a psychiatric condition has more than doubled since 2009 and, in the past three years, hospital admissions for teenagers with eating disorders have also almost doubled.

"In a 2016 survey for Parent Zone, 93 per cent of teachers reported seeing increased rates of mental illness among children and teenagers and 90 per cent thought the issues were getting more severe, with 62 per cent dealing with a pupil's mental-health problem at least once a month and an additional 20 per cent doing so on a weekly or even daily basis."

Tory MP Robert Halfon, chair of the Education Select Committee, has spoken against GCSEs, which pressure teachers to "train to the test", leading to a focus on rote learning above skills such as communication, problem-solving, and team-working.

Costing capitalism

Halfon, speaking out in February 2019, has his own agenda. His concern is the economic damage being done to British capitalism by a system unable to produce critical-thinking, IT-literate young people. He quotes The Open University as suggesting skills shortages are costing British capitalism £6 bn per year.

Halfon wants to replace GCSEs with a baccalaureate qualification at age 18 that would recognise both the academic and vocational sides of education.

His concerns are repeated by the leaders of the bosses' organisation, the CBI. Back in 2015 John Cridland, director general of the CBI, called for the abolition of GCSEs, noting that most countries don't test at 16. "We have to face the uncomfortable truth that – internationally – we're the oddballs."

Nevertheless calls for change have met strong opposition. The Department for Education has called GCSEs "the Gold Standard" and officials argue that recent reforms have made GCSEs better fitted to current needs (i.e. the current needs of capitalism). Cridland replied that reform of GCSEs "misses the point that we need curriculum reform, not just exam reform." He complained that current vocational education is a "restricted, unloved range of options" and "a social and economic own goal… Non-academic routes should be rigorous and different to academic ones, but not second best."

The strange thing about this discussion within the ruling class is its lack of echo in the labour movement. In most school staff rooms, today, when a school worker suggests GCSEs should be abolished, they are most likely met with blank stares or shock. It is not an argument most teachers and teaching assistants have heard. It is not an idea many have ever thought about.

The problem is partly the timidity of Labour Party and National Education Union (NEU) leaders. Take the current crisis over exams. The Labour Party has concentrated on attacking Gavin Williamson's competence. That's fine as far as it goes. But the central job the Labour Party is supposed to do – to critique policy and provide a radical alternative – is not done.

Labour's recent call for GCSE and A Level exams to be pushed back a month, to July 2021, was predicated on the idea that the government was about to do it anyway. The last thing they want is to cause controversy that will take the focus away from Williamson's ineptitude. Nevertheless, that is what students need from Labour.

Missed school

Next year's GCSE students will have missed four months of classes and may well see their schools close, or partially close, in response to future Covid spikes. The last thing they need is the stress of pointless exams next summer.

Melissa Benn calls for teachers to step-up and lead the debate (Guardian, 20 August). Benn says, rightly, that, "teachers and pupils tell regularly of how dull exam material is, how stressful and archaic the formula, how unfit for purpose. A third of pupils, most of them from disadvantaged backgrounds, fail to reach the required standard – that is a level 4 – in the reformed exams for English and maths. They come away not highly educated, but deeply discouraged."

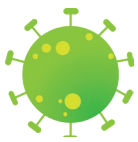
What should replace the abolished GCSEs? Nothing.

And how should students progress beyond 16? They must be allowed to study what they want in 16-18 education, taking, perhaps, six subjects instead of the current standard three A Levels. Broader is better.

16 year old students must also have the option of useful work, with continuing education, which is paid a living wage. Students who stay in full-time education after 16 should receive a living grant which will allow all to do so, should they wish.

Abolish GCSEs! ☐

Union battle over NYC school reopening



By Martin Thomas

The USA currently has a much higher rate of infection than the UK, with a Covid-19 death rate about 120 times bigger (proportional to population) than the UK, and a proportion of tests showing positive about 10 times bigger. In most big cities in the USA, schools are restarting online-only.

New York was the hardest-hit area early on, but now has a lower rate of infection than many areas in the USA: about three times as many confirmed infections and deaths per day as the UK, relative to population.

New York City's schools are due to reopen to students on 21 September, with workers going into the schools to prepare from 8 September. The reopening-to-students will at first bring them back only a few days a week, so that class sizes can be kept small.

It was at first scheduled from 10 September, and put back to 21 September after a threat from the teachers' union to strike in defiance of NY state's Taylor Law banning stoppages by public employees. The union is particularly concerned because New York state has an older teaching workforce (one-third of them over 49: England has one of the youngest teacher workforces in the world; Italy, Spain, and Sweden among the oldest).

The postponement deal bit.ly/ny-s provides for monitoring schools against a 50-item union checklist, regular testing of students and staff, and criteria for school re-closings in case of infection spikes.

As of 7 September, schools are in their second week back in England, and fifth week back in Scotland. Across most of Europe, schools have been reopening since mid-April. The major exceptions are Italy (reopening from mid-September) and Spain (already started reopening, but opening staggered in some areas across September).

The experience since April suggests that it may be possible to reopen schools without setting off a spiral of infections. There are no guarantees, and there is much we don't yet know; but in Sweden, schools (other than the equivalent of sixth forms) stayed open throughout, including at times when the country had a high infection rate. Teachers did not incur a higher infection rate in the way that hospital workers, care workers, bus workers, etc. have done.

In Australia, the starting-point for the new spike which has caused a new lockdown in Victoria was the quarantine hotels and the private-contractor security guards there, not the schools (open since May across Australia).

And schools have a higher claim to be an "essential service" than pubs, cafés, gyms, cinemas, etc.

School workers' unions have generally supported reopenings, but demanded measures to limit infection. Most important is workers' control over the precautions, through elected health and safety committees using the best expert advice they can find. Elected student representatives should be added to those committees. The committees should feel confident to insist on temporary school closures when necessary.

Unions also need to demand extra money for schools to pay for such measures as improved ventilation. ☐

Belarus: confusion or calculation?

Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* is usually clear-cut on international issues: for them (and their political masters, the Communist Party of Britain), the world is divided pretty neatly into goodies and baddies. The goodies are the "anti-imperialist" forces (Hamas, Hezbollah, etc.) and regimes like Cuba, Iran and Venezuela. The baddies are the US (with or without Trump), the EU and all liberal democracies.

Putin doesn't quite fit into the *Morning Star*'s neat division of the world, but it's pretty obvious that on the whole, they reckon he's more sinned against than sinning.

First and foremost amongst the goodies, of course, is China, whose regime can simply do no wrong. The Hong Kong protestors are either terrorists or dupes who don't know what's good for them, the Tibetan Buddhists, are feudal reactionaries and stories about concentration camps in Xinjiang and demographic genocide of Uyghurs are simply Western propaganda.

But, strangely, recent events in Belarus seem to have left the *Morning Star* in a state of confusion. The paper appears unable to decide whether Lukashenko is a goodie or a baddie and whether the protests are the work of western-funded saboteurs and fascists or the legitimate and spontaneous mobilisation of a populace outraged by the regime's obvious and massive electoral fraud.

The *Morning Star*'s initial coverage (10 Aug) of the protests and the regime's violent response described Lukashenko as an "authoritarian", the protests as "massive". and the response of the police as "violent".

The sympathetic tone didn't last long: by 17 August the paper was reporting: "Communist parties in Italy and Russia have warned against another US-sponsored 'colour revolution' similar to those that took place in Georgia and Ukraine". "The Communist Party of Belorussia welcomed the 'unconditional victory' of Mr Lukashenko, calling it the natural consequence of the economic growth of the republic since he came to power in 1994.

"It blamed the protests on 'subversive work' by 'specially trained instigators, from outright fascists to inveterate criminals'...

"It warned that 'foreign puppeteers' were aiming to carry out a coup in Belarus. 'It is clear that if they win, the country will face bloody chaos and landslide degradation,' a statement from the party central committee said."

That was followed (19 August) by a report that quoted the Communist Party of Belarus claiming that "some demonstrators are being paid to attend protests" and the Communist Party of Ukraine warning that the protests "could prefigure a second 'Maidan' as 2014's fascist-backed coup in Ukraine, supported by the EU and United States is known". (For the record, there was a peripheral far-right presence in the Ukrainian uprising, though it's been massively exaggerated by the Stalinists. There is no evidence at all of any such presence in the Belarusian protests).

The *Morning Star* was hedging its bets. On 24 August it published a piece by Unite assistant general secretary Tony Burke backing the opposition and independent trade unions. On 2 September the paper went so far as to publish a letter from A. Bukhvostov, Chairman, Free Trade Union of Metalworkers of Belarus, stating: "Independent and free trade unions in Belarus are fighting for the rights and freedoms of workers, for democratic reforms in the country, for the respect to the people of labour."

It has been suggested that the paper's ambivalence is not unlike that of Putin himself: waiting to see how things pan out before committing to either side. I don't know, but if so, that's a pretty cynical reaction to a working-class uprising whose demands are simply for basic democracy.

No wonder Ian Sinclair, a non-CPB contributor to the *Morning Star*, has written "I would not feel comfortable recommending the paper's coverage of the ongoing protests in Belarus." ☐

Jiři Menzel: 1938-2020

By John Cunningham

One of the great European "auteurs", Jiři Menzel, has died aged 82. He is one of the last of a generation of film directors the likes of which will never be seen again.

They included his fellow Czechs Miloš Forman and Vera Chytilova, the Hungarians Miklós Jancsó, Marta Mészáros and István Szabó, and, from Poland, Andrzej Wajda. From the Soviet Union, Andrei Tarkovsky and Elem Klimov.

From other parts of Europe: Theo Angelopoulos from Greece, the doyens of the French New Wave such as Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Agnes Varda, Germany's Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Margarette von Trotta, and Sweden's Ingmar Bergman. And many more.

What unites those directors, in a very loose sense, is their humanism. They were concerned to portray the basic human qualities that make us what we are, and they rarely put "heroes" up on a pedestal.

More often than not they showed us real human beings

Closely Observed Trains

caught up in difficult situations not of their making, but trying to cope and understand and not lose their basic human dignity and compassion. Sometimes they succeeded, sometimes they didn't.

As nearly all of that generation were supported by state funding, they could make films without looking over their shoulders too often, even to the point where they criticised the same governments that were providing them with state subsidies.

Menzel's best-known film, and his first major production in 1966, was *Closely Observed Trains*.

Telling the tale of an inexperienced railway worker – the film starts with his first day at work – Menzel's film is set during World War Two. As so often with films from Central and Eastern Europe around that time, it was also covertly about the time of its making: the idiocies of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the bullying, pettiness and stupidities of state officials.

At times hilarious and even absurd, it is also tragic (a fairly typical Czech mix, you might say). The young protagonist Milos is sexually inexperienced. He attempts suicide. While assisting the local anti-Nazi resistance he is shot dead.

After the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 (the attempt to introduce "socialism with a human face"), the Czech authorities clamped down on artistic freedom. Menzel's 1969 film *Larks on a String*, a tale of Czech artists and intellectuals sentenced to working in a scrapyard, was banned.

Unlike Forman and others, Menzel never left Czechoslovakia. He stayed and worked on many more films and stage productions, sometimes in collaboration with the writer Bohumil Hrabal. Although his life was not without its difficulties, the authorities tended to leave him alone, no doubt aware of his international reputation.

At a time when we are expected to drool at such morbid dross as *Joker* and listen in awe as a succession of multi-millionaire actors and actresses, oozing "sincerity", tell us how devoted they are to cause of humanity, pause for a moment and look back on the career of Jiři Menzel and watch some of his wonderful films (all the major ones are easily available on DVD).

He never needed to posture before a bejewelled, tuxedo-clad audience of narcissists and half-wits. His films spoke for him, and said everything that needed to be said. ☐

"Revolution Betrayed" study group

Zoom study group, Thursdays 8pm, starting 10 September

Trotsky's book is the classic starting point for discussing: what went wrong after the Russian revolution? What explains Stalinism? Register: bit.ly/sg-rb – zoom link: bit.ly/z-rb

Rebuild the NHS for winter!

Editorial

In mid-July, the government received a report commissioned by its Chief Scientific Officer which warned that July and August were likely to be a lull in the pandemic followed by new spikes over the winter.

Even if this virus is not "seasonal" in the way some others are, the fact of people spending more time indoors in winter will boost infections. The usual seasonal rise of flu will make it harder to trace chains of SARS-Cov-2 infection, and put pressure on the NHS.

The report urged the government to use the July-August lull to get preparations in place for the winter.

At first, it seems, the government just didn't read the report. Boris Johnson blustered about life being back to normal for Christmas.

Then the ministers read it, or someone who had read it caught their attention. The government "put on the brakes" about lockdown-easing, though only after it had reopened pubs and cafés, known to be possible virus-transmission hubs, on 4 July.

The government has also increased the volume of testing, though the organisation of it remains a largely contracted-out mess, rather than a proper public-health operation.

But little else has been done during this period when virus hospitalisations have remained at a low level, though, thanks to the reopening of pubs, cafés, and tourist activities, infections have increased across Europe.

Now Health Minister Matt Hancock is warning, obviously enough, that the current quick rise in infection numbers (since late August) will feed through, sooner or later, to one extent or another, into more hospital cases and more deaths.

Government push

At the same time, the government is pushing to get more office workers out of "work from home" and back into offices. They are demanding that 80% of civil service workers be back in their offices (at least some of the week) by the end of September.

Not so that they can work better! No, so that they can pack into the pubs, cafés, and shops of the city centres, the buses and the trains, and so spread infection!

The Tories want to be able to end furlough pay at the end of October and minimise the consequent unemployment spike. (Over three million workers are still on furlough). The labour movement should demand the continuing of full furlough pay for many months yet; rent holidays for residential tenants and for small businesses; and a great expansion of public services which will provide good new jobs for.

At the same time, schools are being reopened, universities are restarting, and the government is encouraging more passengers for public transport.

Each of reopening schools, re-filling public transport, and even restarting universities, may be possible to do without setting off a new spiral of infections. But each one is bound to add *something* to the infection figures. To do a "back-to-the-office" drive at the same time, and while positively encouraging people to crowd into pubs and cafés, is foolish and short-sighted.

The NHS and the virus-precaution system needs to be rebuilt now, while we still have time, for winter.

Ever since 2010, and before that too, the NHS has been run on the basis of cutting to the maximum as long as it can just "get by". It has been routine, even in ordinary winters, for hospitals to be at 95% capacity.

Cost-cutting kills

Care homes, the same. A recent report showed that larger, fuller, less-staffed care homes have had more Covid deaths. In other words, the more cost-cutting, the more deaths. But the drive has been for cost-cutting.

The pandemic has shown us the destructiveness of the capitalist logic of "what the market calls for, right now" as against the socialist logic of "social provision, with social foresight".

The labour movement must fight for the rebuilding of the NHS and of social care, with good pay rises for all staff, with all jobs taken in-house, and all contracting-out reversed.

And above all we must fight for workers' control at every level. The Tories and the bosses cannot be trusted. Only the workers, in each workplace and industry, have adequate motivation and adequate interest to keep us safe. ☐

Solidarity with workers in Belarus!

On Monday 7 September, Maria Kolsenikova, a Belarus opposition figure, was seized and bundled into a van by two masked men.As we go to press on 8 September, there are confused reports of her being sighted, and maybe arrested, on the Belarus-Ukraine border.

Street protests against the Lukashenko dictatorship continue, four weeks after the rigged election "victory" of Lukashenko on 9 August, and despite thousands of arrests.

Solidarity calls on readers to support the campaign by LabourStart in solidarity with the workers and people of Belarus, and to get their union and Labour Party branches to support it too.

See bit.ly/br-ls – and a longer text on solidarity which can be adapted for motions in unions and Labour Parties is at bit.ly/mo-pe ☐

When "free thought" turns against science

By Will Sefton

Over the months there have been a number of anti-mask demonstrations, most of them fairly small, and certainly well on the fringes of public opinion about the Covid-19 pandemic.

On 29 August that shifted up a notch. A number of larger demonstrations were held in Europe. In London, several thousand of people, at least, crowded into Trafalgar Square to hear speakers including David Icke and Piers Corbyn.

As Levente Zékány reported in *Solidarity* 561 there is a crossover between these demos and the wider-ranging QAnon and "Save our Children" demonstrations. Within the milieu are people committed to the idea that the pandemic is fake, or wildly exaggerated, or caused by 5G, and that the public is being lied to in order to lever more mandatory vaccinations and the suspension of many civil liberties.

Solidarity's Diary of a Tube Worker has reported similar ideas given credence in a relatively unionised workplace. In my own Tube station I have been approached by someone claiming to be a "nutritional doctor" and advising me on the dangers of "breathing in your own CO2".

We also see a convergence of sections of "wellness" and "new age" thought with anti-mask thinking. People who already believe that many ailments are caused by unidentified toxins in your body have been caught up alongside organisations like Stand UpX who reject the lockdown as "authoritarian control" and a mass SARS-Cov-2 vaccination programme as only benefiting big pharma and Bill Gates.

A poll of French anti-mask protesters shows that a majority distrust the powerful and consider themselves free thinkers.

Distrust and free thought are also necessary to build a mass socialist movement. But here we have a valid distrust congealing into a worldview where it is impossible to know the truth and scientific research is no better than the last post you read on social media. Science comes to be seen as something not to be widely understood, something for a privileged few.

Such attitudes have been promoted over the decades by sections of capital for their own reasons, for example to deflect scientific findings on smoking and on climate change.

Socialists have a lot to do to break down these attitudes. We should try to "pre-bunk" rather than "de-bunk" the theories. And understand why people are drawn to them in the first place. ☐

New videos!

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. New this last fortnight:

- The 1945 Labour govenment: Causes and lessons, with Mark Catterall
- Global capital and pandemics, with Camila Bassi
- The Black Jacobins: Haitian revolution against slavery, by CLR James – with Dan Davison
- Back the health workers! 15% pay rise! Editorial plus For schools without exam tyranny! Editorial☐

Please watch and subscribe; like, comment and share! All at: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

“This attack on capitalism”

Environment

By Zack Muddle

As I write on 7 September, Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK’s latest rebellion has just finished its first week, with a few days still to come. Every day, in many locations across the country, hundreds of protesters have turned out for often bold actions to urge action on the climate crises.

XR has rightly denounced serious and increasing police repression. Hundreds have been arrested, including mass arrests following kettling.

Protestors have been taking Covid-safety seriously, yet the police have threatened them, including those wearing face-masks, with fines using Coronavirus police powers.

Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, is threatening increased repression. “We must defend ourselves against this attack on capitalism, our way of life, and ultimately our freedoms.”

The *Daily Mail* cited a “Home Office source” as saying that “We want to see some people banged up instead of escaping with a fine they can pay from their trust fund”. According to the *Daily Telegraph* (5 September), one option under consideration is classifying XR as an organised criminal gang.

On Friday 5, XR targeted some of the bourgeois media. A “team of over 100 rebels blockaded newspaper printers overnight, successfully preventing *The Sun*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *Times* from reaching newsstands all over the country.” Meanwhile rebels in Australia dumped manure outside Newscorp offices.

Aside from causing disruption and raising the profile of the climate crises and XR, XR was was targeting those media for “dehumanising marginalised groups”, systematically under-reporting climate change, and highlighting, too, its ownership by a handful of billionaires.

Boris Johnson, hypocritically, denounced this performative stunt as “seek[ing] to limit the public’s access to news”, implying an attack on “free press”.

The CEE Bill, the passing of which is their key aim of this rebellion, has been tabled in parliament and has garnered significant support.

The Bill and their strategy – while positive – remain severely limited (as

argued in *Solidarity* 561 bit.ly/xr-return).

XR have received less media coverage in this wave than previously, underscoring the longer-term limitations of placing “making the headlines” front and centre in their approach. But socialist environmentalists should and do support it, while using it as a lever to spark or rekindle much needed environmental activism in workplaces, unions, Labour Party branches, and beyond. ☐

Pushing Labour on the NHS

By an MI activist

Momentum Internationalists, a class-struggle, internationalist platform of the Labour left, is launching a drive to make Labour speak out on the ongoing NHS workers’ pay campaign.

The fight for a 15% pay rise by rank-and-file NHS staff, in the face of indifference and inadequacy from trade union leaderships, is a source of inspiration to a great many workers across the country. But Labour is missing in action.

We will be bringing out our Labour and Momentum friends to the demonstrations across the country, and moving motions and petitioning to get the leadership of the Labour Party to offer leadership on this crucial fight.

For more details see momentuminternationalists.org. ☐

TUC report reveals racism but offers no answer

By Janine Booth

A TUC report has revealed the deep-seated racism that underlies the higher impact of Covid-19 on black and minority ethnic (BME) people, but its proposals fall well short of what is needed.

In the early days of the pandemic, it became clear that BME people were dying at a significantly greater rate. Compared with white people, black people are more than four times as likely to die from Covid-19, Bangladeshi and Pakistani people more than one-and-a-half times as likely.

While the government tried to portray this as a mystery requiring medical study, commentators pointed to the facts that proportionally more BME people work in frontline essential jobs and live in more populous areas, both bringing them into unavoidable contact with more people.

However, even within job and residential groupings, BME people are more likely to die. The TUC report, Dying On The Job: racism and risk at work, sets out some of the reasons why.

Some factors are measurable and relate to job security. Temporary, agency and zero-hours workers are significantly more vulnerable to work in unsafe conditions, as taking time off work would cause them to lose their income. BME workers are more than twice as likely to be on an agency contract, and nearly twice as like to be on a zero-hours contract, than white workers. One in thirteen BME workers is in a temporary job, compared with one in nineteen white workers. BME workers are over-represented in low-paid jobs, under-represented in high-paid jobs, and paid on average 3.8% less than white workers.

Other factors are less measurable but just as real. BME workers told the TUC of discrimination including: being given more dangerous work; not receiving adequate PPE even when white workers did; being made to continue attending the workplace while white workers were furloughed or allowed to work from home; being excessively scrutinised over sickness absence; and not being given support that their employer willingly gave to white workers.

But despite uncovering this damning evidence, the TUC’s answer largely comprises suggestions for more reports. It wants the government to publish a cross-departmental action plan and introduce mandatory ethnic pay-gap reporting; and employers to carry out risk assessments, establish ethnic monitoring systems, undertake workplace race equality audits, and set targets. All these measures would be welcome, but they are processes not results. It makes no difference to a black worker if their employer carries out a race equality audit but carries on hiring black workers through agencies to carry out menial work alongside better-paid, directly-employed white professionals.

The TUC makes one specific, concrete demand: a ban on zero-hour contracts. It does not demand a higher minimum wage; employers to remove proven racists from management roles; no more contracting-out in public services; public ownership of PPE production and distribution; or full pay during sickness absence or self-isolation.

Team TUC put together an impressive build-up move, but finished it by missing an open goal. ☐

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Singapore: birth of a new left

By Sara Lee

After three weekends of fantastic discussions on issues like climate change and migrant workers' rights, Activism in Crisis (AIC) – a huge activism festival in Singapore, 3 to 23 August – has wrapped up triumphantly.

The freedom to speak and to organise in Singapore is quite stifled. Yet, in many ways, AIC is a model for organising and hosting events online – a model not just for organising under repressive regimes but a model for organising in the time of Covid.

The festival took place over Zoom with extensive measures to keep the conversation going and to grow a coalition of activists in the long term. The one word that was constantly emphasised throughout the festival was "accessibility".

To a large extent, the fact that everything was online made the festival a lot more accessible already. Still, a guide for using the technology was circulated. Speakers were made to speak slowly and clearly. There was sign language, live closed captions, and live note-taking.

Guidelines were read out at the beginning of each event to prevent harassment and discriminatory behaviour. Material was circulated in advance and in readable font. All that, and more, was provided with the help of crowdfunding.

In some ways, the festival being conducted online gave the organisers and the participants more political freedom. The organisers were able to host many speakers from abroad, including Extinction Rebellion and an abolitionist-activist from the States. Three years ago, Hong Kong democracy activist Joshua Wong had given a speech via Skype at an in-person event in Singapore. The organiser, Jolovan Wham, was then imprisoned for organising an illegal public assembly. AIC, being online, managed to avoid state interference of this kind.

In recent years, the global movement around climate change has led to an uptick in left-wing activism in Singapore – a country that has not seen an organised left or a really independent labour movement since the 1960s. As in so many other parts of the world, people – particularly young people – are radicalising and moving to the far-left because of climate change. Liberal logics of economic growth and political reformism are pushing up against the urgent need to reorganise society from below so as to avoid catastrophe.

AIC was organised by SG Climate Rally – a large organisation of climate activists, mainly politically-conscious university students. In 2011, Yale University – in conjunction with the National University of Singapore – set up a liberal arts college in Singapore. Initially there were fears that student activism on the campus would be stifled. But many SG Climate Rally activists have come from that college.

What has also contributed to the birth of a fledgling left in Singapore is the popular movement for LGBTQ+ rights. For the last fifty-odd years, the ruling People's Action Party has cast a long shadow of social conservatism over the island. Gay sex is criminalised in Singapore, but the movement to repeal the ban on gay sex – Pink Dot – has rapidly become a mass movement. As with the climate crisis, people inevitably run up against capitalist logics when they confront issues of sex and sexuality. On the terrain of social reproduction, the reproduction of human beings stands in stark contrast to the reproduction of workers.

AIC was a broad forum for left-wing ideas – ideas that might not have been fully fleshed out in issue-specific forums on climate change or LGBTQ rights. While some of the festival events focused on specific topics like Big Oil, other events were more general. They were about "building transnational solidarity," going "beyond (policy) tweaks" and developing "bolder (activist) strategies." While some participants might have been perplexed by the ambiguity of these event titles, they were actually a brilliant and subtle invitation to discuss ideas that were revolutionary and not just reformist.

Not only was accessibility a central feature of the way the festival was run, but it was also a recurring substantive theme. Speakers and participants asked, "how do we make activism in Singapore accessible to workers?", "how do we allow oppressed and exploited people to speak for themselves?", "how do we expand the 'activist circle' beyond university students?"

The problem of jargon was brought up a lot, with people saying that activism in Singapore requires a university degree. One participant, in a rather striking reply, said something along the lines of "the Singaporean masses might not understand activists' social science jargon, but lots of activists probably don't understand working-class issues either." Another participant pointed out that it was perhaps a bit condescending to say that orienting towards workers requires doing activism "in plain English."

ACCESSIBLE

When it is touted as a way to orient toward the working class, "making activism accessible" is not only a bit condescending, but it also presumes that knowledge only has to be disseminated in one direction – from the allegedly intellectual activists to the allegedly poorly-educated working class. In truth, we need a situation in which workers and activists are educating each other.

During the event on "Big Oil", it became clear that a 'just transition' to sustainable energy would have to centre the migrant workers who work in the petrochemical industry on Singapore's Jurong Island. It is they who would be able to walk out and demand green jobs. Activists wouldn't be able to make that happen unless those workers gave reports on local conditions within their workplaces and shed light on possible industrial demands. And only workers could stage a walk-out or a strike – activists can't do that, unless they are also workers.

Activists need to be educating, agitating and organising within the working class, not outside of it. In any case, with each AIC event having 500-odd registered participants, activism in Singapore probably isn't as exclusive as some people worry it is. Most of the participants at AIC were themselves workers, perhaps white-collar workers.

It is a falsehood that workers can't understand politics – or that it has to be "dumbed down" before they can understand it. Someone who works two jobs and has kids may not have time to read Lenin, but it isn't true that they wouldn't be able to understand Lenin if they did.

In the event on transnational solidarity, it was acknowledged that a lot of migrant workers in Singapore already have political causes of their own. Despite working under extreme conditions of poverty and exploitation, migrant workers often wish to organise political events and protests in Singapore, especially on issues affecting their home countries. They are prevented from doing so because foreigners aren't allowed to have protests at Speakers' Corner (the only place in Singapore where it is legal to have protests) and public assemblies on the political causes of other countries are not permitted.

Migrant workers aside, it is well-documented that the native Singaporean working class has high levels of education, or at least high levels of literacy. The reason working-class Singaporeans are not "political" is due to a myriad of factors, including the tight control of the PAP, but it isn't due to the fact that Singaporean activists don't do a good enough job of explaining their jargon. Even if that were the problem, activists having their own "lingo" is a bit of a self-reproducing phenomenon. Once workers are brought into "activist circles", language will necessarily start to shift. Linguistic expressions will become less abstract.

The liberal opposition in Singapore now has a stronger presence in Parliament, and working-class Singaporeans are now slightly more involved in what goes on in the sphere of bourgeois representative democracy. That's a step forward. The task for activists in Singapore will be to fight for a form of democratic participation that goes beyond casting a vote every five years. We want workers to be able to protest in the streets about political issues that they care about. We want them to unionise, fight for better wages and working conditions, and take control of their workplaces and industries.

The need for free trade unions and an independent labour movement in Singapore was brought up at almost every event during the month-long festival. References were made to the militant labour movement that once existed in Singapore in the 1950s and the central role that workers played in mobilising against colonialism.

AIC is now a membership organisation, and it wants to continue to fight for the specific demands that were raised in the course of the festival. It has done an exemplary job making Singapore politics accessible in a repressive climate. It must now make politics agitational too. ☐

Bosnia: the war and

By Sarah Correia

Sarah Correia is a researcher into society and history in Bosnia. She talked with Martin Thomas from Solidarity.

Why did war erupt in Bosnia in 1992, between the Bosnian government on one side and Serb militias and the Serbian-dominated federal army on the other? We thought we should side with Bosnia against what we saw as Serbian imperialism, but much of the left refused to take sides in the Bosnian war of 1992-5, or backed the Serb forces.

It was a time of profound changes to the international system. And, from the 19th century onwards, shifts in the international system had been very much felt in the Balkans, because historically it has been the crossing-point of different empires and different geostrategic interests.

Yugoslavia had been organised as a federal state, but it was a one-party system, so in fact pluralism was quite limited.

Nationalism had always been a factor in Tito's Yugoslavia, though then issues were channelled or accommodated within the ruling party. Now, fights which had been controllable when the system was stable, for example in the 1970s, led to the pragmatists and liberals within the regime being sidelined.

After Tito died in 1980, the regime entered a period of flux. It was also a time of economic crisis, external-debt difficulties, and growing discontent. Serb nationalism was the first dynamic to find expression, exploiting a feeling of resentment about the Serbs being the backbone of Yugoslavia but always having to sacrifice their own interests for those of the whole country.

Over the 1980s, there was a shift of ideas which made nationalism more accessible and accredited. Slobodan Milosevic understood well how things were shifting, and he was able to speak both the language of "communism" and the language of national identity.

Reactions grew, led initially by Slovenia and then supported by Croatia, within the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. The single-party system collapsed, not so much because there was popular pressure (as in other countries), but because the republics became unable to find a way forward together. Slovenia and then Croatia moved towards multi-party systems, and towards abandoning the federal state.

There was an attempt by Serbia to re-centralise the system which failed and led to a collapse. The attempt to have a smaller Yugoslavia dominated by Serbia led to nationalisms being seen by a lot of the population as real options. The whole of the Eastern Bloc was collapsing.

Still, nationalist parties and leaders were not advocating for war. The country was led to war not by a wish by the population for violence or conflict, but, at a time of extreme certainty, the population saw the only real forces that were organised as the nationalist parties. They were the only people who could offer an alternative to the status quo which was anyway collapsing.

In Serbia, the media were very quickly controlled by the Milosevic regime. With Serbia being such a strong factor in the federation and Belgrade being the capital, that gave Milosevic great leverage, including in the Serb populations of the other republics.

Now there is a lot of Yugo-nostalgia and romanticisation of the old regime, but in those days the old rulers were seen as grey people, self-interested, opaque, covering themselves in coded language which had become meaningless.

In the appeal of the nationalisms there was an element of populism, as we call it nowadays. But the new leaderships were of poor quality. Either they were recycled from the LCY ("communists"), as for example Tudjman was in Croatia, or people with no proper experience in politics, like Izetbegović (president of Bosnia 1992-6).

Those who had a vision had a vicious one, of dividing people, and the others weren't strong enough to see what was coming.

In the case of Slovenia and Croatia, it was a very credible way forward to become independent and go their own way. They did that. Then for the other republics of Yugoslavia, what was left?

Only a smaller, poorer, more Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. Maybe with hindsight, now, we could even say that might have been a lesser evil. But that is not how it looked at the time to the leaderships in place.

Once a multi-party system was put into place in Bosnia, three strong nationalist parties emerged, Muslim, Croat, Serb. Ostensibly, at first, they were proposing to rule together with some form of power-sharing. That's what people voted for.

The Bosnian government ended up moving for independence because the state that Bosnia had been part of came to be considered no longer to exist.

In the West, the conflict gave free rein to the prejudices about the Balkans. Maria Todorova has described this in her book Imagining the Balkans. The West looked at the Balkans as its "other", when in fact it was more a caricature of the West. People on the left were lost, seeing the newly-emerging world order as just the dominance of the United States.

A lot of dogma, a lot of ignorance, and a lot of unwillingness to face facts, shaped attitudes on the left.

What is your assessment, in hindsight, of the February 2014 protests in Bosnia (strikes and street demonstrations against privatisation and against nationalism)?

The protests caught everyone off guard. They created a certain level of hope that popular mobilisation could lead to meaningful change.

I was in the protests myself, in Sarajevo. There was an attempt at direct democracy, through "Plenum Assemblies". The movement started with a reaction against police violence against factory workers who had been protesting for months. It started in Tuzla and spread through the country.

But much of it was improvisation, and much of it, I'm sad to say, quickly became wishful thinking.

People felt a need to talk, to share a common experience of oppression, and to reject the system in which they lived. But as the "Plenum Assemblies" began to push for new solutions, the established political parties began to regain leverage, and we found there wasn't enough critical mass to go forward.

The people who tried to steer the movement are very decent and principled people, a few of them friends of

Timeline of the region

1180: First independent Bosnian state. The mountainous territory of Bosnia, or Bosnia-Herzegovina, has been a political unit ever since, though usually under an external overlord.

1463: Ottoman Empire takes Bosnia. Over centuries, a part of the population, especially in the cities, converts to Islam from Catholicism or Orthodoxy (Bosnia is on a dividing line between the two Christianities).

1878: Austro-Hungarian Empire takes Bosnia-Herzegovina.

1919: After Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires collapse, first Yugoslav state (Serb-dominated).

1944: Stalinists led by Josef Tito defeat the Nazis, their Croat fascist allies, and Serbian royalists, to win power in Yugoslavia.

From 1966: Titoist Yugoslavia becomes more decentralised. B-H gets more autonomy as a republic within Yugoslavia; "Muslims" are recognised as "a nation" within Yugoslavia.

From late 1980s: As the old order crumbles in Eastern Europe, Milosevic launches a "Greater Serbia" policy, calling it "the anti-bureaucratic revolution".

Summer 1991: Slovenia and Croatia declare independence, and retain it after short (Slovenia) or long (Croatia) wars against Milosevic.

March 1992: By now B-H is about 44% Muslim (still concentrated in the cities), 17% Croat, 31% Serb (and 8% defining themselves just as "Yugoslav"). B-H declares independence after Bosnian-Serb moves to separate Serb-majority areas and after a referendum. The "federal" Yugoslav army (controlled by Milosevic), Bosnian Serb militias, and volunteers from Serbia, quickly seize much of B-H's land area, but most main cities stay in Bosnian hands. Sarajevo is under siege for 44 months. Big powers impose an arms embargo on Bosnian forces.

February 1994: Washington Agreement, brokered by US, between Bosnian government and Bosnian-Croat forces, for a common front against Serb nationalist forces.

July 1995: Srebrenica massacre, of some 8000 Muslim civilians by Serb forces, in an area supposedly a UN-protected "safe haven". European governments, previously tilting towards Milosevic, start tilting pro-Bosnia.

September 1995: NATO bombs Serb military positions.

November 1995: War ended by US-brokered Dayton Agreement. B-H survives, but as a confederation of a Muslim-Croat unit and a Serb unit, ruled over by an external "High Representative". Since Dayton, peace, but continued divisions and high emigration (population down from 4.4 million in 1991 to about 3.3 million now). The "High Representative" continues to rule.

March-June 1999: After escalating Serb repression and Kosovar resistance in Kosova, and finally a move by Milosevic to kill or drive out the majority of the Kosovar population, NATO goes to war against Milosevic, and forces Serbia to withdraw. Kosova survives under international control, and eventually wins independence in 2008.

February 2014: Wave of strikes and protests in Bosnia, against privatisation, for jobs and pensions, for workers' control, against nationalism. ☐

25 years later

mine, but quickly the momentum was lost.

Since then there has been a widespread feeling that there is no hope left in Bosnia. We had a moment of opportunity to transcend ethnic divisions and an unpopular political system, but failed to gather enough support and lost momentum.

Nowadays the only meaningful activism in Bosnia is environmental. Thanks to the European Union wanting more renewable energy, hundreds of small hydroelectric dams have been built on rivers in Bosnia to export electricity, and they are destroying the rivers and the environment. It's usually Austrian companies linked with local contractors. Local populations are trying to resist, because villages end up with their water supply cut off.

And there are imports of waste, especially since China stopped importing plastic waste from the West. And there is extreme pollution. Bosnia is exporting hydroelectricity, and yet Sarajevo is being heated by dirty coal.

Meanwhile there is an exodus of the active population. Young people are leaving. Those who cannot get a visa or work permit are still going to work for periods of three months or so in Austria or Germany or Switzerland, as cleaners, in construction, as care workers, picking fruit, or whatever.

Most people have no sense of a future. Even nature, in Bosnia, is being destroyed at such a rate that people see leaving the country as the only option.

Bosnia has been a political unit in more or less similar borders since maybe the 12th century, though usually under an external overlord. Since the end of the war and the Dayton Agreement in 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina has survived, but as a state held together by the external High Representative, and still with no clear road to independence. Few say explicitly that it would have been better for the war to take its course and end with separate Croat and Serb areas (annexed to Croatia and Serbia), and a rump majority-Muslim Bosnian state, all tidied up by population movements. What do you think?

Dayton was a hybrid that could not work. It put into the constitution the idea of an ethnic sharing of power, but also included many liberal, human-rights element.

The contradictions have been contained and sustained through the international presence, but also through the wish of the population to have a normal life, without war. Anything was better than a war: that is what has kept the country going.

I believe that Bosnia is still one country. The environmental problems are exactly the same both sides of the inter-entity dividing line [between the "Republika Srpska" and the (Muslim-Croat) "Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina"], and there is considerable movement across the line.

Most of my research has been in Republika Srpska. In recent years there has been much less denial of a common Bosnian identity than there was ten years ago. The Bosnian flag is more present. Ten years ago, the TV weather reports in Republika Srpska showed only weather in Republika Srpska. Now they show the whole of the country.

Of course, Serbia re-emerging as a strong country, and the recent rise of ethnic nationalists in Montenegro, create new problems. ☐

The left and Bosnia

By Martin Thomas

The wars in Croatia (1991-5), Bosnia (1992-5), and Kosova (1999), all part of the break-up of Yugoslavia, were among the first wars of the new era following the fall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe (1989) and the USSR (1991).

And the different attitudes then of different trends on the left were among the first markers of how the left would differentiate in the new era.

Workers' Liberty backed the peoples of Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosova in their struggle for self-determination against what we saw as Serbian proto-imperialism, quasi-imperialism, or sub-imperialism.

Leading figures of the parliamentary left then, such as Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner, saw the Croatian and Bosnian governments, and the Kosovars, as catspaws for aggression by German or American imperialism against the old Yugoslavia and against Serbia. Some of their co-thinkers identified Milosevic's Serbia as the last redoubt in Europe of socialism, when in fact it was privatising and marketising in much the same way as other ex-Stalinist states, while retaining highly authoritarian rule.

One group, Workers' Press, did valuable and courageous work to promote Workers' Aid to Bosnia, with convoys to Tuzla, but politically refused to see anything but the "defence of Bosnia" and multi-ethnic democracy against "fascism".

They rightly praised the attitude of the trade unions in Tuzla, but refused to register the increasingly Muslim-communalist and sometimes sectarian drift of the Bosnian government of Alia Izetbegovic.

Workers' Press wound up in 1996, and there was little direct sequel to its policy on Bosnia.

The attitude of *Socialist Worker*, however, would have sequels.

They saw the Bosnian war as only "a cynical battle between ruling groups with two aims in mind: to grab as much territory as possible and, in doing so, to stir ethnic hatred..." (*Socialist Review*, July August 1995).

Unlike the pro-Serbian former admirers of the USSR, *Socialist Worker* had a record which suggested a better response.

When some on the left had denounced nationalistic rebellions in Hungary and Poland against USSR domination as "socialism", *Socialist Worker* had supported the rights of the Hungarian and Polish peoples.

But *Socialist Worker* was shifting. In 1987 it had switched its attitude on the Iran-Iraq war which raged from 1980 to 1988.

Until 1987 *Socialist Worker* had, like us, said that was a war in which socialists could back neither side. On neither side was it a fight, however warped, for national liberation. It was a battle between two aspirant regional powers for regional domination.

My enemy's enemy

Now *Socialist Worker* backed Iran, on the grounds, so they said, that they had discovered that the USA was backing Iraq. (In fact the USA had been doing that since early in the war. It feared that Iran, as the bigger power, would overrun Iraq, and focused its policy on preventing a clear Iranian victory).

Thus *Socialist Worker* buried the positive democratic principle of national rights as a guideline, and replaced it by the negative rule of supporting whomever was "against imperialism". And, as the power of imperialist-inspired attacks on the USSR crumbled, *Socialist Worker* increasingly identified "imperialism" as just the USA.

As Yugoslavia fell apart, the big powers generally sought to minimise separation and, for as long as it seemed even half-plausible, to press the weaker nationalities to be patient and continue under Serbian overlordship. The big powers imposed an arms embargo on the Bosnian government in the 1992-5 war.

But the USA tilted somewhat more towards Bosnia than the European powers. The USA was the driving force behind the NATO bombing of some Serb positions in 1995 and the subsequent (botched) Dayton Agreement of 1995, which ended the war with Bosnia intact.

That US tilt was enough to persuade *Socialist Worker* that the Bosnian cause was not "anti-imperialist" enough to support.

By 1999, and the Kosova war, *Socialist Worker* had moved further pro-Milosevic. They did not deny that Milosevic was to be criticised, but now he was up against the USA, and the main thing had to be opposition to the USA.

Over Bosnia, *Socialist Worker* also emphasised that the Bosnian government was dominated by a Muslim party (the SDA), which had a Muslim-chauvinist wing, and "the Muslims of Bosnia were not an oppressed group before the war started".

At that time, *Socialist Worker* like others on the left took it for granted that the left should oppose Muslim-chauvinism or political Islamism. And (again like others on the left) they must have taken the fact that the hijab had been banned in Bosnia from 1950 to 1992 as a (bureaucratic) form of secularism, rather than as "Islamophobia".

Things are different with *Socialist Worker* these days. It denounces ex-Muslim secularists as "racists", praises Hamas, claimed to be "the best fighters for Muslims" as its election pitch in its 2004-7 "Respect" period, and hails hijab-wearing as a gesture of solidarity with the oppressed.

The Bosnia story shows us that those attitudes come not from any principled stance for universal rights, but from the negativist "back whomever fights the USA" rule, and a catchpenny opportunist hope that militancy against the USA (no matter for what positive alternative) may win support. ☐

Shapurji Saklatvala: a tribune of the working class

By Sacha Ismail

In rapidly shifting post-war conditions, as Labour displaced the Liberals as Britain's second party, there were three general elections in 1922-4. Chosen as the standard-bearer of a strong and radical local labour movement, Indian revolutionary socialist Shapurji Saklatvala was elected Labour MP for Battersea North in 1922; narrowly lost it to his "Constitutionalist" opponent in 1923; and won it back in 1924, as a Communist candidate with local Labour backing.

Saklatvala was Labour's first "BAME" MP, but not the first MP with membership in the then-revolutionary Communist Party of Great Britain. Peculiarly, that was Cecil Malone, an airforce colonel and OBE elected in 1918 from the wing of the Liberals then in coalition with the Tories, on a militantly anti-socialist platform. He visited Russia, was won over by the Bolsheviks, and on his return helped found the CP! In 1922 John Walton Newbold became Communist MP for Motherwell, with local Labour backing.

Malone and Newbold quickly lost their seats and left the CP soon after. Saklatvala sat for his until 1929 and remained extremely active, a Communist by his own lights, until his death in 1936. What kind of MP was he?

Report-back, not "MP's surgery"

"During my strenuous work in the Labour Movement", finished Saklatvala's 1922 election leaflet, "I have always remembered one thing, that I have to fight for and to work for the Working Classes, as through them alone I see a chance for a truly humane world." He would use his position to help workers organise, champion their struggles, and fight to end the capitalist system exploiting them.

For Saklatvala, the working class did not mean the working class of just the UK, but of the whole world, and in particular the British empire. In particularly, he made consistent attempt to link the material interests and struggles of British and Indian workers. I will look at this central part of his work in my next article.

The kind of working class and labour movement Saklatvala represented and his relationship to them were vividly described by Communist and Trotskyist veteran Harry Wicks, who in 1922 worked in Battersea's important railway industry:

In the twenties, to the consternation of the Liberal-minded Labour leadership... Battersea North elected as their member of parliament the Indian Saklatvala. Not only was he an Indian but a Communist, and he was sponsored by the united Battersea labour movement.

The link that Saklatvala established with his worker constituents was not that of the proverbial surgery: 'Can I help you?', 'Have you any problems?' At that time the entire working class had a problem, that of survival against the employers' lock-outs, widespread unemployment and the downward slide of the sliding scale of wages agreements.

Saklatvala spoke at factory gate meetings and introduced the monthly report-back from Westminster. There were great meetings. Long before the doors of the town hall opened, queues formed just like they used to at Stamford Bridge.

The platform was always crowded. Sak, as he was affectionately known, was flanked by the entire executive of the Trades and Labour Council and numerous representatives of Indian and colonial organisations. He was… a magnificent orator.

Those monthly report-back meetings on the doings in Parliament stirred hundreds into activity. The Battersea labour movement pulsated with life and was united. Marxist classes held by the old Plebs League flourished. Trade union branches were crowded.

Holding monthly report-back meetings for his "Labour electors" had been an election pledge. Saklatvala and the local Labour and Trades Council organised regular canvassing, not primarily for electoral purposes but to discover the concerns of and engage in dialogue with the constituency's wider working class.

In Parliament

Saklatvala energetically used the platform of Parliament itself to raise a wide range of issues – again, local, national and international. In his maiden speech (23 November, 1922), he discussed growing UK unemployment; the state of post-war Europe; the shared interests of textile workers in Scotland and Bengal; the Irish Treaty establishing de facto but limited independence; and the Russian revolution.

The next month, responding to a loan for "economic development" in Sudan, he spoke about British imperialism, the interests of working people in Britain and Sudan, and the problems of "private enterprise". The last was a theme in many of his speeches, widely noted.

While the CP was still enmeshed in the Labour Party and the Battersea labour movement united around Saklatvala, he regularly raised local issues, often in consultation with the borough council. He repeatedly raised housing, for instance the council's conflicts with private landlords refusing to pay for repairs. He spoke about attempts by Battersea South's Tory MP, Viscount Curzon, to hinder the council from running local energy provision, again using the chance to indict private ownership.

Later, as Labour was pushed out of the CP, Saklatvala became less inclined to raise purely local issues. India became increasingly central to his interventions.

He used Parliament to champion working-class and liberation struggles. In 1923 he played a major role in the fight against deportation without trial of Irish republican activists in Britain. In 1925-6, the CP collected 300,000 signatures to protest the arrest of many working-class activists, including twelve of its leaders; Saklatvala got wide publicity by presenting the petition to Parliament and raising the issues in the chamber. He regularly raised strikes and workers' issues. Attempting to coordinate parliamentary with extra-parliamentary struggles, he consulted extensively with working-class organisations and activists.

Saklatvala loved parliamentary-style debate and his general courtesy and politeness were widely acknowledged. At the same time he regularly used his speeches to mock ruling-class figures and institutions, indulging his impish sense of humour. This was part of indicting the system of which they were part, to mobilise workers against it. He consistently brought class conflict and the wider question of capitalism and socialism to the fore. There is no MP doing quite the same today.

A Communist MP

Even before his re-election as a Communist, the CP regarded Saklatvala as a Communist MP. From the start he was very open about his political ideas and his affiliation. In 1922-3, although Saklatvala was accepted into the Parliamentary Labour Party and John Walton Newbold was not, they cooperated closely as what the CP called its "Communist Fraction in Parliament".

As a result of having MPs, the prestige of the CP in the labour movement was increased, along with interest in Communist ideas. Saklatvala and Newbold received numerous invitations to speak from a wide range of non-Communist organisations. Their speeches were often reported in the press, giving increased opportunities for wider propaganda.

CP publications regularly carried extracts from Saklatvala's speeches, and the party published three pamphlets of his speeches – The Class Struggle in Parliament, With the Communist Party in Parliament and Socialism and "Labouralism" – selling tens of thousands of copies.

The CP was not afraid to criticise Saklatvala. When the (Liberal) Commons Speaker retired in 1928, Saklatvala made a glowing speech about him, and there was widespread criticism in the party, including calls for his expulsion. The CP leadership resolved to exercise greater control over the MP. Soon after that controversy he was criticised by the German Communist Party for a speech at a meeting in Berlin, and the CP discussed disciplining him again.

In 1927, after Saklatvala had his five children initiated into Parsism at a large public ceremony in Westminster, the CP published a statement saying that, while religious workers could join the party, a leader like Saklatvala should know better. He replied publicly that he fully agreed, but it had been unavoidable for family reasons...

Saklatvala had a very strong personality and will of his own, but remained strongly committed to revolutionary socialism and to the CP. He resisted serious pressure to break from the party. This ranged from widespread vilification, to suggestions of receiving a safe Labour seat and becoming a minister, to being barred from international trips for MPs. Eventually, he was banned from his home country, for the last decade of his life.

The General Strike

Saklatvala worked hard to support the 1926 General Strike, suffering repression as a result. More broadly, too, the strike was a turning point for him.

The first Labour government (1923-4) had done nothing to dismantle the system of organised strike-breaking the state had gradually built up to prepare for industrial unrest. Saklatvala repeatedly raised the question of strike-breaking organisations in Parliament.

On 3 May, the day before the strike started, the Manchester Guardian reported the "unusually large" May Day demonstration in London:

Saklatvala seemed to be the hero of the day. He was followed to his platform by a swirling wake of enthusiasts, and his meeting was much the biggest. He is, one imagines, the most powerful mob orator of the day… he harangued for a good half hour. With a sort of sombre joy, he acclaimed the General Strike as the definite rising of Labour against their oppressors, to a chorus of "Good old Saklatvala!"

Saklatvala's speech called on soldiers to support the strike. He was quickly charged with sedition and sent to Wormwood Scrubs for two months.

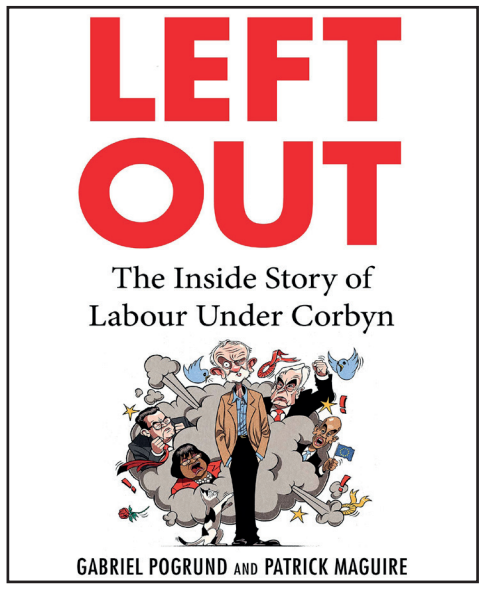
On his release, he went literally straight to Parliament to attack the Tories and the ruling class. Speaking at mass meetings in Battersea and across the country, he was hailed as a hero by angry labour movement activists. But as the impact of the strike's defeat set in, organised labour weakened – with major consequences for Battersea, the CP and Saklatvala. ☐

• Longer version at bit.ly/sakarticle3. Part 1 at bit.ly/sakarticle1. Part 2 at bit.ly/sakarticle2. There will be two more articles in this series – one on Saklatvala's campaigning for colonial (and particularly Indian) liberation and one on the CP's breach with the Labour Party, his last years and his legacy.

Left politics without the activists

Book review

By Keith Road



Gabriel Pogrund's and Patrick Maguire's book *Left Out*: *The Inside Story of Labour Under Corbyn* is not really about the politics of the Corbyn Labour Party leadership, but about the "politics" in the sense of corridor chat, text-message exchanges, and WhatsApp groups at the top of the party hierarchy.

Tellingly, it doesn't mention the failure of the Labour Party in that period to promote any real ongoing political campaigns outside the general elections of 2017 and 2019. Either the authors take it as obvious that political parties won't do political campaigning, or they picked up no argument or dispute about it in top circles, or both.

The alt-left media of The Skwawkbox, The Canary, and Novara get a mention but the focus of this book is very much in the top echelons of The Project, rather than among its many online and on-the-ground supporters.

The book rattles on quickly through the "Corbyn Project" ("The Project", as the authors call it), through the optic of offices in Westminster, from Corbyn's second election in 2016 through to the General Election of 2019 and the election of Keir Starmer as Labour leader.

Part serialised in *The Times*, *Left Out* has had much negative reaction from the Corbyn-loyal twitterati, who have pulled apart a misleading passage about Laura Alvarez and an oatcake.

It is hard to know exactly which of the book's unfootnooted anecdotes will stand up to scrutiny. Even those who lived through The Project only from the grassroots will find see glaring errors. Andrew Fisher was never accused of backing a "Trotskyite" candidate against Emily Benn. It was Class War. Seamus Milne's adherence to Stalinism was not a flirtation when at Winchester and Oxford, but continued through his role as business manager of *Straight Left* and into the politics he has today.

The star of the book, almost, is Karie Murphy, as the all-round bullish enforcer of LOTO (the Leader of the Opposition's office).

An observer is quoted as saying: "Karie doesn't do politics. In fact, I'm not sure she has politics". Certainly she had no real background in Labour left politics. Her biggest political role before LOTO had been as a backroom aide, for some years, for Labour right-winger Tom Watson.

By 2019, according to the book anyway, she was central in getting an often disengaged and at times meek Corbyn to make decisions or just to get to things on time. Central also to the plot to oust her former employer Tom Watson as Labour's Deputy Leader.

She is depicted as determined to do her job however she might be viewed by anyone else, and at war variously with her juniors in the office, with John McDonnell, and at times with Corbyn himself.

Her move in late 2019 from LOTO Chief of Staff to overseeing the general election campaign is presented as a matter of John McDonnell and his closest ally in LOTO, Andrew Fisher, using Bob Kerslake to push her away from an overcentralised power and a stifling atmosphere she had allegedly created in LOTO.

"Director of Communications" Seumas Milne is presented as being the most serious ideological influence over Corbyn, who, so the book says, called him "The Great Milne."

He is portrayed as not very good at the communications part of his brief, getting into the office late, resented by the other staff, and careful to put very little in writing – but has Corbyn's ear.

The book presents Corbyn's interest in issues like East Timor or West Papua as unnecessary distractions. In fact, that interest was not the problem at all, but rather the ideological frame built round them, and the influence in shaping that of Milne and Unite hatchet man and inveterate Stalinist Andrew Murray.

Breaking convention after the Skripal poisoning, even the Press Association quoted Milne by name rather than a "Labour spokesperson" as dismissing or questioning the role of Putin's Russia. As Andrew Fisher's resignation letter, which went public in September 2019 and is covered again in this book, revealed, Milne sought to stop a tweet from Corbyn mentioning the Russian bombing of Syria, and removed references to Russia's role in Ukraine from a Corbyn speech.

When Corbyn's social media manager tweeted about Corbyn being "disgusted" by an antisemitic banner outside Labour conference, Milne chastised him and complained that the tweet has caused friction with some pro-Palestine groups and *Mondoweiss*.

Even Ian Lavery, with some of the most stridently pro-Corbyn, *Morning-Star*-wavelength views in the Shadow Cabinet, is reported as remonstrating: "Why can't you just say sorry? Just do it, man", in a conference call after Corbyn squirms on TV (26 November 2019) when questioned about Labour Party members going on about "Rothschild conspiracies".

Corbyn, we're told, tends to talk only with Jewish activists who already agree with him. He remains close to Sue Lukes an Islington councillor and JVL member. When options for how to respond on antisemitism are put to Corbyn, he is said always to ask: "What does Sue Lukes think?"

Andrew Murray appears to have given more time, or more thought, to his interviews with the authors (Milne is never quoted directly). He comes across as more considered, and more as an intellectual advising LOTO on strategic direction than as an enforcer. The book confirms that Murray mooted Labour supporting one of May's Brexit deals, in order to get Brexit "out of the way", and to stop the Tories presenting Labour as frustrating Brexit. Like Milne, he voted Leave in the 2016 referendum.

McDonnell and his ally Fisher are written as The Project's more dynamic but also more pragmatic faction. McDonnell pushes for more conciliation with the Parliamentary Labour Party [PLP], whom Corbyn is clearly exhausted by. He develops friendly relations with Alistair Campbell over Brexit and he uses his friendship with former Civil Servant chief Bob Kerslake twice to reorganise LOTO. He opposes the removal of Tom Watson, the disciplining of Margaret Hodge. He is much more bothered about the harassment of Luciana Berger. He drags LOTO towards at least a fudge on Brexit.

DETERMINED

The book gives us very little sense, other than McDonnell being determined that The Project win an election, of why McDonnell does this. It does not consider real political differences, as distinct from differing tactical calculations, as a factor in the rows about Brexit and about antisemitism.

Lavery and Jon Trickett are presented as the hardest pro-Brexiters in the Shadow Cabinet, but McDonnell is presented as just having a mysterious overnight conversion to the Remain cause.

The nearest the book gets to touching on political principles is when Michael Chessum is quoted as saying that the majority of Labour members opposed Brexit because it is a nationalist project committed to ending free movement. Where the book does mention pressure from the membership, it is really only as an aside to the boiling conflicts in the top circles.

The "Corbynsceptics" of the PLP do not come off well in this book. Neil Coyle MP sends repeated boorish texts to Corbyn with no reply, appearing as a sad act shouting into a void. The MPs who became Change UK, are portrayed as disoriented by the two egos of Chuka Ummuna, who everyone can see is big-headed, and Chris Leslie, who spends most of his energy on decrying his colleagues on the Labour right who refuse to leave.

WATSON

Peter Mandelson is described as trying to regroup the right-wing "stay and fight" brigade around Progress and Tom Watson. Mandelson advises Umunna he stands no chance and might as well join the Lib Dems (as he eventually did).

Tom Watson is a tragic bully who lost his way. He had long been considered a quitter by his internal opponents on the Labour right, but his mandate from the membership as elected deputy leader put him on the spot to lead the Labour right's rearguard action. His half hearted attempt to set up the Future Britain group in March 2019 with the blessing of Mandelson and Gordon Brown does very little to dent LOTO, though it does dent Change UK.

Eventually he retires from politics (on 6 November 2019), after giving five minutes' thought to an offer of running in Lewes as a Lib Dem at the 9 December 2019 election.

The Labour staff in Southside under Iain McNicol fare badly in the book. They are shown as having utter contempt for the growing Labour membership after 2015 and for their new bosses.

By the time of the 2019 election, relations in the shadow cabinet, primarily over Brexit and antisemitism, are, we are told, at an all-time low. As Johnson's government loses its majority, intense squabbling develops over whether to push for a Brexit referendum or for an election. By the time the crunch comes, both sides are weary and have low hopes.

We are taken through Labour's almost-daily dropping of new policies on the electorate during the 2019 election campaign, many not drawn from the conference or even discussed in the shadow cabinet, presenting that as shaped by a desperate semi-belief that a shopping list of good things can turn the polls with weeks to go.

Left Out is far from a definitive history of the period. But it gives one angle on how a politically ill-prepared and ideologically-incoherent left leadership can flounder when it has no clear plan to neutralise a largely hostile parliamentary party, and it fails even to try to mobilise a potential mass movement. ☐

Stand firm for right to protest!

By Colin Foster

On 5 September, a trans rights protest (bit.ly/t-r-5s) scheduled for Parliament Square, London, was cancelled by its organisers because the police threatened them with mass arrests.

The organisers wrote: "On 3 September we liaised with the Metropolitan Police and they assured us, after the news of Piers Corbyn's arrest [on 29 August, at a Trafalgar Square anti-virus-precautions protest] that there would be no risk of arrests or fines because our protest posed no risk of danger.

"[Then] on 4 September the police called us and informed us that there is a likelihood that us, any participants, stewards and even British Sign Language interpreters of the Trans Rights Protest [would] be arrested on 5 September".

Many other demonstrations of different sorts have taken place and are due soon. The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign held its regular monthly protest at the Chinese Embassy the same day, with care but with no trouble from the police.

Far-right anti-asylum-seeker protesters blocked main roads in Dover on 5 September. Ten were arrested, but on charges like "assaulting an emergency worker", not on the basis of any ban on protests. Migrant rights supporters held a counter-protest elsewhere in Dover, and had no trouble with the police.

Extinction Rebellion protests have incurred arrests, but that is not new for them. NHS workers are confident about their protests on 12 September.

There are regulations restricting protests, under the Coronavirus Act, which are periodically amended. As it stands, it is legal to organise a demonstration of over 30 people as long as:

- you are a "political campaigning organisation" (in a broad sense)
- you've done a risk assessment (which does *not* have to be shown to or approved by police)
- you take reasonable measures to reduce risk (covid-distancing, using hand sanitiser, wearing masks).

Even if some people attending your demonstration behave recklessly, as long as the organisers have taken reasonable measures to promote virus-precautions, they're covered.

Moreover, if the protest is static, it is covered by different legislation. Organisers do not have to liaise with the police or get permission for static rallies. There is no need for risk assessments.

If protesters keep our nerve, and the labour movement stands up for civil liberties, then we can sustain our rights.

The dangers are shown by events in New South Wales, Australia. Back in early June the police got a court to ban a Black Lives Matter protest, overturned on appeal only minutes before the 60,000-strong march started.

Since then the police have squeezed down protest rights bit by bit. A new appeal, "Restore the right to protest in NSW", facebook.com/DemocracyNSW, says:

"Following the NSW police's recent interpretation... any public gathering of more than twenty people, for the 'common purpose' of protesting, no matter how distanced the participants or large the area, is deemed illegal."

"Yet in NSW, up to 10,000 are now allowed to attend Rugby League matches, and 50 in a single corporate box. Three hundred can be in a casino, pub or restaurant.

"Not a single documented case of coronavirus spread has occurred at a protest in Australia [where the public-health authorities have much wider tracing of infection sources than in Britain]. We now know that outdoor activities, combined with mask-wearing, are one of the safest things you can do..." ☐

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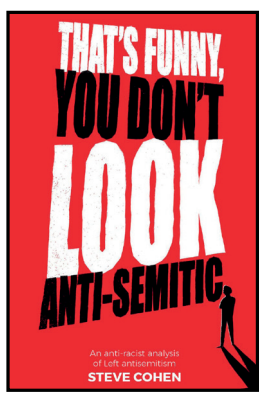

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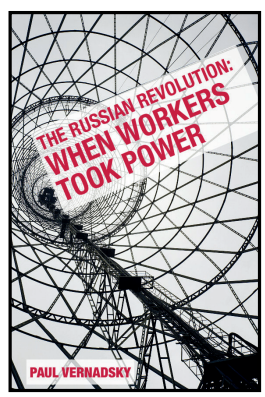

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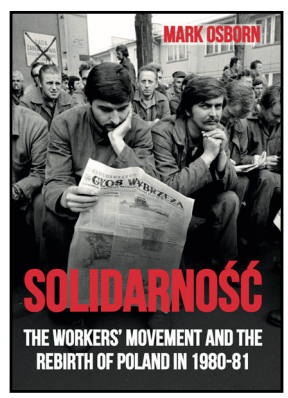

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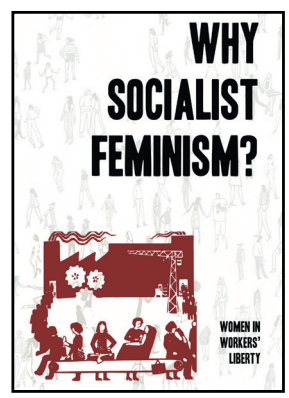

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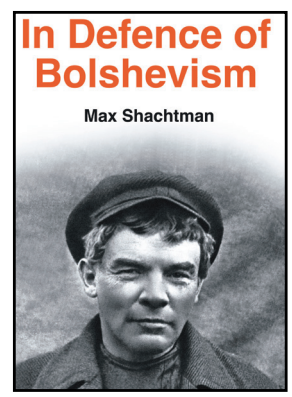

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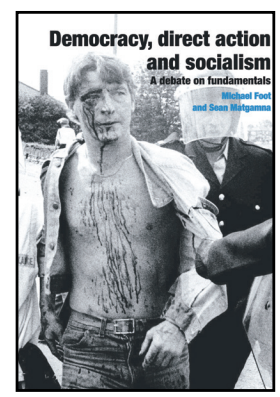

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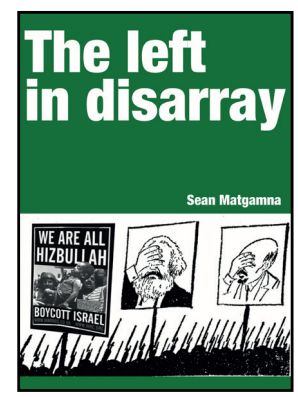

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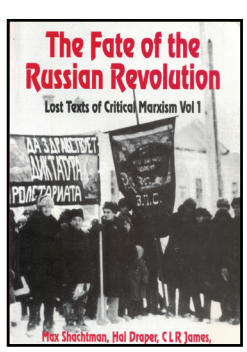

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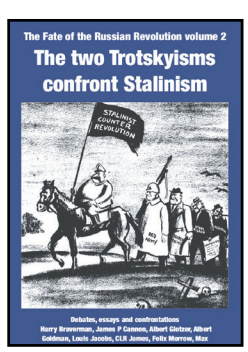

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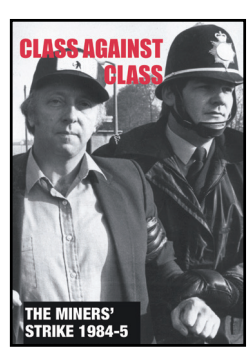

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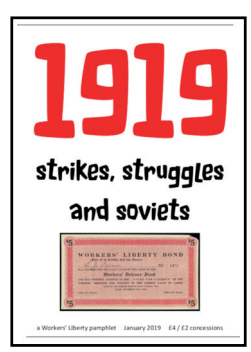

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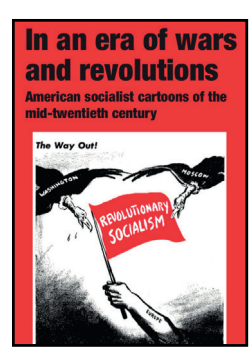

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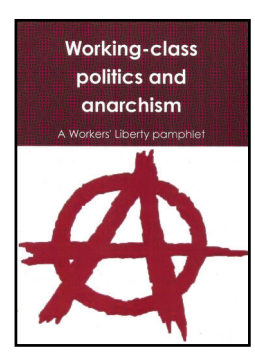

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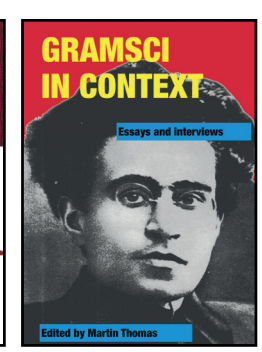

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GMB: democracy vs Regional Secretaries

By Ann Field

The GMB union is institutionally sexist. There is gender-based job discrimination. Branches are male-dominated, with deliberately engineered limits on female participation. And bullying, misogyny, cronyism, and sexual harassment are endemic in the union.

That is the conclusion of Karon Monaghan QC's report on her investigation into the GMB trade union, commissioned by its Central Executive Council (CEC) in late April, and published on 2 September.

Monaghan's remit was to investigate the GMB's record on responding to complaints of sexual harassment, assess the effectiveness (or otherwise) of GMB policies and procedures relating to sexual harassment, assess the impact of the broader GMB culture on dealing with sexual harassment, and make appropriate recommendations.

The report also concludes that real power in the GMB is wielded by the (unelected) Regional Secretaries, all of whom are male (and always have been). They use that power to manipulate and bully lay members, from branch level up to and including the CEC:

"There are, and have been, regional secretaries who maintain power largely through bullying, threats and victimisation and by creating a climate of fear. This means that officers and lay members in the regions do what the regional secretaries instruct them to do."

Regional Secretaries are also a majority on the union's Senior Management Team, which is the body which really runs the GMB. The power which Regional Secretaries exert over lay bodies at national and regional levels allows them to decide on their own successors, which guarantees a perpetuation of the same culture of bullying and intimidation.

When a GMB member is elected by lay members as a shop steward or workplace representative, they have to be confirmed by the Regional Secretary before taking office. This allows Regional Secretaries to control branches. They decide who will have access to facility time, and if or when to withdraw their credentials

In contrast to the power wielded by Regional Secretaries, the report exposes the ineffectiveness of the lay structures of the GMB. Nominally the supreme decision-making body of the GMB between conferences, the CEC subordinates itself to the Regional Secretaries:

"On occasion the Regional Secretaries bully CEC members to vote in particular ways. It was put to me that 'nothing happens [at the CEC] without the Regional Secretary whispering in the ear of their delegate.' Evidence I received indicated that the CEC has at times acted as no more than a 'rubber-stamping' body."

Regional Councils meet only once every six months, although the smaller Regional Committees which they elect meet more frequently. But, in practice, Regional Councils and Committees "have very little real authority, if any. It is the Regional Secretaries who hold the real power, along with the General Secretary."

The union's National Equality Forum is weak and lacks power. Some Regional Equality Forums promote best practice, but others "are not effective and do little by way of promoting equality."

As for branches, the most basic unit of lay-member democracy, 40% of them are moribund.

"The lay structure formally dominates under the Rules," concludes this part of the report, "but despite all the powers outlined above, the real power in the GMB rests with the Regional Secretaries and the General Secretary."

"The practices and culture of the GMB are so entrenched that a complete transformation is required" says the report. The report concludes with 27 detailed recommendations to help achieve that transformation. But some of them point in different and contradictory directions.

"External monitoring, auditing and, if needed, support" should be provided by the TUC, described as "the obvious organisation to take up that role." But that would be to entrust the reform of one trade union bureaucracy to another, and do nothing to promote lay-member power.

At the same time the report rightly recommends that the CEC and other lay bodies "claim and exercise the authority the Rules give them over the General Secretary, Regional Secretaries and the regional bodies."

The change required in the GMB, says the report, "will be traumatic." Lay members need to organise to bring make that prediction a reality. In the language of the GMB's booze-ridden male-dominated culture identified by the report, it's a case of: "Time, gentlemen, please!" ☐

Upcoming livestreams

Workers' Liberty have a schedule of videos going "live". Please tune in and share! The videos (often subtitled) will "go live" at the times below on our facebook, and (if not before) instagram, youtube, and often twitter. From Wednesday 5 to Tuesday 11 August:

Thursday 10 September, 1.30pm: *Solidarity* editorial with Stephen Wood (see page 5)

Monday 14 September, 1.30pm: Marxism and autism, with Janine Booth and Dinah Murray

Tories lurch towards "no deal"

By Martin Thomas

Boris Johnson, according to the Financial Times on 7 September, is planning legislation (to be published 9 September) which will contradict the Withdrawal Agreement already signed with the European Union on state aid to industrial bosses and on trade checks between Britain and Northern Ireland.

And Johnson said on 6 September that if he doesn't get an outline deal on free trade post-Brexit with the EU by 15 October, then he will "move on". In other words, to a "no-deal" Brexit.

We can't judge how much Johnson is bluffing to try to spook the EU into last-minute concessions, and how much he positively wants "no deal".

At the very least, there's a serious risk of "no deal". That is an outcome which Parliament voted to block in 2019. Which almost all shades of opinion among Labour MPs and trade unions condemn. And which a big majority in the general population oppose.

Labour has said nothing much about this, beyond shadow Northern Ireland minister Louise Haigh saying that the flouting of the Withdrawal Agreement would be "viewed dimly by future trading partners".

By most, probably, but not by Donald Trump's USA, which would welcome the UK cutting its other trade options and giving itself little choice except to do a trade deal with the USA on US terms.

Why are the Tories even considering "no deal" disruption as an option?

Negatively, because it looks possible (though still difficult) for them to hide the disruption of "no deal" under the disruption of the pandemic. And, positively, because for them there are advantages to doing Brexit in a chaotic, off-balanced, improvised way.

That way makes it easier to use Brexit as a lever for social regression and worker-bashing, via has been called "Disaster Capitalism", where plunderers pick up on chaos in order to slam through their plans.

"Disaster capitalism" could clear the way for the Tories to cut or abolish the mild protections which workers in Britain have acquired through EU standards, on working hours, on agency work, on protections when work is contracted-out or switched to a different contractor, and on redundancy payments.

The Tories have already published an Immigration Bill, which starts its Committee Stage in the House of Lords on 7 September. It is written to license the government to write regulations as it pleases. It will stop free movement, go with an even more punitive attitude to asylum-seekers, and make more workers' status dependent on the say-so of employers.

"No deal" is not what it says on the can. No one, not even Tory free-market ultras, believes that Britain can "build a wall" in the Channel and dispense with negotiations with other countries.

"No deal" means mainly that the deal-making will be helter-skelter, ad hoc, and tilted towards closer ties with Trump's USA. It will contain everything bad about the EU, but none of what is good: the lowering of borders, the restraint on race-to-the-bottom competition between states, the limited levelling-up, the scope for political scrutiny of the rules: in general, the creation of a broader terrain for cross-border working-class action.

A US trade deal, as the alternative axis for the way Britain inserts itself into the world economy, will mean many more rules dismantling safety protections, opening out areas to international capitalist investors, and giving them legally-enforceable rights against future government moves to regulate them. It will mean that even if Biden wins in November, and with double force if Trump wins.

What is behind Labour's silence? As in 2019, the "tactic" is to allow a Tory Brexit formula to go through, but to go through with Labour criticising it.

That way, Labour can avoid being seen as "blocking Brexit", but at the same time be free to criticise the outcome. "Nothing we can do about it now, but that's not the way we wanted Brexit".

But any form of Brexit that the Tories push through, and especially a "no deal" Brexit, will be a setback for the working class.

Labour activists should demand that Labour campaign urgently against Brexit, and positively for free movement and for a socialist united Europe. ☐

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Slow days

Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

After the intensity of the Outage [when the plant is shut down for two weeks for maintenance which can be done only when it is offline], normal working feels lethargic, and our days feel short. So much has been repaired that there are only routine jobs to do.

We have several improvement projects planned and ready to go, but the maintenance budget is exhausted, and our manager won't order the parts required. The team of mechanical fitters has divided once again into old friendship groups and patterns which I find hard to break into.

Frustratingly, we are now carrying out daily repairs on one piece of pipework which is too flimsy to do its job – the fluid inside it rushes around with such force that it rattles the pieces of plastic pipe apart. The whole pipe leg needs to be replaced with steel, but the budget won't allow for it yet. We have the time to repair it, and it is our job, but it's very disheartening to see your work broken and broken again pointlessly, when the problem could be easily eliminated.

Another apprentice installed some new lights in one of the workshops, and the worker that uses them asks that they be angled slightly differently. This pointless task keeps the apprentice busy for a day – I grit my teeth and roll my eyes.

I observe others working. An external company come in to change some valves on the crane grab's hydraulic system. The contractor spends some time trying to get the crane to move by remote; neither of us can figure out why the grab won't lower, and have to waste time getting help. Once the grab is down, the engineer tests the fluid pressure on each side of the cylinders which move the "petals" on the grab. He ensures that there is a pressure difference between each side, enabling the cylinders to move smoothly, all while scowling at his manager looking over his shoulder.

Another day I help some valve engineers test the high-pressure steam safety valves in the turbine hall; a process known as trevi testing. A hydraulic press is placed on top of the valve and pulls the spring upwards, simulating an increase in pressure within the pipe. Once a given pressure is reached – 8 bar – the valve should open by itself and release steam safely out the chimney. The engineers – who both have huge beards and are a good laugh – adjust the tension on the valve spring until these conditions are met.

For several mornings the qualified fitters are nowhere to be found, and the other apprentice and I kick around drinking coffee and trying to find jobs to do. I go up to the control room.

"Where are the fitters?"

"J was just here – he's gone down to the workshop."

"Ah, I was just there. What about D?"

"He's delivering a motor to Sulzers."

"Tricians?"

"In shop."

"Anything going on up here?"

"Nope."

Me and J, the other apprentice in our team, try to keep ourselves occupied and second-guess where our tutors might be. We clean the lime venturi; we hammer and press a door back into its frame; we fix the discharger pipe again; we do greasing runs; we replace oils; we drink too much coffee; we have long, irritated lunches.

Everyone is a bit restless and on edge, we feel useless and left out. I'm looking forward to having the knowledge and trust to work alone. ☐

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a Combined Heat and Power plant.

Stop this deportation!

Dozens of protesters gathered outside the Home Office on Friday 4 September to demand that Osime Brown not be deported to Jamaica.

Led by Osime's family, the protest was supported by Autistic Inclusive Meets (AIM), Neurodivergent Labour (NDL) and RMT's London Transport Regional Council. Osime's mother, sister and stepfather told how he had been imprisoned under "joint enterprise" law simply for being present when a mobile phone was stolen, and that an order has been issued to deport him when he is released next month.

The family left Jamaica when Osime was four years old; he has no knowledge of the country and knows nobody who lives there. Osime is mentally and physically unwell, has learning difficulties and is autistic, but his trial did not take into account how this might have led him to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Representing RMT and ND Labour, Janine Booth told the protest that "joint enterprise" is unjust in principle and racist in practice, as ixt systematically criminalises black youth.

Nadia Whittome MP gave her full support, telling protesters how the injustice of Osime's story had moved her. Afterwards, Nadia met with campaign organisers to plan the next steps. With sufficient pressure, we can push the government to intervene and prevent this deportation.

More info: autisticinclusivemeets@gmail.com – sign and share the petition: bit.ly/osime-b ☐

Four films to watch

Mini film reviews

Two films worth watching on Bosnia are *Walter Defends Sarajevo* (from 1972, probably the "model" Partisan film), and *Gbravica* (2006), where a Muslim mother hides from her daughter the fact that she was raped during the 1992-5 war.

On the revolution against slavery, *Lydia Bailey* is a film made in 1952 about Toussaint's Haiti. It was a major Hollywood studio film, and it focuses things through the eyes and adventures of an American visitor; but it is sympathetic to the slaves and Toussaint. The second hero is a Haitian who is portrayed a hundred miles from how black people usually were in those days.

Another film from the same year which sympathetically shows a slave revolt is worth mention, though not in the same league as *Lydia Bailey*. It is called *Caribbean Gold*. ☐

• Thanks to John Cunningham and Sean Matgamna for the recommendations, inspired by recent Workers' Liberty meetings on these same topics

The 80% gesture

John Moloney, PCS AGS

The government has announced a target of 80% of civil service workers to back in the office from the end of September. They want to use the civil service as a beacon for their wider "back-to-work" drive. It's a crude political gesture, effectively a form of virtue signalling.

Currently, 74% of civil service workers are still working from home, so to go from that to 80% being back in the workplace would be a huge leap. In reality the target is not serious; the government plans to count people who come into the office for just one day a week as part of the 80%. The safety measures the employer has agreed to mean it wouldn't be possible to accommodate that many people in offices and maintain distancing anyway, but the rhetoric could lead to our members being put under pressure.

The union's National Executive Committee meets on 9 September, and will decide our collective response. Our policy remains that everyone who wants to continue homeworking should be able to do so, and we'll reinforce that message. We'll also remind members of their individual rights, including the right to refuse unsafe work, but we also need to discuss a collective response. One option is to ballot members across departments to see if they'd be prepared to take industrial action against the "back-to-work" push.

We've now begun balloting our members at London's Southbank Centre for industrial action against job cuts, and our dispute at the Tate is continuing. The consultative ballot for action of our members in DWP Job Centres, where management are imposing extended opening hours, concludes on 7 September, and the union's Group Executive Committee for the DWP will meet the following day to discuss the result and possible next steps. We're expecting an overwhelming majority to vote for action, so the obvious next step would be a formal ballot for action. ☐

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

Preparing to fight Tube cuts

By Ollie Moore

Members of Tube union RMT in London met via Zoom on 7 September to discuss the union's response to cuts which the union expects to be proposed by an ongoing audit into Transport for London and London Underground's finances.

The audit was ordered by the Tory government as part of a funding bail-out given to TfL in June, with accountancy firm KPMG appointed to run it.

There was a strong consensus in the meeting to oppose any and all cuts recommended by the review. Several members emphasised the need for RMT to go on the offensive against arguments from the bosses and government that TfL/LU needs to be "self-financing", and that cuts were necessary due to the collapse in fare revenue during the pandemic. "We didn't cause the crisis, we shouldn't have to pay for it", argued one rep.

There was debate over the best time to launch an industrial action ballot. Some, including supporters of *Tube-worker*, the rank-and-file bulletin published by Workers' Liberty, argued that RMT should ballot as soon as administratively possible. Others argued it would be better to wait until the details of the KPMG audit are known.

Drivers' union Aslef is already balloting its members on LU, with the ballot due to close on 17 September. RMT members in Service Control on London Underground's Victoria line are also currently balloting for industrial action, in a local dispute against management bullying, with the ballot closing on 15 September. ☐

• Tubeworker/ Off the Rails joint meeting, Thursday 17 September, 16:00-18:00: fighting "colour bars" on the railway. Zoom: us02web.zoom.us/j/8784354612 – Facebook: bit.ly/rail17s

Deliveroo: against sackings

By Michael Elms

Deliveroo drivers in Sheffield are set to take further action against large national partners of Deliveroo in the week starting 7 September.

Despite the risks that drivers have taken during the pandemic to keep the service rolling, and in spite of the fact that Deliveroo expects its hyper-exploited workers to themselves bear the costs of running and insuring their vehicles, the fees paid to the drivers continue to fall.

Worse, a whole series of drivers in Sheffield find themselves being terminated with no reason, no warning, and no right of appeal. On the evidence of anonymous complaints (made by whom? Racists bent on mischief? Restaurant bosses with a grudge or a taste for union-busting? Small-minded curtain-twitchers who take an arbitrary dislike to a driver one night?), a whole series of workers have been given the sack, with no thought for either their long records of service or their children. And at the same time, millionaire Deliveroo founder Will Shu is beating his chest about his paltry contribution to the new "child food poverty task force" in an attempt to drum up business.

Drivers in Sheffield have in recent weeks proven that they have industrial muscle, shutting down the whole food delivery service as an opening move in their campaign, and then effectively closing the doors on a restaurant run by a particularly bad boss. They will intensify their campaign of action in the weeks to come, until their fellow union members are reinstated, and Deliveroo moves on the real cause of child poverty – low pay. ☐

£7,634 towards £10,000

With donations from Eddie, John and Andrew of £500, £20 and £10 respectively, we are now less than £2,500 from our target of £10,000, and just over 70 days away from the end of the drive on 21-22 November.

We now have an opportunity, but possibly a short one, for an uptick in in-person activity. This is the first tabloid Solidarity since 18 March. We are trialling a new "endorsed folded" format. Feedback from our readers would be welcome.

Returning to the usual tabloid format obviously enables to increase the content in the printed paper, rather than having to have much of it online-only, or with a full version online and only an abridged version in print. It also brings an increase, albeit quite a small one, in the cost of printing, partly because we will now be printing many more copies.

The opportunities to distribute *Solidarity* further are there, and we aim to increase subscriptions and general sales in the coming weeks.

The fundraising is also helping to develop our new Workers' Liberty e-commerce shop. That should be ready to launch before the end of the year, and will make buying our books, pamphlets and merchandise easier and more accessible. We are also investing in better equipment for sound recordings for our online meetings. We will keep these going permanently, even as we return to more face to face meetings.

All donations help to improve the output we can produce, and help to win more socialists. ☐

• workersliberty.org/donate

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Next steps on NHS pay

By Angela Driver

The cross-union campaign "NHS Workers Say No!" is organising a day of demonstrations on 12 September. (London: 11am from the BBC, Portland Place. Info for other cities: bit.ly/pay-n).

This follows a round of protests in many cities on 8 August, when NHS workers across the country came onto the streets to demand a pay rise, an earlier London street protest on 29 July, and workplace actions across the country.

The demand is that all NHS workers (including those contracted out) get a 15% pay rise. That does not fully make up for the loss in pay NHS workers have had over the last decade due to pay freezes. When taking inflation into account, NHS workers have lost 20% in real terms.

Pay is not the only issue for health workers, who have suffered great stress and danger during the pandemic and over many years of the NHS being run with cuts and privatisations on a just-scraping-by, nudging-full-capacity basis.

But pay is a national issue that can unite workers to organise together. Nurses and other health workers, especially the low paid and those on the top of their pay bands, have felt their pay drop over recent years. There is a direct link between pay and the other most immediate issues for many health workers – workload, stress and safety.

The NHS is about 100,000 workers short, including 43,000 nurses, even on official figures. This vacancy rate has a massive impact on day-to-day working, with, for example, qualified staff being moved around from ward to ward, to provide cover away from their speciality.

This pay campaign so far has been driven from the grass roots, by some workplace union branches and sometimes by hospital workers, especially nurses, who hadn't even been particularly active in their union before. It has some nominal support from the Unite and GMB unions, but the officials of those unions have not done much to build the action, and anyway neither is especially strong in the NHS.

But to win, turning round the unions and getting the possibility of industrial action is crucial. The two biggest unions in the NHS, especially among nurses, are RCN and Unison.

The NHS unions do not always coordinate their pay demands. Each union submits "evidence" and demands to the official pay review body, which then makes a recommendation to the government, and the government ultimately decides on the pay award. Some years unions smaller in the NHS, such as Unite, have rejected the outcome, but been unable to challenge the bigger unions.

RCN is calling for a 12.5% rise, but has a long record, since 1916, of never striking (the notable recent exception being Northern Irish nurses in December 2019). Unison is demanding only £2,000 flat-rate increase (about 11% for Health Care Assistants, more like 5% for longer-serving nurses), apparently wanting to target their appeal to lower paid members.

Union election

Activists are given extra leverage in Unison by the fact that the union currently has a general secretary contest underway. The main left candidates, Paul Holmes and Hugo Pierre, are known to support the NHS pay campaign, but have said nothing about it in their platforms, which have been more targeted to Unison members in local government.

Unison health branches should call on these candidates to make NHS pay a key issue. If they did that, that would put pressure on Roger McKenzie (the more leftish of the two "union establishment" candidates) to do likewise.

So far the Labour Party has done little to support NHS workers. The Labour front bench has said nothing, and Labour MPs did not figure as speakers at the NHS demonstrations on 8 August. But local Labour decision-making meetings are resuming this month after nearly six months' suspension for lockdown. Branches should call on MPs and the party to put out clear messages of support, and on MPs to join the demonstrations.

In France the government has already, in July, awarded an increase of 183 euros a months (about £2,000 a year) to all health workers. It has promised more pay rises, and to hire 15,000 new workers for hospitals. Not enough – French health workers have been on the streets demonstrating for more – but evidence of the public pressure on governments to move on these issues.

Public support for the NHS is enormous. Everyone knows that the NHS will continue to be a key service over the coming months, as the risk of further waves of Covid 19 remains high.

Even from a conservative point of view, the state requires a good health service right now. The government has increased, and knows it has to increase, public spending anyway.

The Tories won't budge without pressure. If the campaign is continued on the streets, and taken into the unions and the Labour Party, we can produce that pressure. ☐

Young Labour: democracy, struggle, internationalism

By Steve Michaels

Set up to back internationalist, class-struggle candidates in the current Young Labour elections (nominations close 27 September, ballot 19 Oct to 12 Nov), Young Labour Internationalists also aim to connect Young Labour activists with social movements and struggles.

In particular, they plan to get young activists involved in the NHS workers' fight, and in making solidarity with freedom struggles in other countries: Belarus, China, Montenegro, Poland... You can read their full platform at bit.ly/yl-i

Young Labour Internationalists candidates include Benj Eckford (Northern rep), Robbie Scott (international officer), and Sacha Marten (student rep).

Democracy is also a major theme of the Young Labour Internationalists platform. On Friday 11 September at 6:30 they will be running a public Zoom meeting on democracy and the Republic, along with the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform. Details: bit.ly/mi-f

There is a need for greater democracy and better culture within Young Labour and Momentum as well. Momentum ran a "primary" election to select the candidates it would recommend for Young Labour.

So far, so good. But turnout was poor: we hear that the winning candidate for one committee position reportedly won by 9 votes to 7. (Possibly because they were so poor, actual voting numbers have not been released by Momentum following the election).

In an organisation of tens of thousands, such figures raise the question of whether those responsible for running the primary actually wanted members to participate in it.

A number of candidates were excluded from the primary by a panel of unnamed experts and with no right of appeal, Danielle Wright, a supporter of *Socialist Appeal*, was removed for having written a tweet seeming to imply that the Labour antisemitism outcry was simply a put-up job. Cam Rose was excluded for having lent a nomination to a trans candidate (not backed by Momentum) with the explanation that they were doing it to get more trans people onto the ballot.

Democracy

Workers' Liberty strongly disagrees with what Danielle Wright wrote in her tweet. But that would make us vote against her, not exclude her from the vote.

In any democratic organisation, the membership is supreme. It is the membership, through ballots and conferences, who should decide who is or isn't a good candidate – by voting for them, or not!

To delegate that power to nameless experts is a Blairite method of politics, technocratic, obsessed with scrubbing away anyone who might not fit with a squeaky-clean image. It creates cruel, panicky, anxious, conservative and undemocratic organisations.

The decision to ban Cam Rose is especially bad after Momentum lent its support to candidates for in the Labour National Executive Committee elections who refused to give commitments on trans rights asked for by Momentum itself.

And worse still. A candidate for Young Labour under-18s officer, the leftwing climate activist Scarlett Westbrook, has reported that she has withdrawn from the running after receiving menacing messages from anonymous social-media accounts, threatening her if she does not stand aside for their preferred left candidate.

This is surely an egregious examples of online bullying on the Labour left, and against a 16 year old. Momentum and Labour should deal with it seriously.

Whoever was responsible for the bullying, it also demonstrates the degree to which the culture in Labour has been debased, including on the Labour "left". Witch-hunting, bullying, and an attitude that winning committee places for your mates is the highest virtue, all have to be swept out of Labour – right and left. ☐

Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to our pamphlets:

- The German Revolution
- For workers' climate action
- Two nations, two states
- Workers against slavery
- How to beat the racists
- Remain and rebel
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- How to fight elections
- Left antisemitism: what it is and how to fight it ☐

More: workersliberty.org/pamphlets

Solidarity

For a workers' government

Pic: CC BY-NC 2.0 bit.ly/nhs-se

REBUILD NHS FOR WINTER!

According to a report for SAGE, the government's official scientific advice committee for the pandemic, bit.ly/s200831 the proportion of people in England with Covid-like symptoms who then get a test "could be as low as 10%". And, if they test positive for Covid, the proportion who follow self-isolation rules fully is "currently estimated to be less than 20%".

The figures may be over-pessimistic (the footnote references in the report don't seem to tally). But there is no solid basis for clear *optimism* about the big majority, of those who should do so, seeking a test, getting a test, getting prompt results, reporting contacts, and then the infected and the contacts self-isolating.

Infection figures in Britain have risen since early July, and more steeply since late August, while hospitalisations and deaths continue to decrease.

There may be many factors in these apparently conflicting trends: increased testing; more "false positives"; more of those testing positive being young people who've picked up the virus from the holidays and openings of pubs and cafés which seem to have fuelled infection rises across Europe, and there being a delay until infections spread to the more vulnerable elderly.

It is unlikely, though, that the trends will remain in conflict. Virus-control efforts and the NHS will come under new stress in the winter and in the run-up.

The social measures needed to underpin and facilitate serious virus-control policy are still lacking. Scraps of them have been conceded by the Tories only under pressure. The unions and the labour movement must apply more pressure.

• Full isolation pay for all! Not just Matt Hancock's feeble £13 a day for some lower-paid workers in some areas. As of now, only about 40% even of care-home workers have access to full isolation pay.

• Rebuild the NHS! A good pay rise for all, and a big increase in budgets. Take all private hospitals into the NHS, rather than just paying them to provide overflow facilities, as the government is now doing. Bring the privatised NHS logistics into public ownership and control, and requisition industry to ensure supplies.

• Bring care homes and domiciliary care into the public sector, with staff on public-sector pay and conditions.

• Run testing, tracing, and isolation as a local public-health operation, adequately funded, instead of the current contracted-out Serco-Sitel mess. ☐

What we demand in the crisis

1. Requisition key sectors
2. Fight for workers' control
3. Make the labour movement an essential service, fighting on the issues listed here
4. Defend workers' rights. Work or full pay! Cancel rent, mortgage, and utility payments.
5. Take care of the worst-off
6. Defend civil liberties
7. International solidarity ☐

• See full text at bit.ly/what-d
• Animated video of full demands: bit.ly/demand-video