

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



**For social ownership of the banks and industry**

*Protesters on  
the 20 September  
March, Minsk (see  
back page).*



# BELARUS WORKERS FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY

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A regime which blocks workers' rights

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# The nature of the Lukashenko regime

6699 Editorial

While Belarusian and Russian troops have been staging joint military exercises ("Slavic Brotherhood 2020"), Belarus President Lukashenko's story about the events reveals the undemocratic nature of his regime.

The current wave of protests, claims Lukashenko, is the product of ten years of preparations by the USA and its "satellites" – Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Ukraine – each of which "has had their own role to play".

"Just as in Syria and Venezuela" attempts were made to undermine the electoral base of the country's leader. Tactics "borrowed from the Arab, Armenian, Polish and Hong Kong protests" were used to create unrest in the country.

Politics was transformed into an entertainment show, in which the role allocated to women as opposition leaders was "exploitation of the female sex, traditionally respected by Belarusians but which now took on a new farcical form."

The day of the presidential elections was "hour X for the attempt to carry out a Maidan Blitzkrieg". The opposition called on voters to take part in "dubious initiatives" and staged "artificial queues" outside polling stations as they closed.

"Foreign co-ordinators" attempted to mobilise Belarusians against the elec-

tion result, attack the riot police (so that protesters could be portrayed as victims of police violence) and seize government buildings.

Only timely intervention by the security forces prevented an escalation of the protests.

The "puppet-masters" then changed their tactics, transforming protests into displays of "angelic innocence", with flowers and white clothing, while "social media in Warsaw" put "plan B" into operation: the creation of parallel power structures and "sabotage of the economy and the social sphere."

Although Lukashenko remains "ready to meet all challenges", he says he is mooting constitutional "reforms".

Belarus is a presidential republic with all power concentrated in the hands of the President. Lukashenko has suggested a devolution of some powers to provincial governors and Parliament.

But real power would remain in his hands: "It must be remembered that Russia and Belarus are Slavic states, where a strong leader is necessary, a leader who has defined powers. This is where his strength lies."

Powers which the President would retain include "directing the activities of all branches of government, and defence and security, and perhaps powers to make appointments to key positions, and so on."

Lukashenko has also floated the idea of political parties, while denying that there is a demand for them: "Before introducing a party-system we need to



Pic: Serge Serebro, Vitebsk Popular News

create genuine parties. They have not been created. We have not engaged in party-building because there is no demand among people for parties."

In the 2019 parliamentary elections – condemned for fraud and irregularities by election observers – "independents" (i.e. non-independent Lukashenko nominees) won 89 seats, and candidates of political parties 21 seats.

The existing recognised parties include such as the Communist Party of Belarus, which won 11 seats in 2019. It defines the current protests as an attempt to install "contemporary fascism in the sheep's clothing of western

pseudo-democracy."

And its paper prints appalling poems in support of Lukashenko:

*He's against the West and NATO  
And against all foreign masters,  
To stop their soldiers coming here  
And their boots from marching here.  
A monument made of bronze  
Will be erected to him one day  
To the glory of his deeds through all  
eternity.*

*He is – the people's President! □*

• Belarus diaspora protest against banks linked to Lukashenko regime: [Wed 23 Sep](#), 4:30, West Plaza, Canary Wharf, London

## Unis: No classes? No rent! Student-staff solidarity!

By AWL students

Most first year uni students will have planned to stay in university accommodation this year. Most will already be locked into contracts or will have paid for the first month or term. This year, as in all recent years, rents may be so expensive they drain most, even all, of a student loan.

But this year we are also living with Covid-19. Now students are stuck in high-density barely-affordable accommodation where there is a high risk of getting the virus. If say 1 in 500 among students (an age-group with a higher infection rate) has the virus, then, statistically, among student hall-of-residence flats of 12, one in 40 will have an infected person right now, and one in six will have one by end of term if infection rates even re-

main constant. Meanwhile:

- many cannot afford to eat because they can't find part-time work to top up their loan income;
- they are cut off from the University experience of wider "real-life" socialising;
- they are cut off from the essential University experience of intensive face-to-face teaching and discussion.
- they may be threatened with disciplinary action if they are found to be not covid-distancing
- they not allowed to travel home to see friends and family because Covid restrictions stipulate they cannot return to Uni accommodation (particularly tough for students who have caring responsibilities for people at home).

Students have been conned! Universities have forced students to take up accom-

modation contracts for the Universities' financial benefit, insisting that they have to be close to the institution for face-to-face teaching, in the full knowledge that such teaching is very limited and may soon be unsustainable.

Unis will probably severely limit face-to-face teaching or close it down altogether as high infection rates develop in student accommodation and unions oppose face-to-face teaching on reasonable grounds of health and safety.

### Rent strikes

Many students will soon be feeling angry at the lack of planning and the failure to give them the choice to opt into online-only teaching early on and live at their out-of-term address for now.

Student unions and the campus unions need to develop

joint campaigns which organise direct action, including building for rent strikes when rents fall due. The campaign should demand:

- The right to get out of Uni accommodation contracts early. (And if students wish, to return to that accommodation when Covid regulations allow for it.)
- Cut the rents!
- Hardship grants for students in need;
- The right to access online-only teaching for all students;
- Study for international students to be organised during appropriate time-zones;
- Prompt access to tests and test results for both students and staff so decisions can be made more easily.

The government needs to provide emergency bail-out funds to those Universities that

need it, to stop redundancies, to employ more staff, and to cover other shortfalls in funding. □

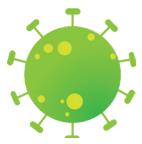


### What we demand in the crisis

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](https://bit.ly/what-d)
- Animation of full demands: [bit.ly/demand-video](https://bit.ly/demand-video)

# Care workers fight for rights



**Covid-19**

By Alison Brown

On 18 September are workers at Sage Nursing Home in north London, primarily migrant workers, organising through the United Voices of World union, threatened to strike for a pay claim of £12 an hour to give equality with NHS terms and conditions: [bit.ly/uvw-c](https://bit.ly/uvw-c)

Another important struggle for care workers lies in a successful legal case, taken by Unison against three domiciliary care companies, over time for travel counting as working time under the minimum wage legislation. A victory for this group of women zero-hours workers opens the door for action on this issue across the home care sector.

Workers in the care sector are starting to get organised. The effects of the second wave of Covid in the sector are likely to make the issues even more acute. Solidarity from the rest of the labour movement should be a priority.

The number of positive cases within care homes has quadrupled since the start of September.

Care workers have expressed horror at the recent instruction to prepare for an increase in discharges from hospitals, including Covid-positive cases. The shambolic discharge of patients with unknown infection status in spring to poorly prepared care homes, was previously blamed for bringing Covid into the 43% of homes that reported outbreaks.

In the spring and summer English care homes reported over 15,000 Covid related deaths of residents, and by mid May 131 care workers had died.

In theory the sector is better prepared this time around. The government have promised testing for all within 48 hours prior to discharge. However, delays in test results are already widely reported. Government guidance also advises 14 day isolation for all new care home residents and states care homes "should not accept admissions if they cannot safely cohort or isolate". Many care workers have said this underestimates the difficulties of isolating people with dementia and may be ignored by some cash-stretched businesses.

The current figures show the infection rate is rising among care workers in advance of residents, suggesting that community-acquired infection rather than hospital-acquired infection is key. In this context the importance of full pay for self-isolation for workers is an ongoing priority.

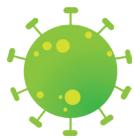
The government has announced a

continuation of the "infection control fund". The latest guidance repeats that funding should, firstly, ensure care workers only work in one setting and, secondly, receive their normal wages while isolating in line with government guidelines.

Yet the [Safe and Equal](#) campaign has shown many examples where this funding is simply not reaching the pockets of workers, who are, at best, receiving Statutory Sick Pay. The political and trade union campaigning on this issue, like that in Islington and the North West region, must be stepped up.

Unions have reported a significant rise in care-worker trade union membership during the pandemic. There is a noticeable increase in workplace organising, with new local and national networks of care-worker activists through both traditional and new unions. □

## Responses to the pandemic: equality or insanity?



**Covid-19**

By Stuart Jordan

Agitation for increased funding for mental health services continues, with various research papers highlighting or predicting high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Mental health services are in desperate need of resources.

It remains unclear whether this coronavirus pandemic and lockdown restrictions, specifically, really have made a difference to the mental illness pandemic that was already blighting the lives of billions globally long before Covid-19 came into being.

For instance, a survey from UCL headlined that 18% of respondents had thoughts of self-harm or suicide during lockdown and a further 5% had self-harmed. Those figures are shockingly high but sadly nothing new. The 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey for England and Wales found slightly higher rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation.

Some studies even suggest improved wellbeing during the pandemic. A study of 1000

year 9 students found 45% of girls and 18% of boys feeling anxious during lockdown compared to 54% of girls and 24% of boys the previous October.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has analysed data from Public Health England suggesting the number of high-risk drinkers has nearly doubled during lockdown to 19% of the adult population compared to 10.8% in February.

However, total alcohol consumption in the UK dropped dramatically during lockdown. 1.3 billion litres were drunk during the same period last year. According to an Opinion survey 7% of drinkers stopped entirely and over one third took steps to reduce their drinking.

NHS Digital [data](#) shows that even the high-risk lockdown drinking was low compared to some years back: the proportion of men and women usually drinking at increased or higher risk of harm has been steadily [decreasing](#) for years. In 2011, 34% of men and from 18% of women were in the high-risk category.

Probably, the pandemic and lockdown has meant that some are struggling more and some struggling less, with few people's mental well-being

remaining entirely unaffected. We will not know the long-term effects on mental well-being for some time. We do know that mental illness reached pandemic proportions long before the coronavirus disrupted our lives.

New figures from the ONS show more suicides in 2019 than at any point in the last two decades. [Statistics](#) from the US show the worst suicide rate since 1941 – a time before modern psychiatric medicine!

### Anxiety

The biggest ever study of anxiety, analysing 6.6 million GP records over 20 years found an "explosion" of anxiety disorders between 2008-2018. During that time anxiety among 18-24 year olds trebled. A further large scale study has found poorer young people are much more likely to suffer mental illness than their richer counterparts.

All of these studies are further confirmation of the groundbreaking work of Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, who have shown that mental illness increases as inequality increases and hits the poorest hardest.

Whatever hardships and pain the pandemic has brought, it has to a limited extent disrupted a social system that was making us mentally

unwell and provided some space for a reappraisal. To some extent it has revealed aspects of our social reality that were previously obscured.

It has revealed what work and workers are essential and who is not, and how poorly that essential work is valued and remunerated. It has revealed our common interdependence and common humanity across borders. It has revealed a world blighted by gross inequality and injustice, a complex system of racial and gender based oppression propping up one deep

world-spanning class divide.

The crisis has been an abrupt and stressful shock to many people, in part because it has shattered some of the complacent illusions by which the miserable capitalist system sustains itself. That shock will lead some into depression, paranoia, and the insane politics of conspiracy theory and millenarian cults.

For others it may lead to a fight for a less maddening and more equal socialist world. Therein lies the hope for a cure to the mental illness pandemic. □



## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom. **Until the end of October:**

**Sunday 4 October, 6.30-8pm:** Fighting council cuts

**Sunday 18 October, 6.30-8pm:** Analysing the new far right; a discussion jointly hosted by Mutiny and Workers' Liberty

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see [workersliberty.org/meetings](https://workersliberty.org/meetings)

### Plus

**Every Monday, from 21 September, 6-7pm:** [Workers' Liberty Students](#) online political discussions

**Thursdays, 8-9pm:** ["Revolution Betrayed" study group](#)

### Online calendars

Visit [workersliberty.org/meetings](https://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 to keep your schedule up to date! □

# Uyghurs suppressed? But the US has racist cops!



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

During the Cold War the cry "but America lynches blacks" was a favourite Stalinist riposte to any criticism of the USSR's human rights record.

This is known as a *Tu Quoque* – a form of debating trick based upon the perceived hypocrisy of the opponent rather than the merits of their argument.

Last weekend's *Morning Star* (19-20 Sep) carried a classic example of this with an article by Fiona Edwards entitled "The left must oppose the US cold war on China and not sit on the fence".

Ms Edwards examines "the reality of the contrasting approaches of the US and China on the major issues facing humanity – the pandemic, climate change, and human rights."

We are treated to a very partial account of China's supposedly superior

record on all those issues. Xi Jinping's handling of the Covid-19 epidemic may compare favourably with Trump's – but that's hardly something to boast about. The authorities in China suppressed the news that there was human transmission of coronavirus in January – a decision that surely had lethal consequences, not just within China but throughout the world.

Now, of course, no socialist wants to see a new cold war, and in the loathsome Donald Trump, China's apologists have their strongest card.

We'll leave aside Ms Edwards' enthusiastic claims for China's record on climate change. That would be disputed by, amongst others, the *New Internationalist*, which in October 2019 pointed out that "cutting down coal consumption at home while building up coal capacities abroad is no contradiction under Xi's ecological nationalism". Let's move straight on to human rights.

Here we encounter the classic Stalinist *Tu Quoque*: "The claims of the US

government is the 'land of the free' and an international beacon of human rights, while China is the land of human rights abuses are both hypocritical and completely absurd... This is while unarmed black people are gunned down daily by cops and Black Lives Matter protesters are brutalised by various militarised forces in the US".

All true, of course, but entirely irrelevant to the Xi regime's well documented record of authoritarianism and human rights abuses,

## Fabrications?

This could be dismissed as simple naivety until we get to Ms Edwards' treatment of what she calls "fabrications" about the Uyghur Muslims: dismissing claims of mass detention in concentration camps and of genocide as coming from the Trump administration. Actually, they come from a range of reputable sources including Amnesty International.

Edwards claims: "The facts are the Uyghur population in Xinjiang has more

than doubled in the past 40 years from 5.5 million to over 11 million, and there are 24,000 mosques in the province."

To take statistics over a period of 40 years is a sleight of hand. As *Solidarity* has previously pointed out, the current repressive regime in Xinjiang began in 2014. The regime's own statistics show a dramatic drop in birthrates in Uyghur-majority areas since 2015 and particularly 2016.

Birth rates in Uyghur regions plunged by more than 60% from 2015 to 2018. Across the Xinjiang region, birth rates fell by nearly 24% last year alone.

Since 2014 measures including forced sterilisations have been implemented to suppress the Uyghur birthrate, and the state has been actively promoting Han Chinese immigration into Xinjiang to alter the population balance. This meets the UN definition of genocide...and the *Morning Star* effectively supports it.

No debating tricks or dodgy use of statistics can hide that simple, shameful fact. □

## Dump Trump, vote Biden



Letter

Socialists in the US should be trying to build a working-class campaign to throw Trump out of power. In the last six months the Trump Administration has moved decisively in the direction of open fascism.

Violent racist, transphobic and anti-left rhetoric was always part of his repertory. Since the start of the pandemic and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter protests that has stepped up decisively. Trump has effectively celebrated far right shootings of anti-fascists and Black Lives Matter protesters. He encourages followers to take up arms against BLM and Antifa. He is trying to designate Antifa a "terrorist organisation".

Trump has used the Department of Homeland Security far outside their jurisdiction as his personal paramilitary force to attack protesters.

He has tried to use the regular army in the same way, and only the Pentagon's reluctance has stopped that.

He is signalling active support for the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory, which is giving a millenarian and apocalyptic edge to much of his support.

He is also actively trying to undermine the electoral process by attacking the US postal service and signalling that he will refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of any defeat in the polls.

US federalism and the separation of powers blocks Trump from full power. So the US is not a fascist state.



However, that is only true at the moment. As long as Trump sits in the White House, events could conspire to break the deadlock in Trump's favour.

US workers, if they have any incipient sense of class-consciousness, will be trying to drive Trump from power by all means at their disposal. One of those means is electoral. That means voting for Biden.

Howie Hawkins is a trade unionist and a good hearted reformist. But he has no traction, even by the standard of recent Green Party or left candidates, because the US working class is in an epochal struggle against fascism and he is a paper candidate not even on the ballot in 20 states.

Down the ballot, socialist candidates should be voted, for not standard Democrats. However, the Presidential election will be won by Trump or Biden, a fascist or a bourgeois liberal.

Socialists should build socialist politics against Trumpian fascism; but they do need to recognise the seriousness of the situation by being honest that voting out Trump means voting for Biden. □

Luke Hardy, Leeds

## Descriptive, not algorithmic



Letter

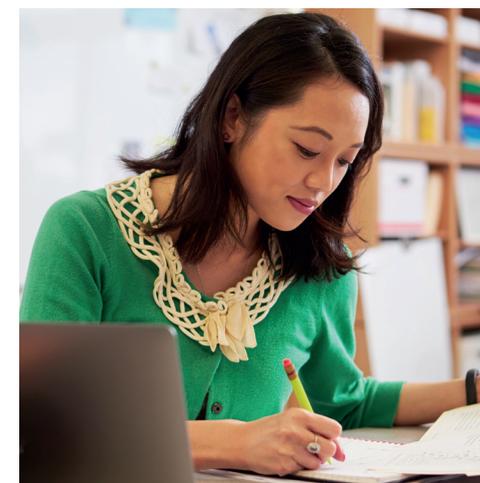
Like Martin Thomas ("In defence of Algorithms", [bit.ly/d-alg](https://bit.ly/d-alg)), I strongly support action to dismantle the current system of high-stakes summative public assessment. Unlike him, I value the role of personal judgement in formally assessing students.

In his recent piece defending algorithms Martin writes: "But it would be bad, not good, for student gradings (for example) to be decided by personal judgements rather than by objective rules".

I think it's essential to retain such judgement when grading certain high stakes public summative exams, provided that judgement is undertaken in line with appropriate assessment criteria, is suitably informed, is buttressed by a process of moderation, and is open to appeal.

I can't see how in the creative arts, in English Literature, or (though the case may be weaker) in the Humanities, appraising a student's exam performance can be better done by attempting to eliminate the human factor, if the integrity of these subjects is to be retained. Assessment in these subjects requires the student not only to parade acquired knowledge and demonstrate security in following skilled procedures, but to organise and convey original thinking and express a personal responsiveness.

The extent to which a candidate's exam-performance displays these



qualities can only be decided by interpretation and evaluation, not by "precisely-defined lists of instructions". No list of this kind can anticipate every student's response to such exam-questions or tasks as: "How successful was the 1945 Labour Government in introducing the Welfare State?" or "Make an artwork entitled 'Self Portrait'", or "Who or what do you blame for the death of Eva Smith, and why?"

It cannot define precisely enough what should or should not be rewarded in an answer. Only informed professional judgement can meet the case. Scope for judgement will be circumscribed by the wording of assessment criteria. But these work descriptively, not algorithmically.

An exam script which argues *King Lear* is a comedy must be weighed up for the case it makes, not given a low mark on the grounds that the play is tragic. □

Patrick Yarker, Norfolk

# Ukraine: Miners' protest goes underground



**Eric Lee**

By Eric Lee

Hundreds of mine workers have spent weeks underground in a desperate attempt to win concessions from their employers in Ukraine.

The protests began on 3 September at the Oktyabrskaya mine, where 29 miners started the action.

There was no response from management, so the strike began to spread.

Within a few days, 214 miners at the Rodina mine, 90 miners at the Gvardyevskaya mine and 60 miners at the Ternovskaya mine joined the protest

underground.

By mid-September, nearly 400 workers at four mines belonging to the Kryvyi Rih Iron Ore Plant were participating in the protests.

Above ground, the miners are being supported as hundreds of local miners and members of their communities held daily demonstrations.

The miners' demands include a wage increase, improved working conditions, better pensions and enforcement of health and safety regulations. They are also demanding that the mines' management, which is widely seen as corrupt, is dismissed.

Unlike most workplace occupations, an underground protest of this kind comes with serious risks to the health and safety of the workers involved. The protesting miners have been exposed to harsh conditions, with high levels of humidity and spreading fungus. They have reported negative effects on their lungs and skin.

At the start, the general director of the company spoke to the protesters in the streets and even descended into the Oktyabrskaya mine to talk to the underground protesters for ninety minutes. But there has been no dialogue since then.

The chairman of the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU), Mykhailo Volynets, is calling on management to engage in social dialogue as soon as possible, but so far with little effect.

Volynets reported that management has increased the pressure on the miners, including attempts of some members of parliament to encourage the



workers to change the leadership of their trade unions. "It seems that they want to take control of trade union organizations," he said. This would be "in violation of international labour standards and national laws."

There has been some progress. There are rumours that some of the mine managers, those accused of corruption, have been dismissed.

The mine workers are keen to get international support.

Some of them recorded an appeal to members of the European Parliament asking for help to protect their rights, and to protect protesters' families from persecution.

The global union federation representing mine workers, IndustriALL, is giving the union its full support.

Kemal Özkan, IndustriALL's assistant general secretary, supported the miners' demands. "We call on state authorities to pay all wage arrears to coal miners," he said, "and the Kryvyi Rih Iron Ore Plant management to engage in a social dialogue with unions to resolve the critical situation as soon as possible and avoid the dangerous underground protests in the future."

The Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine and IndustriALL have just launched a major new online campaign on LabourStart where people can express their solidarity and demand justice for the miners. It can be found at [bit.ly/ukr-m](http://bit.ly/ukr-m)

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

## Against Beijing and Washington

The anniversary of the founding of the "People's Republic" of China comes on 1 October. There will be a lot of "first camp" right-wing and liberal agitation on the one hand, and "second camp" China apologism on the other. The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong have jointly launched an open letter expressing international workers' solidarity and third camp socialist politics, aiming to put a flag in the ground and get some action going on 1 October. They ask activists to sign and share widely: [bit.ly/1oct-s](http://bit.ly/1oct-s)

## Ballot the school workers over safety!



**Letter**

I agree with the London school worker who says schools should be considered an essential service. I am in favour of additional measures such as exempting children from the "rule of 6", keeping outside of school activities open even in otherwise hard lockdowns.

Given that children do not appear to get particularly ill with this virus and there is some evidence they are not particularly infectious, you could imagine a Covid strategy that allowed children to carry on much as normal even if harsh restrictions are placed

on the adult population.

However, we are not in this situation. The government's priorities are elsewhere: encouraging the work-from-home section of the workforce back into their offices so they can spend in the high streets and maintaining millions of workers on the most precarious terms and conditions so that many cannot afford to comply with the isolation strategy.

It seems likely that we will be in a crisis similar to March 2020 before too long. The National Education Union (NEU) has already challenged the government on the timings of lockdowns and lockdown easings in May-June 2020 and with some success. They should prepare for the next

episode of this battle by backing up their rhetoric with action. School workers seek to win a live national strike mandate where they can walk out on health and safety grounds under conditions where it is dangerous to work i.e. when the infection rate is high. If they are successful in winning a ballot then the point at which school workers use the strike mandate can be determined democratically.

### Agitation

To achieve this would require an agitation in schools. What would that agitation look like? The NEU should point to all the many failures and random innovations that the Tories have delivered: PPE, care homes, Eat out to Help out,

Track and Trace. They should highlight the official government estimates that only 20% are complying with isolation strategy, that millions still do not have adequate sick pay, including some school workers. They should highlight that the government did not use the summer to implement the recommendations of the SAGE committee. These failures have not only led to the highest death rate in Europe but also created an environment where the virus is able to spread rapidly, meaning just two weeks into term many classes, year groups and schools are quarantining.

We have no faith in the government to do the right thing as the infection rate rises. The risk inside a school is largely

determined by the risk outside the school. A live strike mandate would give school workers democratic control over when to walk off the job if the infection rate rises. It would be a powerful lever of workers control that may force government action on the many social measures we know would make schools safer.

Presumably there is little appetite from the NEU leadership for this industrial strategy but the increased NEU membership and large meetings in May-June this year suggest there might be an appetite among the rank-and-file. We will only find out by making the argument. □

*Stuart Jordan, London*

# Making streets good for walking and bikes



## Environment

By Zack Muddle

Over 200 emergency low-traffic neighbourhood (LTN) schemes have been proposed or implemented across the country since May, when the government introduced new guidance and small amounts of funding to "promote active travel". These are proposed in at least 54 boroughs, particularly in large cities, with the majority in London.

The schemes introduce car barriers, preventing cars from using streets as "rat runs" as a way of bypassing main road traffic, and so reducing net traffic. That makes the back streets more pleasant for walking, cycling, for mobility and electric scooters, and the like.

Evidence suggests that such schemes can be successful in these aims. They bring in a net reduction of car use and ownership, and an increase in "active travel".

Schools and more workplaces reopening, coupled with anxieties about the Covid-risks of public transport, have shifted some public-transport

users to cars, and brought traffic congestion significantly exceeding 2019 levels in much of London.

Nationally, rail, tube and bus usage remain significantly below pre-lockdown levels (down to around one third, one third, and just under three fifths respectively). Cycling is up by over one fifth (with particular increases at weekends). Car use is up to 90% of February 2020 levels now, and at weekends exceeds it.

More needs to be done, and should have been done already, to support a move away from car use and towards walking, cycling, and public transport, as the economy restarts, restarting transport on a better basis. LTNs can play an important part.

There have been protests against LTNs, including by many Tories on a local level. Some opponents allege that the main beneficiaries are people in middle class neighbourhoods. They say traffic and hence pollution is displaced onto main roads, which more lower-income people live near. Some drivers feel they are, or genuinely may be, dependent on their cars.

It seems that such measures lead to a significant increase of overall walking and cycling, and a decrease of traffic not just in the immediate effected area.

However, there are small rises in traffic in the surrounding areas.

Most of the decrease, but not all, seems to be people cycling, walking, etc. rather than driving different routes. Cycling and walking become more attractive. People who didn't previously cycle feel able to build up their confidence in low-traffic areas, and so people feel empowered to stop driving. Part of it, however, is just driving becoming more inconvenient.

So anti-LTN concerns cannot be dismissed as just fictions of car-obsessed people who don't care about the environment. Maybe some short term inconvenience to some workers is unavoidable in pursuing essential environmental aims. Exactly how the measures are implemented and communicated, and, more importantly, other measures taken alongside them, can change to what extent LTN change is and is experienced as an inconvenience.

With adequate Covid-precautions even the Tube could safely support significantly higher numbers than currently. We need improved, subsidised, affordable public transport. We need improved bike infrastructure, schemes for people to get free or cheap bikes and repairs. Extended low-emissions zones and wider pavements can mit-



igate potential issues with increased traffic on main roads. Schools should encourage student travel to school in "walking buses" or "cycling buses". □

- More on the kind of measures we need: [bit.ly/travel-l](https://bit.ly/travel-l)

- The first youth climate strike since lockdown has been called for [Friday 25 September](https://bit.ly/25-September), in a variety of forms around the world depending on Covid-19 circumstances. A year since the day which called on workers and trade unionists to join youth strikers, environmental action by workers and young people is more important than ever. A map of actions: [bit.ly/s25-map](https://bit.ly/s25-map)

# How I got 100 people out to back the Uyghurs

By Sade Sawyers

Sade Sawyers, who organised a protest for the Uyghurs at the Chinese embassy in London on 11 September, spoke to Sacha Ismail from Solidarity.

I watch a lot of political videos on YouTube, and about a month ago I came across one about the Uyghurs. Before that I hadn't actually heard about the issue, even though I'm pretty up to date with current events. I was shocked – I ac-

tually ended up crying, which I wouldn't normally. I started tweeting about it and got into discussion with a friend, decided to organise a protest and it went from there.

I didn't expect such a good response – I thought it would be me and a few others. Getting eighty or a hundred people on a weekday at short notice was amazing. The call going viral on social media helped, but it was encouraging people actually turned up.

Going forward, I want to continue using social media and the connections we made in the media, and it has also been good to link up with Uyghur Solidarity.

There is growing awareness of the Uyghurs among young people. Paradoxically, part of it may be because of statements from right-wing figures like Trump. They raise it for their own reasons, even though their own records aren't great, but it isn't necessarily right-wing people who pick it up and run with it. The young people who came on our demo were clearly left-wing. More generally, once young people pick up an issue it starts to get out into certain networks.

I hope the buzz is still there and can be developed. Huge numbers of Uyghur people are in literally life-threatening conditions. We need to push the protests further and make them bigger. We need to aim to actually end the forced labour and get people released from the camps.

**What would you say to those**



**who argue that by protesting against the Chinese government we are strengthening right-wing governments in the US and Britain?**

I'm left-wing, in fact I'd say hard left, but sometimes we focus on ideological labels too much, when we should look at the issues. How do we support people facing oppression? When I called for the protest I got a sort of racial backlash on Twitter; there were people asking why as a non-Muslim black

woman I was raising this. It's ridiculous. If I was in a concentration camp I wouldn't care if the people protesting were black, white or pink as long as I got solidarity.

Clearly the Chinese government is not socialist. It's capitalist in socialist clothing. Look at the huge wealth gap they have. It's a police state. That's why socialism has got such a bad name, because of countries that claim to be socialist but are not in any way. □



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- [The 1945 Labour Government: Causes and lessons](#) – intro

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# A socialist voice in difficult times

By Keith Road

Workers' Liberty [backs](#) the Green Party US campaign of Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker, as the only campaign in the US presidential election to raise explicit socialist demands and have a labour movement orientation.

There are other socialists of some stripes running, but on a purely sect-building basis. Hawkins is a member of the revolutionary socialist group Solidarity, and has been a long term activist in the third-camp socialist tradition. In some ways, his is the best socialist Presidential campaign for many years.

But it also faces great difficulties.

His choice to run as a Green Party candidate comes with both advantages and disadvantages. The Green Party already has ballot access in a number of states and groups across the US. But the Green Party is not a socialist party, and there are a lot of conspiracy theorists, kitsch anti-imperialists and anti-vaccination campaigners within it.

It is a federal organisation, and different states have vastly different Green Parties. Many Green activists consider themselves to be socialists, and Hawkins won the Green primaries with a manifesto in favour of an "eco-socialist Green New Deal". Walker is also a prominent rank and file trade unionist and socialist campaigner.

Their campaign video is explicit that workers generate a surplus that goes to

the owners of capital, and that capitalism is an unsustainable system that will destroy the planet. Possibly because of the explicit socialist turn, some local Green Parties have chosen to ignore his nomination and instead campaign for other candidates. Some have even denounced Hawkins for his "third-camp" opposition to imperialisms which clash with the US.

Hawkins does not have the name recognition that Jill Stein, the Green candidate in 2016 had. He has lost access to ballots in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, both states where Stein picked up a sizeable vote.

The issue of ballot access dominates third party campaigns in the US. As Hawkins said in an interview with *The Atlantic* (19 September), if the Democrats were really serious about democracy they would challenge the electoral college system and would make ballot access much easier. In no other "western democracy" does the governing party control election procedures in the way they do in the US.

Hawkins lost access in Wisconsin, for example, the state that Angela Walker is from, just because she changed address (in South Carolina, where she now lives) during the signature-gathering process. All signatures collected for her at her previous address were deemed invalid.

Hawkins has said he believes this campaign is the most devoid of policies any he has experienced. All the constitutional wranglings distract from

## H'2O

the issues Hawkins and Walker raise. The death of Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is likely to make the Presidential campaigns even more focused on these wrangles. If Trump rushes in a right-wing judge to replace Ginsburg with his preferred right-wing candidate before the election, that will help him in court rulings over election disputes.

That is why Google trends shows Hawkins with 0% of searches for presidential candidates. Biden has 50%, Trump 48%, and the (right-wing) Libertarian Party candidate, Jo Jorgensen, 2%.

Hawkins has the endorsement of the Socialist Party USA, Socialist Alternative, two branches of the Democratic Socialist Alliance, the Independent Socialist Group, and the Legal Marijuana Now Party of Minnesota.

However, Solidarity, the organisation where Hawkins is still listed as a member, has withdrawn its endorsement. It polled its members. The option of support for Hawkins/Walker in every state received the highest vote (47%) but lost out to a combined 48% for voting Hawkins/Walker only in states where Biden is sure to win the electoral college mandate (27%) and "Stop Trump, Fight Biden" (meaning vote Biden) (21%). □



## Agenda

We've decided to continue this experimental "endorse-folded" format for a while. Reactions so far have been either favourable or non-committal.

Some of us have already been out around university campuses with the paper plus "Workers' Liberty students" posters and leaflets. Footfall is much lower than usual, but sales have been ok considering that.

Political protests are still legal despite the "rule of six" and other measures the Tories are talking about. Although the protests look like being smaller again, they continue (Osime Brown protest 25 Sep, China protest 1 Oct, anti-Serco protest 17 Oct, maybe NHS pay protest the same day: information on all [workersliberty.org/meetings](http://workersliberty.org/meetings)

Some socialists, elderly or frail or caring for the elderly or frail, will have to stay at home, where they can do back-up activity to support the majority of socialists being active in workplaces and on the streets.

But, one way or another, we must get our message out. The left can't become "locked down" into a closed world of stay-at-home electronic-only communication just among ourselves.

Text to adapt on several issues for motions to the Labour Party and union meetings this month can be found at [bit.ly/mo-pe](http://bit.ly/mo-pe)

# Labour: arrogance and a new dullness

By Rebecca Lawrence

I flagged in [Solidarity 563](#) that the agenda for Labour Connected [the on-line event, 19-22 Sep, replacing Labour Party conference], portrayed one-way traffic to members instead of discussion with members.

There were then late amendments to insert Member Discussions following the Policy Panels, which I concede is

some further attempt at participation. However, seeing that even the Lib Dems will apparently be voting on policy at their virtual conference and Labour are not, this should be an embarrassment to Labour.

For a new brand of pseudo-conference we have been "treated" to a new slogan as well, Starmer deciding to declare "A New Leadership". Talking about unity in one breath, and trying to erase the past

five years in another breath is hardly unifying. To those who did vote for Corbyn twice and have volunteered countless hours for the party, it's an arrogant and condescending attitude that lacks any political grace.

Angela Rayner's focus on care workers was welcome, but did not move to anything solid beyond paying care workers a living wage. In her speech she cited the value

of her experience as a trade union rep, but did not include a call out to all care workers to join a trade union and organise themselves. Anneliese Dodds' speech was cautious, keen to show she is financially sensible and not "wasteful", playing into the idea that this is somehow a particular problem for Labour. When listening for anything remotely interesting or a hint of socialist politics, in a fairly long speech, I found only the mention of testing the budget against net zero carbon emissions.

Overall, I have noticed a tangible lack of buzz around the whole event, an event designed not to engage members has probably succeeded in that respect. In one of the most dramatic political periods of many of our lives, Labour Connected in contrast was remarkably.... dull. □

to demand prompt investigation by his employer into the (undisclosed) allegations on which it has suspended him, and by Unison into the (undisclosed, apparently different) allegations on which it too has suspended him.

Suspension from the union doesn't block Holmes from running. But here, as increasingly across the whole labour

movement, rules or customs which block suspended activists from speaking about charges against them, or have them suspended for long periods without even being told the charges, are harmful.

Anyone suspended should be told the charges, should be free to publicly dispute them, and should get prompt due process. □



## Democracy in the labour movement

Workers' Liberty activists in the Unison public services union have decided to support Paul Holmes in the coming general secretary election (ballot 28 Oct to 27 Nov). They also urge Holmes

## Young Labour Internationalists



Three Young Labour Internationalists candidates are running for Young Labour National Committee, on a platform of internationalism, class struggle, saving life on earth, and democratising Young Labour.

Nominations close 27 Sep, and balloting will be 19 Oct to 12 Nov.

More: [bit.ly/yl-int](http://bit.ly/yl-int)

# Shapurji Saklatvala

By Sacha Ismail

"I pay homage to the British spirit of hypocritical statesmanship... We are debating here as if the [viciously repressive] Bengal ordinances were never promulgated, as if the shooting of Bombay operatives during the cotton strike had never taken place, as if a great strike of thousands of railway workers is not even now going on in the Punjab, with men starving ... as if a great controversy is not raging, not only with the people of India but with people all over the world, whether British Imperialism, whatever its past history, is at all permissible to exist now... Is there a single British man or woman today... who would tolerate for one day a power so despotic and arbitrary as the crown, under the imperial system, is insisting upon enjoying in India?"

- Saklatvala in the UK Parliament, 1925

Struggle against the colonial imperialisms which dominated during Shapurji Saklatvala's lifetime, and in particular against the British Empire and its rule in India, was at the heart of his work – including as an MP. Not for nothing was the Member for Battersea North attacked as the "Member for India".

Saklatvala was the only MP who came from one of the empire's "coloured" subject peoples (though from a well-off background within it). He made his name in the British labour movement as a militant advocate of anti-imperialism; and he was selected in Battersea not despite but because of that. Becoming popular among many working people in the UK and India (and elsewhere), he used his unique position to try to "pull the two working-class brotherhoods together".

## Anti-imperialism and socialism

The leading members of Saklatvala's family were moderate nationalists with links to the British Liberal hierarchy. According to Communist Reg Bishop, Saklatvala's secretary as an MP, a "furious argument" with Liberal Secretary of State for India Viscount Morley – a long-standing critic of imperialism nonetheless overseeing extensive repression – was instrumental in him leaving the "Liberal mausoleum" and joining the socialist movement.

As a result of his anti-colonialism, before the First World War Saklatvala was already subject to police surveillance.

In 1911, he worked with a group of British and Indian trade unionists seeking links to support workers' struggles

in India. He wrote to leaders of the Labour Representation Committee and the TUC; the responses were disappointing and disillusioning. The project fizzled out, but prefigured the later Workers' Welfare League of India in which Saklatvala was an organiser.

The rising British labour movement was in a vague way hostile to imperialism; the LRC's first manifesto, in 1900, had called for "legislative independence for all parts of the empire". As the response to Saklatvala's 1911 appeal showed, this did not represent a committed or active priority, even when posed in simple trade union terms. Some more radical socialists were sharper and more committed, but far from all.

After joining the Independent Labour Party in 1909, Saklatvala spoke at many meetings about India and anti-colonial struggles. His ILP branch, City of London, became known as a champion of colonial liberation movements, including in Africa.

At his first ILP conference, in 1918, Saklatvala appealed to the delegates to be "more definite in their internationalism", and successfully moved a motion for Indian independence and links with the Indian National Congress.

The Russian revolution had a big impact. In a letter to Arthur Field, Workers' Welfare League of India activist and anti-imperialist collaborator in the ILP and then the CP, he described the milieu of labour activists who supported World War 1 as "rotten". The revolution inspired and re-energised him, as it did many thousands of socialists in Britain.

Saklatvala was impressed by the Bolsheviks' revolutionary commitment to socialism and internationalism – strongly in line with his view, expressed in the ILP's Labour Leader, that internationalism was not "not a secondary and remote stage of evolutionary development, but... a primary and unneglectable factor" in socialism's success.

He was struck by the parallels between Russia and India. From then on he would refer to this repeatedly, contrasting the Russian revolutionaries' emancipation and uplift of "Asiatic" peasants with the repressive policies of the British Empire.

## Battersea

Internationalist activism was a key part of how Saklatvala first made links with the labour movement in Battersea. In addition to Arthur Field, local Labour treasurer and London Trades Council secretary Duncan Carmichael was also active in the Workers' Welfare League. Battersea's labour movement had a well-established anti-imperialist tradi-



Saklatvala sitting next to James Maxton at a meeting of the League Against Imperialism

tion, rooted in a large population of Irish-background workers. In 1913 it elected the first black mayor in London, pan-Africanist John Archer, of Irish and Barbadian descent.

Archer became a friend and ally of Saklatvala's, championed his selection in Battersea North, and ran his three successful election campaigns. He arranged for him to speak on colonialism at the 1921 Pan-African Congress in London. (Later, as Labour drove out the CP, the two fell out, and Archer ran the 1929 campaign which ejected Saklatvala from Parliament.)

Saklatvala's election literature referred extensively to his background and his anti-imperialism. The main leaflet for his first election (1922) included statements from K S Bhat of the Workers' Welfare League ("unity of interest between Labour in India and Labour in Britain"), from Duncan Carmichael ("your election... would be a message of hope and encouragement to the awakening masses of our fellow workers in the East") and from the founding conference of the All-India Trade Union Congress in 1920. Even Labour leader J R Clynes managed an insipid statement about Saklatvala working to improve "the economic conditions of our fellow subjects in India".

Saklatvala raised funds not only from the Battersea labour movement but supporters in India. Shortly after his selection, he attended a meeting of Indians in London, pledging to represent their interests in Parliament too.

Straightforward racism seems to have played relatively little role in the right-

wing agitation against him. On rare occasions of anything like it, it caused uproar among his (almost entirely white) local supporters. The core line of attack against Saklatvala was anti-Communism, which stressed his opposition to Britain's "constitution" – including the empire. His foreignness was thus more or less directly invoked.

Although racism was widespread, in a situation where the UK's black and brown population was small it was not widely used as a political weapon. Loyalty to the empire was.

As an MP Saklatvala supported struggles by ethnic minority workers in Britain, including against discrimination; and fought to end the "colour bars" in restaurants and dancehalls which he learned were operating in several cities. But there is no doubt he saw anti-imperialism as his focus.

## Labour and empire

The Labour Party for which Saklatvala became an MP in 1922 was moving to the right on imperialism, as it prepared to administer the British state.

Labour spokespeople and activists, even on the left, had tended to positively advocate self-government only for India, Egypt and Ireland, with a view or implication that Britain's African colonies among others were not ready for it. There was widespread anti-black racism in the labour movement, reflected in post-war agitation around black troops from France's colonies in the occupied Rhineland. Such material was occasionally reproduced by the Communist Party.

# as the "MP for India"



The main spectrum of left opinion on India during the war was distinctly reformist, with Dominion Status inside the empire presented as the most radical option. Labour leaders encouraged the Indian national movement to work within the very limited system of representation conceded by the 1919 Government of India Act, despite continuing repression.

Saklatvala embodied and contributed to the rise of a radically different viewpoint, advocating universal decolonisation – including complete independence for India – and mass mobilisation to win it. At the same time, he was an active campaigner for reforms. Although he was sometimes consulted by the Labour leadership on colonial issues, even his more limited proposals would be ignored.

The 1922 Labour manifesto committed only to the "independence of Egypt and self-government for India". Its manifesto in 1923, when it won office for the first time, said nothing about the colonies. This was no accident. The Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald not only preserved the British Empire, but failed to make even minimal changes in its administration. It continued and even stepped up the repression against India's growing nationalist and workers' movements.

Saklatvala lost his seat for a year in 1923, so was out of Parliament during the first Labour government. Nonetheless, MacDonald et al's failure to implement even reforms in the empire was at the heart of his increasing alienation from the Labour Party. In 1924 he re-

turned to Parliament as a Communist, but with the push to force CPers out of Labour, he was no longer even formally consulted by the Labour leaders.

In 1922-3, when Saklatvala was a Labour MP and concerned not to unnecessarily antagonise the leadership, he was nonetheless vocal in Parliament about imperialism. He stressed that he was "no narrow nationalist". He intervened not just on India, but also China and African countries. He was extremely active against the 1921 Treaty the British government imposed on the Irish independence movement, the partition of Ireland, and repression of Irish republican activists in Britain. After 1924 his anti-imperialism became more outspoken still.

## Indian and British workers

Throughout his life as a socialist, Saklatvala openly advocated an independent and socialist India. "Of course", he would summarise in a 1926 pamphlet, "socialism means the destruction of the British empire". He simultaneously advocated reforms, particularly in terms of workers' rights, while India remained a colony. Later his emphasis shifted in favour of the more radical anti-colonial perspective.

From 1918 he was central to the Workers' Welfare League of India, founded by British and Indian labour activists the year before. In 1918, when the Montagu-Chelmsford report on the government of India was published, the League pointed out its indifference to appalling labour conditions there. It submitted proposals, including the

right to vote for all Indians, a mass education program, a government-led drive to push up wages, and radical changes to labour laws. It lobbied (unsuccessfully) for trade unionists to be included on the committees preparing what would become the Government of India Bill.

Threaded through the WWLI campaign was the idea that the rights and living standards workers in India should be lifted to match those of workers in Britain. This would become a very important theme for Saklatvala.

Until 1927, the WWLI was officially recognised as the British voice of the All-India Trade Union Congress. Addressing the Scottish TUC in 1923, Saklatvala sought to link the struggles of jute workers in the competing factories of Bengal and Dundee. He argued that:

"...unless there was a uniform standard of wages in the Jute Industries of Bengal and Dundee, the black worker terrorised in Bengal would deprive the Scottish worker and his children of the necessities of life.... They must be unions of human beings in the trade without geographical barriers. [Delegates should] understand that International Trade Unionism was not the ultimate development, but the first essential."

He spoke at workers' meetings in Dundee, calling for "trade unionism without race or colour consideration".

The Labour MP for Dundee, Edmund Morel, demonstrated how far behind Saklatvala the bulk of the labour movement stood by denouncing his proposals as "communist propaganda". Morel had been central to the racist campaign about black French troops in Germany.

In 1925, in the parliamentary speech quoted at the start of this article, Saklatvala developed the idea about international workers' standards:

"You had your struggles, and we have ours.... you are talking in contradictory terms... If you decide to go to India and revolutionise the lives of the Eastern people [through industrialisation], you do not talk of castes, you do not talk of Hindu and Mohammedan ideas, or of the depressed classes. When it is your intention to start cotton factories, jute factories, steel works, engineering works, post offices, railways and telegraphs, you do not say, 'We cannot do it, because India is cut up by caste, or because of Hindu and Mohammedan hatreds, or because there are depressed classes.' With just the same ease... with which you start these machines for grinding human life and freedom here, you start factories, mines, railroads and dockyards there. Nothing stands in your way then."

British capitalists used every excuse imaginable to justify not improving wages and conditions in India – just as, even without colonialism, multinationals do in lower-wage countries today.

Saklatvala stressed that, for British workers, supporting workers in India was a matter of solidarity and self-interest. If Indian workers were not pulled up to the British level, the development of industry in India would begin to "tell its tale" on the rights of workers in Britain too.

The WWLI gained significant support in the British labour movement, including not only – for a while – links with the TUC, but a range of active affiliations, including the Iron and Steel Confederation and dozens of trades councils and union branches. It brought working-class activists in Britain news of a post-war wave of workers' struggles in India.

As he developed widespread connections on the British left, Saklatvala also made links with Indian worker-activists and nationalists linked to Indian workers' struggles. Many now became leaders in India's accelerating labour movement. Saklatvala's friend Diwan Chaman Lall was first general secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress.

Saklatvala was attacked in the House of Commons for alleged hypocrisy, given that his family were large employers in India. He replied: "The Parsi capitalist class is just as abominable and as much to be avoided as the class to which the Hon. Member and his friends belong in this country." □

• More on Saklatvala and anti-imperialism next week. This article is part of a series on Saklatvala: [bit.ly/sak-s](https://bit.ly/sak-s)

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# Walter Benjamin 80 years later

By John Cunningham

Things never seemed to work out for Walter Benjamin. He failed to obtain the teaching post he wished for in Germany and, for the rest of his life, made only a precarious living through his writing.

As a Jew, he fled Germany to exile in Paris, and then had to leave Paris in 1940 as the German tanks approached. Having obtained a US visa he eventually made his way to the very south west corner of France and crossed the Pyrenees to the relative safety of Spain.

What happened next has always been unclear. On crossing the border and arriving in the Catalan town of Portbou he was told by the local police, under pressure from the French authorities, that the French-Spanish border was now closed and refugees were to be returned to France, which probably meant being turned over to the Gestapo for execution or deportation.

Rather than face that, Benjamin preferred to take his own life using the morphine tablets that he carried... just in case. It was 26 September 1940.

In an ironic and bitter twist, it turned out that the news was incorrect and the prohibition was withdrawn. The local authorities, shocked at his suicide, allowed the rest of his party to continue their journey. He could have carried on and lived.

Legend has it that he was carrying a manuscript – his life's most important work, as he remarked to his guide



across the mountains. The fate of the manuscript is also clouded in mystery. It may have been the collection finally published as *The Arcades Project* (various essays about Paris, its history, topography, its corners and alleyways). We will probably never know for sure. He was buried in an unmarked grave.

Born in 1892, Benjamin was part Marxist, part Jewish mystic, a fascinating writer but not always an "easy read". The strange mixture was probably best illustrated by two of his closest friends: the German dramatist and poet Bertolt Brecht and Gershom Scholem, brother of the German Communist Party leader Werner Scholem but a specialist in the study of the Kabbalah (Jewish mystical text) based in Tel Aviv.

In his brilliant study of Central and East European Jews, *Redemption Thought*, Michael Löwy heads the chapter on Benjamin with the apt words "Outside all currents, at the Crossing of the Ways".

Writing occupied Benjamin's life. In the mid-1960s essays such as *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and books such as *One Way Street and Other Writings* and his study of Charles Baudelaire were translated into English and much discussed on the left – indeed, done to death by academia.

To anyone attempting to understand the essence of photography and the moving image, *Art in the age...* is an essential starting point.

For me, the main interest of Benjamin lies in his various essays, book reviews and articles now available in six volumes of *Selected Writings* published by Harvard University Press and easy to access in the UK; a dazzling collection of essays on such diverse topics as Surrealism, Goethe, a toy exhibition in a Berlin museum, a critique of violence, the metaphysics of youth to name just a few.

Benjamin was part of that Jewish cultural and intellectual milieu of Central and Eastern Europe (Franz Kafka, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, György Lukács and many more) who did so much to shape that part of the world culturally and politically, and whose influences actually goes well beyond the borders of any country. After the Holocaust, almost nothing of that remains, except the books they have left us. A barbaric waste of human potential, creativity, intelligence and genius.

For those coming to Benjamin for the first I would recommend *One Way Street* as a "starter": beautiful essays many of them recollecting his childhood days in Berlin. Despite his "outsider" persona, Benjamin shouldn't be forgotten. If you are ever in Portbou (it's at the very northern end of the Costa Brava) visit his memorial plaque and put some flowers there. □

• More on the web: Esther Leslie on Walter Benjamin, *Workers' Liberty* 66, [bit.ly/el-wb](http://bit.ly/el-wb)

# Brexit: "a bit of crazy"

By Chris Reynolds

The Tories have moved fractionally on their Internal Market bill, which, by their own account, breaches the Withdrawal Agreement treaty they signed with the EU (on economic checks between Northern Ireland and Britain).

As shadow Attorney-General Charlie Falconer puts it, it's "no climbdown... only a doubling-down". The shift says only that each breach of the Withdrawal Agreement will need parliamentary assent. Dissident Tory MPs are placated, but the EU isn't.

The Tories are also hyping up conflict with the EU about "state aid" to industry. The *Morning Star* and others see this as a left-wing move by



Boris Johnson. But revolutionary socialists in France, where the government does much more "state aid" than the UK, have made *stopping* that state aid a key economic demand for decades: [bit.ly/p-d-u](http://bit.ly/p-d-u)

EU "competition policy" contains obstacles to public ownership, though they are elastic and didn't stop many banks being nationalised across the EU in 2008-9, nor the Tories re-

cently renationalising the Train Operating Companies.

The "state aid" rules are chiefly aimed not against social policy (generally less meagre in other big EU countries than in Britain) but against "wasteful subsidy races to lure investors, as happens between American states... sweetheart tax deals granted to firms such as Amazon and Ikea by Ireland, Luxemburg, and the

Netherlands" (*The Economist*, 19 September).

Socialists do not endorse "level playing-field" capitalist competition, but equally we oppose sweeteners and hand-outs to bosses. Even if we think Boris Johnson might pay many such hand-outs, which is unlikely.

Former Tory adviser Lynton Crosby reckons all the noise is a deliberate "[bit of crazy](#)" to knock the EU off balance for advantage in talks over a post-

Brexit deal after 31 December.

Maybe. But both "no deal" Brexit, and a deal levered through while all attention is diverted by the coming Covid winter spike, will be bad.

Labour's leaders are still trying to play clever, by criticising the Tories only on grounds of competence at "getting Brexit done". Worse, union leaders, MPs, and most Labour left groups (outside Momentum Internationalists) are silent. Speak out now! □

## 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](http://workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources) □

# QAnon: growth of a fascist cult

By Luca Brusco

On 17 September, Q urged his followers in two posts to distance themselves from the toxic QAnon name, and to try to "redpill" ["enlighten"] people without associating their claims with the movement.

For those out of the loop, those claims posit the existence of a Satan worshipping paedophile cabal, who drink the blood of children, before sacrificing them to Moloch. Q himself is supposed to be a military intelligence officer, working with Trump to bring down the cabal, while communicating with his followers on sketchy anonymous image boards.

Who is behind the posts is in fact unknown, but all signs point to the name changing hands multiple times, as the style of the posts varies noticeably.

This is at least partly a response to the – belated and inefficient – crackdowns on the movement on various social media sites. Most recently, followers have been using "cue", "17", or the magnifying glass emoji as a substitute for "Q" in discussions.

It's also the continuation of the trend we have seen with the "Save the Children" rallies. They are saturated with QAnon mythology through and through, yet they pretend to be a non-partisan movement to end child sex trafficking. After all, that is a goal everyone can get behind, and once you've got the support of the prospect, you can introduce them to Q.

Needless to say, their version of human trafficking is not connected to reality. They believe over 800,000 children per year are trafficked in the US – presumably for the cabal. In 2018, the number of births in the US was 3,791,712. That would mean that around one fifth of children born in America every year end up as fodder for Moloch.

I think somebody would've noticed that. In any case, actual human trafficking experts have denounced QAnon as a harmful distraction from the problem, further stating that the overwhelming majority of missing children are returned to their parents.

QAnon, being an internet based cult, takes proselytisation very seriously. Their adherents view themselves as "digital soldiers", fighting an information war (or at least, pre-Save the Children followers do). In June, Q posted the digital soldier oath. Soon after, followers uploaded videos of themselves taking said oath, as per Q's instructions.

It is clear that believers derive a sense of purpose from participating in QAnon. The nature of Q is different from other conspiracy theories. They take part in decoding Q's drops – instead of receiving ready-made informa-



tion, they feel like they themselves are uncovering the workings of the cabal, even though Q's posts are filled with leading questions, clearly indicating what answers are the "correct" ones. Instead of, let's say, reading a book, where a purported whistleblower reveals the truth about UFOs, or the like, they act as a community playact as investigators and researchers, swapping interpretations, and making predictions. Q himself may even gratify their responses with his approval, putting QAnon in contrast with other conspiracy theories such as 9/11 trutherism.

## Source

The vast majority of QAnon followers do not go to the source of Q drops, that is, the site 8kun. The site is too confusing, and too filled with trolls, racists, right wing extremists, and paedophiles, to ever achieve popular success. Most QAnoners get their info from Q aggregator sites, or QAnon influencers on social media, hiding the true origin of the posts as an internet cesspool behind a more sanitised front.

Fellow QAnon believers are often the only community these people have, especially after they've alienated their friends and families. The QAnon Casualties forum on Reddit is full of stories of people losing spouses, partners, friends, and family members to QAnon. As I write, it has close to 25,000 members. Jane Lytvynenko of BuzzFeed News also documented people's experiences of the destructive effects of Q on relationships in a recent article.

These stories are well worth studying. The theme of a loved one becoming unreachable, and unable to have con-

versations is constantly recurring. But the difficulty of dissuading these people from their beliefs shouldn't stop us from trying.

After all, every believer is a die-hard Trump supporter, and by associating their political opponents with devil-worshipping paedophiles, they are being primed for political violence against leftists – a term so poorly defined among Americans that it even includes Hillary Clinton. While a decent number of believers were on the far right even before Q, a sizeable number were liberal, or apolitical. A lot of people who are currently QAnon supporters have class interests that should set them against Trump. We can't let them become footsoldiers of a fascist cult.

One former supporter also shared his story on Reddit. He says: "I suppose I was a prime candidate, disaffected, vulnerable and insecure. Q gave me purpose, meaning and perhaps saddest of all, he gave me joy. I was happy that the world wasn't as actually as fucked up as it seemed, that there were good guys out there fighting the good fight,

that we could genuinely build a better future for all of humanity. What a fucking joke".

It is important to keep in mind that no matter how ridiculous their beliefs seem, they are legitimately misled, and that it is possible to reach some. Of course, I am not talking about the openly antisemitic and racist elements here.

On the other hand, it is also worth thinking about what happens if we don't reach them.

Charlotte Alter in *Time* magazine quotes a QAnon supporter as follows: "I think if Biden wins, the world is over, basically, [...] I would honestly try to leave the country. And if that wasn't an option, I would probably take my children and sit in the garage and turn my car on and it would be over."

It is hard to overstate how divorced from reality the people are who campaign for saving fictional children, but would kill their own if a right wing Democrat were elected. This is the result of an Evangelical culture where credulity is a virtue and where the end is always nigh, plus decades of right wing propaganda, and it won't be undone overnight.

## Solution

As Nathan Allebach wrote in a recent Medium post exploring America's conspiracy-theory-laden culture, there is no all-catch solution to bringing people back to reality. Private conversations are recommended over public ones, but even then, success is not guaranteed.

As for the US election, there are no good scenarios. If Trump wins, the consequences should be obvious. But what happens if Biden wins? In Q world, that is not supposed to happen. A violent response from them is not out of the question. Trump is supposed to shut down the cabal, and arrest tens of thousands of deep state operators.

After Trump spent months trying to delegitimise the elections in advance, stoking baseless fears of mail-in voter fraud, supporters are ready to call a Biden victory a deep state coup, to be resisted by violence, if necessary. □

## New videos!

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

- [Remembering the Bosnian War](#), with Sarah Correia and Martin Thomas
- [The 1945 Labour government: Causes and lessons](#), with Mark Catterall
- [Global capital and pandemics](#), with Camila Bassi
- [Rebuild the NHS for winter! & Next steps on NHS pay](#) editorials □

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

# An antidote on the internet

By Angela Driver

The ideas that socialists try to communicate are often complex. They don't always fit on a placard. As Marxists, we base ideas on reality, on things that we know about the world around us. Knowledge comes from scientific enquiry – systematic gathering and analysis of evidence about the world around us.

Covid-19 presented a challenge to rational thinkers everywhere. Action was needed, but no-one knew very much about the virus. When I, as a nurse, first had patients who had the illness, I did what I always do when coming across something new. I tried to find sources of information.

I was worried about infection control. Normally, if a patient has an unusual contagious infection, the Health and Safety Executive and the NHS would both have clear definite guidance on how to manage the infection. This time what I found from them was vague and contradictory.

It became apparent that some of the official guidance was being influenced by pragmatism and coercion from politicians, rather than by emerging evidence.

Then I found a podcast called *Science Vs*. Scientists of all disciplines were scrambling internationally to learn about Covid the illness, how to treat it, how to prevent it spreading, how social conditions affected it, where it came from, etc. etc. Throughout the pandemic *Science Vs* has covered all these issues weekly. (No! The virus wasn't *made in a lab!*)

Science has to adjust its conclusions on the basis of evidence as it emerges. So *Science Vs* followed the evidence on the use of masks, for example, as it changed over time.

Initially the evidence on masks was unclear. Some research concluded that using cloth masks may actually *increase* the risk of the spread of Covid, as in some studies people tended to touch their faces more when wearing masks.

More evidence has been gathered,

and the balance now suggests the use of cloth masks may reduce the spread. So *Science Vs* released an [update](#). That is how science works.

Looking at *Science Vs*' extensive back catalogue I found episodes on US police racism, abortion, being transgender, and even astrology. (Yes, there has been research on astrology, and no, the research concludes astrology is not able to accurately predict anything. There are 89 citations for [this episode!](#))

Often the internet and social media helps to popularise concepts that have no basis in fact. We have seen this recently with the rise of anti-vax ideas, that have spilled over from the internet to large real-life demonstrations. Although these ideas predate the internet, social media is helping to propagate them, as I'll show in an article next week.

*Science Vs* is an example of how the internet can be used to communicate complex scientific ideas, and summarise large volumes of research in an accessible way.



The absurd humour of *Science Vs*'s host Wendy Zukerman may not be everyone's taste, but she makes me laugh, and as an accessible introduction to the existing evidence on a whole range of topics I thoroughly recommend it. Wendy interviews researchers from a variety of fields in every episode.

The full transcript, including the citations (which range from 70-130 per episode), is attached to the site as a Google doc.

*Science Vs* is a welcome antidote to all sorts of conspiracy theories and rumours, and fascinating too. □



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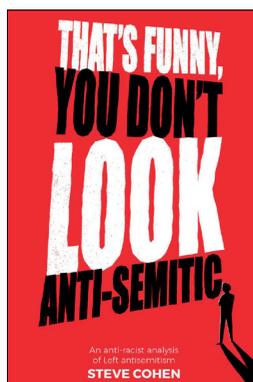
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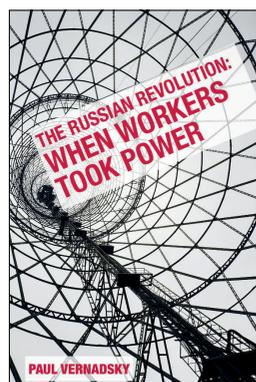
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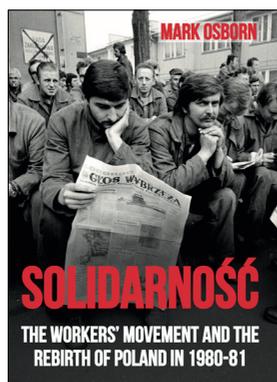
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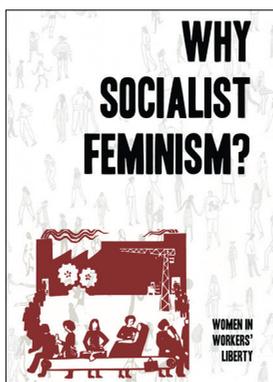
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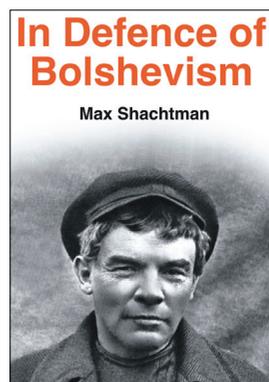
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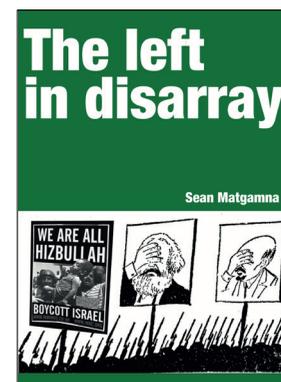
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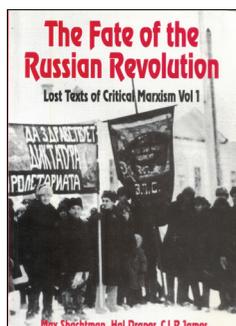
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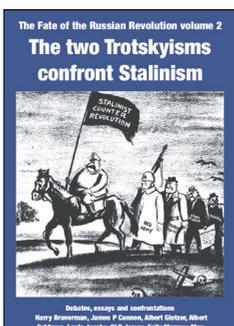
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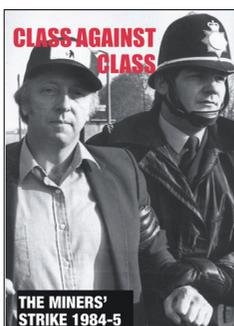
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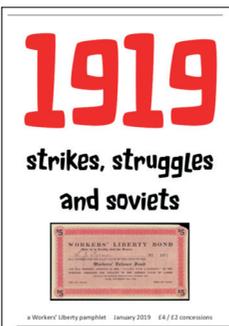
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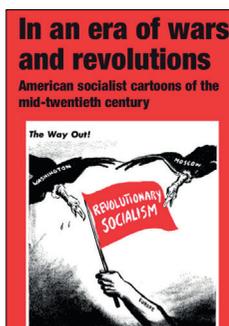
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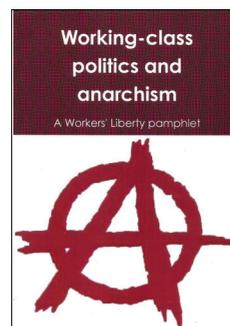
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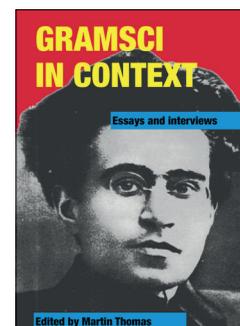
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# We need a pay rise to rebuild the NHS

By Holly Johnson

Holly Johnson, a staff nurse at Sheffield's cancer hospital, talked to Alison Brown from Solidarity

**Why has the issue of pay, in particular, mobilised nurses, more than privatisation, cuts and safety in the NHS?**

Pay freezes, pay cuts and expanding roles for all NHS workers are part of the dismantling of the NHS. Inequality of our pay affects well-being. This has a direct effect on patient safety. If pay is low, it does not attract people into the workforce, does not make them feel valued. That, combined with poor working conditions, makes it hard to retain staff, thus affecting safe staffing levels and ultimately patient care.

Our pay has been frozen for 10 years. The pay deal in 2018 did not even match inflation. People are struggling to pay their bills and rely on overtime to make ends meet.

Nurses and other NHS workers are using food banks, are in debt, unable to save and making tough decisions about which bills to pay. We are skilled workers and the pay does not match.

This, and being purposefully missed out of the public sector pay rises on the back of work done during covid, was the final push for many of us.

This is a fight for a pay rise, yes, but is also a fight to protect the NHS and bring it back into the hands of the public. Many NHS staff don't want to leave their jobs, but we are losing experienced staff who are hard to replace. Recruiting numbers are at their lowest. If pay was fair and our work recognised it would help to reduce the need to use private agencies to bump up our staffing numbers.

We deserve a pay rise. Over the last 10 years, in real terms the freeze has meant a 20% pay cut. We are asking for 15%.

**What do you think is the best strategy now for winning 15%?**

We are continuing to have conversations in workplaces and with family and friends, spreading the word and using social media to build and raise awareness. We are encouraging people to join and get engaged in their trade unions. We are putting pressure on MPs to show their support and want as many people as possible to write to them.

Join [NHS Workers Say No!](#) and [Nurses United](#) and keep informed. There are over 83,000 members on the national facebook group. Further small actions are in the pipeline also, "Badge Wednesdays" and local workplace demos included. On Fridays at 8pm we want people to share a short video on



social media to say why they support a 15% pay rise for NHS workers.

What's the relationship of the campaigners to the existing trade unions?

Many of us are active in our union branches and are reps too. Those that haven't been engaged are now. We are encouraging people to pass motions in their branches.

We have had support from GMB and Unite, who back 15%. RCN is pushing for 12.5% and Unison a straight £2000 for everyone.

No union has invested in face to face campaigns for decades. That's why this grassroots movement has been successful and will continue to be successful.

Some have been disappointed by the initial lack of support from the unions, that it's taken a grassroots movement

to create actual action for our workers, but we are continuing to build and getting our unions involved and working with them to win. We are putting resources into teaching people how to become organisers on the ground.

**Do you think health workers will take industrial action?**

There are a significant number of NHS workers willing to take industrial action. If you look at other countries where nurses take industrial action, they tend to be better paid and have better working conditions including better staffing. So it is better for patients.

We've tapped in to what staff really want and their anger. We are organising in the workplace and we're trying to be systematic about how we build up structures on the ground to win. □

## More online

### "Workers' action to impose lockdown"

Another round of debate  
[bit.ly/wa-ld](https://bit.ly/wa-ld)

## Blake's Tiger revisited

Tiger, tiger, dying out Shrinking forests no redoubt Tell the world to stop and see Its game, its dismal tyranny	floods the land Whose the profit, whose the hand? And what exploitation drives Poachers to erase their lives? Selling skin and meat and bones For trophy rugs in hateful homes?	Let tigers thrive and protests roar Raise our voices, cry 'No more! Tiger, tiger, dying out Shrinking forests no redoubt Tell the world to stop and see For shame, its dismal tyranny
In what cruel economy Agriculture cuts the tree? Starving our elusive cat Bulldozing its habitat?	What the chainsaw? What the gun? What the hell has avarice done?	<i>Janine Booth</i>
In what fell society Rising warmness swells the sea? Drowns the mangroves,		

## Janine vs Cops & Covid

Tune in for this [facebook livestream](#): Janine Booth performs poems on the two big issues of 2020 – the Covid-19 crisis and racist police brutality. Expect some pandemic polemic too! □

Sunday 27 September, 7pm on [fb.com/JanineBoothTheBigJ](https://fb.com/JanineBoothTheBigJ)

## Scottish Labour: why did GMB abstain?

By Dale Street

On the eve of the 12 September 2020 meeting of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) Executive Committee, Gary Smith, Regional Secretary of the GMB union, announced that the GMB would be abstaining on the motion of no confidence in SLP leader Richard Leonard.

"Richard Leonard's Own Union Refuses To Back Him Ahead of Leadership Vote," read the headlines in the Scottish press.

Smith knew, and told the media: "A lot of these people [pushing the no-confidence] are not mandated by their organisations to vote in this way. That exposes how this is motivated by faction and that it is an entirely factional move."

But the GMB response? To abstain – and thereby give the factionalists a free hand to undermine democracy. (In fact, one of the GMB delegates spoke in favour of the motion, which was eventually withdrawn).

Smith's line that "members wouldn't

thank us for getting bogged down in this SLP-internal affair" is in stark contrast to his conduct in the SLP deputy leadership contest held just six months ago.

Smith was only too happy for the GMB to nominate ultra-right-winger Jackie Baillie, rather than the trade union activist Matt Kerr.

Unlike Jackie Baillie, Matt Kerr backed the Glasgow City Council equal pay strikers in 2018, many of whom were GMB members. Unlike Jackie Baillie, Matt Kerr did not support collaboration with the Tories in the "Better Together" campaign of 2014 – which is what drove so many GMB members to stop voting Labour.

Here we have a microcosm of the toxic culture which has poisoned the GMB for years.

Only the members themselves can change that culture – not the queue of self-proclaimed saviours who, having gone along with that culture for years, are now emerging from the shadows to lead us to the Promised Land. □

• Abridged from [bit.ly/gmb-sc](https://bit.ly/gmb-sc)

## 6699 What we stand for

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

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!](#) ☐

# Where will the axe fall?



## Diary of a tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

"I've been here 13 years, so you know what, yeah? If this fucks me, now, and it doesn't come round, I'll be pissed, pissed". D shakes their head and goes back to their food.

"Well, the training [for Tube station workers to become drivers] has to restart at some point, but it's going to be a long time yet. They haven't even got enough instructors that can do the in-cab training yet".

I'm in a similar boat myself. Several of us all thought we had a route out. It has been six months now since the lockdown put our training on pause, and time is really dragging.

And some days drag more than others. "It's better for us if more people are coming through. It feels busy now, we probably need it". "Yeah, more customers is more protection for us", I say. Everyone is aware that the KPMG report, whatever the details, will see the axe fall somewhere

"It'll be the back office lot. People in Palestra (TfL HQ) who earn about £35k, and that have been on furlough. If they think, 'well we've managed without them', then they will be for the chop". "Could be", I say, "but we can't let them



just dictate the changes, and even if it might not be our jobs this time, it could be us next time. We should not let them take those jobs, even if we don't know what they do".

"Bring back cash and we'd guarantee our jobs. I can't believe we can still go without cash. Most of us want it back, at least in one ticket machine. It's not fair".

"Yeah 35 quid today I've done", K says, looking up from his *Superbikes* magazine. "What do you mean"? I ask. "That's how much I have spent on my card and taken the cash for", he replies. "Ah, you probably think I don't care, dontcha? I might think we are too soft on the double-gaters but if someone only has cash, then we are just encouraging them to push through... Nah I can manage it, so I just top 'em up from my card".

"Fair enough, shouldn't have to do that though, should we?". "Yeah, and

now I've got all this cash, hahaha". K pipes up, "But I think company are going to keep it this way. I know the Area Manager, likes it this way. Might not be fair, but saves them money on getting the cash collected, and then they won't need as many of us either". "Yeah, well, that's really why we need it back then".

Days later we get an email confirming that the company is considering going completely cashless across all 270 stations. "They can use the money saved to fix all the gates that are going to get smashed then" someone says in WhatsApp. They may well be right. ☐

- "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube worker.

## Using the "window"

£821 from Duncan, John, Simon and others takes us to £8539 towards our fund-appeal target of £10,000 by 21-22 November. We warned back in July that our "window" for increased political street activity might be short. Now the government is going for new restrictions. Exemptions exist for protests, but the lower turnout on the NHS pay demonstration on 12 September suggests that talk of restrictions will depress attendance and mean some people are less likely to go out anyway. With students starting the university year, we will see an uptick in footfall, but less than usual, and it may be shortlived. We need to use the next weeks well!

Whatever happens on that front, the money we receive in donations helps us to prepare for the future. We've already been able to invest in new computers, a multi-directional mic, and paying for expert technical work towards the launch of our online shop. Further donations will help us to plan for the future of our office space, support organisers and office workers, and increase our capacity. ☐

- [workersliberty.org/donate](https://workersliberty.org/donate)



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

**K**ino Eye is a new column which will offer suggestions for film or TV viewing which are related to articles in *Solidarity*. The term "Kino Eye" is borrowed from the early Soviet documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov, whose best-known film is *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Suggestions for viewing from readers are welcome. In *Solidarity* 562 I recommended two interesting, and very different, films from Bosnia, *Walter De-*

*fends Sarajevo* and *Grbavica*. Although not about Sarajevo, another film from that region also worth seeing is *Tito and Me* (Goran Marković, 1992), the comic story of a chubby young schoolboy, Zoran, in 1950s Yugoslavia. He hero-worships Tito and joins a school trip to hike to Tito's birthplace in Kumrovec in Croatia. On the way his illusions about Tito start to slip, prompted by a deranged, bullying Stalin-like group leader. On reaching their goal Zoran has had enough and ditches Tito, stating instead his love for his parents and his preference for Tarzan films. That was the last film made in Yugoslavia before the Bosnian war started. ☐

# Statutory ballot in DWP?



**John Moloney,**  
PCS AGS

By John Moloney

The consultative ballot of our members in Job Centres returned an overwhelming majority in favour of industrial action over safety concerns. The union's Group Executive Committee for the Department for Work and Pensions meets on Tuesday 22 September and will discuss whether to proceed to a formal, statutory ballot, which they're very likely to do.

Anyone who was wavering on whether action is necessary is likely to have been galvanised by events in recent days. Management is increasing the number of claimants required to attend physical meetings at Job Centres, which is a huge risk given spiking infection rates. There are no adequate measures in place to ensure distancing between claimants, and no provision of face coverings or any requirement to wear them.

Against the backdrop of spiking infection rates and the second wave of the pandemic, this puts both claimants

and DWP workers at risk.

We also expect DWP bosses to reinforce "conditionality" sanctions, which were formally reintroduced in August but which have so far been only lightly enforced. Claimants, particularly those in vulnerable groups, who don't feel safe to physically visit Job Centres could see their benefits cut. The union continues to demand the revocation of "conditionality."

The other civil service department which has been making a concerted "back-to-the-office" drive is HMRC, which has been demanding staff are present in offices at least one day a week. Reps and activists are discussing a potential dispute and ballot there. Beyond DWP and HMRC, the "back-to-the-office" drive has been patchy.

The strike against redundancies at Tate galleries is continuing, and there may also be action at the Southbank Centre, where workers are also facing job cuts. Management there have now offered somewhat improved redundancy packages, but these still aren't satisfactory.

As we face the second wave of Covid-19, the union will step up our "Dying for Sick Pay" campaigning. We want an



agreement that outsourced workers in civil service departments will be paid in full for periods of sickness and isolation extended beyond its current 31 October deadline, and ultimately made permanent. That's part of our wider policy for direct employment of all currently outsourced workers. We're building links with other unions over these issues, including the United Voices of the World, who organise outsourced workers in the Ministry of Justice and some other civil service workplaces, and the Bakers' Union, who are campaigning over similar issues in their industry.

The recent TUC annual congress passed multiple motions on the issue of sick pay, acknowledging that full sickness and isolation pay were an essential infection control measure. Now the labour movement needs to organise action to win this demand. Grass-roots campaigns like Safe and Equal can play a vital role in catalysing that campaigning. □

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

## Transport for London audit: Open the books!

From Tubeworker

The audit and review of Transport for London (TfL) governance and finance, ordered by the Department for Transport (DfT) as part of the funding bailout provided in June, and led by accountancy firm KPMG, was due to make its initial report at the end of August.

As Tubeworker reported, language in the audit's terms of references about "efficiency savings", "workforce modernisation", and "alternative operating models" made the intent very clear: cuts, and possible privatisation.

But TfL and London Underground (LU) bosses have now told unions that the contents of the audit won't be made public. Not only will they not be shared with unions, TfL bosses have said they don't expect to see them either! KPMG will apparently report to the DfT, and the DfT only, which will inform the DfT's position on any further funding bailout once the current package runs out in October.

This is a scandal. The future of our jobs, and the future of the transport service for London's travelling public, is at stake here. TfL and LU are public bodies, administered by local government. It's not acceptable that only a handful of Tory ministers and some govern-

ment bureaucrats will see the full scope of this review.

Although seeing its full contents won't change our fundamental position – to oppose any and all cuts and attacks on terms and conditions – opening the books would allow for far greater scrutiny and response by the people the recommendations of the review will most directly affect.

As well as organising to resist cuts, our unions must also demand transparency.

### Aslef members vote yes for action

Members of the drivers' union Aslef on LU have voted by a 95% majority in favour of industrial action, on a 70% turnout. It's a thumping result on a high turnout, that easily smashes the arbitrary thresholds of the Tories' anti-union laws.

Aslef balloted over the demand that LU abide by all existing agreements – in other words, in defence of the status quo. Tubeworker commented previously that this demand was slightly lacking in ambition, and balloting for action to compel our bosses to abide by existing agreements implies we assume abiding by them might otherwise be optional! Nevertheless, Aslef's method

– of balloting preemptively, rather than waiting for the KPMG-led review into TfL finances commissioned by the Department for Transport to recommend cuts, and then balloting reactively – is absolutely the right one.

Although it seems unlikely Aslef will use the mandate to call action on any immediate timescale, their ballot result at least gives them the option to do so. Other unions need to organise their own ballots as soon as possible, so that industrial action can be cross-combine.

### Defend Sherelle Cadogan!

Sherelle Cadogan, an Instructor Operator and Aslef member on the Tube, has been given a 12 month suspended dismissal for challenging racism! A manager posted racist comments on social media, including disparaging Black Lives Matter. Sherelle and others challenged the comments. While the manager was reported for their racist comments, Sherelle, and only Sherelle, was disciplined, with a counter-complaint from the manager! This is an extremely worrying precedent for the company to set. We could all face disciplinary action for standing up to racism. A petition has been started to support Sherelle at [bit.ly/sherelle](https://bit.ly/sherelle) □

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# Joint Enterprise: unjust and racist

By Janine Booth

British courts' application of "joint enterprise" is unjust, and criminalises black and working-class youth.

"Joint enterprise" is a common-law doctrine that allows courts to convict not only the person who carried out a crime, but others who helped them to do it. In principle, that sounds reasonable. But since 1984, British courts have used it to convict people who they think knew the crime was going to happen, even if they did not help carry it out.

That has led to a string of unjust convictions, with some people given life sentences in prison simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time – and on occasion, not even in the place that the crime was committed.

In 2016, the Supreme Court declared that the application of the law since 1984 is wrong, but its ruling is not automatically retrospective, and prisoners who would not be convicted today have been denied the right to appeal. Asher Johnson was convicted of a 2012 murder and is now eight years into a mandatory life sentence, despite the fact he did not kill the victim. Although he did take part in the initial assault, he withdrew from the scene before any weapon was produced. Various courts have frustrated and refused his appeals.

And unjust convictions have continued. In 2018, Osime Brown was convicted of joint enterprise in the theft of a mobile phone, despite a witness telling the court that Osime had urged the teenagers who did steal the phone not to do



so. Osime, who is autistic and learning-disabled, now faces deportation to Jamaica (which he left at the age of four, and where he has no support) on his release in October.

In 2017, the Lammy Review revealed that nearly half of prisoners convicted under Joint Enterprise are from ethnic minorities, a hugely greater proportion than the twelve per cent of the general population. A Cambridge University submission to a Justice Committee investigation found that the proportion of people serving custodial sentences for Joint Enterprise offences who are Black and/or Black British is eleven times greater than the proportion of the general population who are Black and/or Black British (37.2% compared to 3.3%).

Joint Enterprise convictions are fuelled by the narrative of feral working-class youth roaming the streets in gangs, who are jointly responsible for anything that any one of them does. It seems that the police are more likely to see a friendship group as a "gang" if it is made up of or includes black people. The application of this law is a central plank of systemic racism and class oppression in the British judicial system.

Black Lives Matter, including lives of black people in prison for crimes they did not commit. □

- [JENGBA \(Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association\)](#)
- Free Osime Brown [bit.ly/osime-b](https://bit.ly/osime-b)
- Protest to stop Osime Brown's deportation: [Friday 25 Sep](#) 1pm-2pm, Home Office, Marsham St, London SW1P 4DF.

# Socialist policies to combat new virus surge

By Martin Thomas

We want furlough and the ban on evictions extended, and rent "holidays" added. We want full isolation pay for all. The Tories' £500 one-off self-isolation dole for workers on benefits is a concession, but inadequate: [bit.ly/500dole](https://bit.ly/500dole) Social care should be taken into the public sector, and its staff put on regular public-sector pay and conditions.

Test-and-trace should be taken out of the hands of Serco and the other profiteers, and made a coordinated public-health effort.

NHS logistics, at present also a mess of profiteering subcontractors, should be put into public ownership, and industry requisitioned to provide supplies, so that PPE is available wherever needed. The NHS should take over all private hospitals and integrate them into the service.

Workers' control over virus precautions in all workplaces can aim to keep schools open with minimum risk (but schools need more money for precautions).

Quarantine accommodation should be provided to people self-isolating who would otherwise be in crowded housing.

Despite a clear government-commissioned [report](#) back in mid-July, the Tories wasted the June-August virus lull, doing little of what the scientists indicated but much that was counter-productive.

The new rise across Europe follows the government-promoted surge in pub, café, and tourist traffic after schools closed from early July (and not the reopening of schools in most of Europe from mid-April onwards).

It was not an inevitability. Other countries have kept infection levels low, and indeed with only fragments of the comprehensive policies socialists advocate. Japan, for example, which has never had a general lockdown.

The Tories are going for a mess of policies: heavier fines, "rule of six", bans on households meeting, early closing of pubs, a roll-back to "work from home" for office workers. (And maybe a "circuit-breaker" full lockdown for 2 weeks in October?)

Experts in many countries have said transmission is more via household socialising than even via pubs. But the "rule of six" and bans on households meeting are unenforceable. Coming on

top of the distrust the government's floundering has already caused, they will work against the *social solidarity* needed to make *covid-distancing* work.

Full-on lockdowns are no magic bullet, either. Buenos Aires, in Argentina, has had one since March, and infections are still rising. At best they win time. If no better policies are developed in that time, then infections rise again when the lockdown is repealed or (as is inevitable even with a police state) frays.

There is a case for a clear, uniform policy of closing pubs, cafés, etc. Pub and café workers who lose their jobs (as many now will come what may) should get alternative employment or re-training on full pay: there are masses of public service jobs short of workers.

The Campaign Group of Labour MPs has called for a "Zero-Covid" policy. That has proved impossible even in closed-borders, remote-islands New Zealand. Advocates now say it should be read as meaning, instead, "maximum suppression". Or really, just "mass testing". Better-organised testing would be good. It is only a secondary part of a policy. All known tests fail to detect the virus in the first days of the most infectious period; and if they were really "mass" administered their results would have infections buried amidst a much larger number of "false positives".

Sustainable policies to limit the toll are possible. The labour movement must fight to rebuild the social solidarity to enable them.

We must foreground the social demands, not make them a footnote in a story where the headline is "lock down more" or "test more".

The Madrid region in Spain, where this second surge is worst, has imposed new restrictions (which it doesn't call a lockdown) for at least 14 days from 21 September. The restrictions sparked big street [protests](#) on the weekend of 19-20 September. The protesters were mostly masked and tried to covid-distance. They had slogans like "Long live the fight of the working class", and "more healthcare, fewer police".

Scientists of the Madrid Association of Public Health have criticised the restrictions, counterposing more social measures, rather than a fuller lockdown.

Socialists must work to reunite the working class round a workable, socially-underpinned, virus-curbing policy. □

## Watch our 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](#).

Every **Thursday at 1.30pm** we have *Solidarity* editorials with Stephen Wood (see page 5)

Every **Monday at 1.30pm** we have a longer (10-50 minute) video, such as meeting opening speeches



# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## **BELARUS WORKERS FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY**

By **Pete Radcliff**

Again on 19-20 September, mass demonstrations across Belarus demanded democracy. The last two Saturdays have seen tens of thousands of women in the capital, Minsk. They have faced police attacks, but the last two Sunday demonstrations have both attracted over 150,000.

The women defended each other heroically – stopping state security arresting their comrades and pulling off the balaclavas behind which the security thugs hide their identity.

One hero of the women's marches is 74 year old Nina Baginskaya. Escaping arrest on 12 September, she was eventually arrested at the 19 September demonstration.

19-20 Sep saw the first significant Sunday demonstrations in some cities such as Gomel. In Grodno, Brest, Solihorsk, etc., numbers were larger.

Belarus's president Lukashenko remains in power. Russian president Putin has given a £1.2 billion loan to bolster the Belarusian economy, though economically that is only a gesture.

Neither Lukashenko and Putin seems to know whether to make concessions to the protests. That might encourage further democratic demands from an increasingly confident people. But then a bloody escalation of the repression could set off an even more united reaction from the Belarusian people, perhaps

ricocheting into Russia itself.

Each week there are probably at least 1,000 people arrested. Every day police snatch squads are active against prominent oppositionists like Maria Koleznikova and against strikers.

In the huge Belaruskali potash mines, a heroic minority of workers have been out on strike for weeks. The majority of workers are in the mines, but not working normally.

### **Striking workers**

The appeals of the striking workers at Belaruskali on [their Telegram channel](#) are both inspiring and moving. They draw attention to the bureaucratic corruption of managers and the neglect of health and safety in an industry full of fatal accidents and lung disease. They speak in fury at the beatings of demonstrators and the arrests of their comrades for building a genuine workers' union.

On Monday 21 Sep a second Belaruskali worker, Oleg Kudelka, protested by following the example of Yuri Korzun and refusing to leave the mine. Kudelka was forcibly brought up and taken to a mental hospital and then to police questioning.

In Belarus, protest action routinely brings the risk of unemployment for a whole year or imprisonment.

The Belarus Independent Trade Union (BITU) and others have called for National Strike Committee, but have not been

able to form it yet.

In many companies the new independent unions are new and have weak links with similar unions elsewhere. And many strike leaders have been arrested, or have temporarily left the country for Poland (where they are getting help from the Solidarnosc union network) or for the Ukraine or Lithuania.

At the massive Grodno Azot chemical production complex, a vote of two-thirds of all workers is required for strike action. The union was confident of getting that majority, but a strike decision was prevented by the bosses refusing to allow workers who are on leave or sick to get onto the site to cast their vote. (And then Lukashenko still has the power to rule strikes illegal whatever the vote).

Norwegian unions from the Yara International chemical company have accompanied managers to visit their supplier Belaruskali. They were refused permission to meet the reps of the strike committee and BITU on site. They instead met them at the airport, and have arranged further talks about the mine's failures on workers' health and democratic rights.

Liza Merliak, international secretary of the BITU, told me that other acts of solidarity are important too – like John McDonnell's "Early Day Motion" to Parliament, and street protests. □

• LabourStart solidarity statement: [bit.ly/lbelarus](http://bit.ly/lbelarus)