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## PUSH BACK FOR ASYLUM RIGHTS

Becket House  
Immigration  
Enforcement  
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Centre

←  
Public  
Entrance

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» **End “Hostile Environment”**  
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*Pic: Angela Christofilou*

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# Push back for asylum rights



Editorial

"Its main effect will be to add an extra dose of cruelty to the existing arrangements". That's the impact the Tories' Nationality and Borders Bill – just passed by the House of Commons for a second time – will have on asylum-seekers, as summed up by migration writer Daniel Trilling. The arrangements are extremely cruel already.

For almost three decades, Labour and Tory governments have progressively tightened access to asylum in the UK and restrictions on those seeking it when they are here. They have normalised barbaric practices including imprisoning asylum-seekers, forcibly dispersing them around the country and denying them the right to work and access normal benefits and services – in addition to enthusiastic use of deportations. Now the Johnson-Patel Tories are working to normalise new barbarisms.

The bill proposes to give the Home Secretary powers to expand the camp-style "accommodation" established last year. And that despite the explosion of Covid cases in the Napier barracks in Kent.

51 asylum-seekers have died in Home Office accommodation in the last five years, with the number increasing sharply in the last 18 months. Only three of the deaths were a result of Covid (asylum-seekers are usually young). Four committed suicide. Three of the dead were babies.

The Tories' bill also paves the way for asylum-seekers to be sent overseas for "processing". The Tories have mooted disused ferries, abandoned oil rigs and remote islands in the South At-



lantic as possibilities. The UK Refugee Council described such "offshoring" of asylum-seekers, practised by Australia 2001-2007 and since 2012, as "an inhumane policy" producing "appalling outcomes including high levels of self-harm and mental illness".

The government wants to increase prison sentences for "illegal entry" to the UK, from six months at present to a year or up to four years in certain circumstances. Priti Patel has endlessly claimed to be promoting this legislation to crack down on "people-smugglers". But startlingly, the Tories want to remove the words "and for gain" from the current restrictions on helping asylum-seekers enter the UK. Even the Royal National Lifeboat Institution has complained: it could be criminalised for saving lives at sea.

The rhetoric about people-smugglers is Orwellian. A government actually concerned to tackle criminal exploitation of refugees' plight would open up, not further close down, safe legal routes for those who want asylum to come to and remain in the UK.

After years of refugee-bashing, asylum claims in the UK are historically

low, highlighting the extent of the hysteria from the government and right-wing media about tiny numbers crossing the channel from France. There are about 200,000 people who have been given or are seeking asylum in the UK – as against, for instance, over a million in Lebanon, whose population is a tenth of ours. But the reason to champion asylum rights is not that the UK has proportionally few asylum-seekers. It is a matter of defending human rights, reasserting human and working-class solidarity, and trying to bring some minimum of rationality and safety to a world in chaos.

We're not against border quarantine rules, or even short-term border curbs to slow Covid spread. But the Tories' rules are for a world where the well-off travel freely, and people for whom access to a new country is life-or-death are harassed and banned.

## Labour movement

The labour movement should put itself at the forefront of opposing the Tories' assault and fighting back for asylum rights, or it has no right to present itself as the representative and champion of the oppressed and exploited. We fail to oppose the Tories' pumping of xenophobic and racist poison into society at our peril. And our movement must reckon with its own role in creating this desperate situation.

It was not the Tory governments of the 1990s, but the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown who erected the core structures of the anti-migrant edifice the Tories have since built higher and higher. Those Blairite

policies were a major factor enabling the right-wing insurgency in British society and politics since the turn of the century, bringing us the BNP, UKIP, Brexit and now Johnsonism...

As with Blair's wider right-wing agenda, his nurturing of the hostile environment would have been impossible or much harder if trade unions had stood up against it. The labour movement can make this right by acknowledging its past failings and, most importantly, genuinely fighting to change the situation now.

That means speaking out and mobilising against the Tories' agenda, starting with the Nationality and Borders Bill. It means developing and campaigning for a programme to radically change immigration and asylum policy in the UK.

Labour under Keir Starmer has criticised the government on asylum rights, but mutedly. It has failed to advocate a clear alternative, while engaging in nationalistic pandering. Its criticism sounds unconvincing.

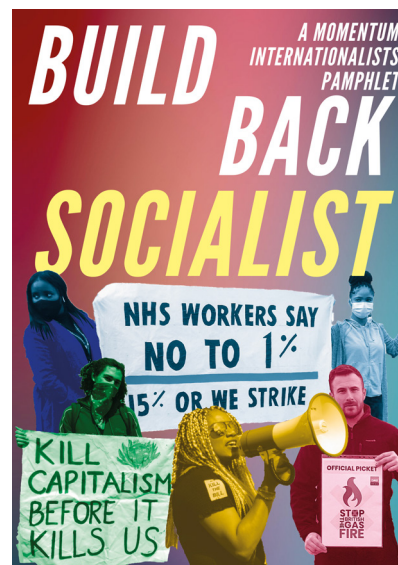
Workers' Liberty argues for free movement and equal rights for all, everywhere in the world. We oppose immigration controls. Those in the labour movement who cannot be immediately convinced to support this policy should be challenged to go beyond woolly pro-migrant rhetoric and take up clear proposals for change.

Let's get the Labour Campaign for Free Movement's proposals to Labour conference this autumn, push similar demands out through the labour movement, and get people out on the streets campaigning for them. □

## Migrant rights and Labour

These are the demands the Labour Campaign for Free Movement is promoting for Labour Party conference (Brighton, 25-29 September). Full text at [labourfreemovement.org](http://labourfreemovement.org)

- Re-enter Europe's free movement area, and pursue free movement with other countries, including in all future trade deals.
- Reject immigration systems based on migrants' incomes, savings or utility to employers.
- Abolish "no recourse to public funds", minimum income requirements, and all Hostile Environment policies including restrictions on NHS access.
- Introduce an easy process for all UK residents to gain permanent residency with equal rights.
- Introduce equal voting rights for all UK residents.
- Guarantee safe routes for asylum seekers and rights to family reunion, work and social security.
- End all immigration raids, detention and deportation, especially childhood-arrival deportations and racist "double sentencing".
- Replace Settled Status with an automatic Right to Stay.
- Support workers who refuse to implement deportations or Hostile Environment measures. □



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

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



## Corrections

The reference to Dinah Murray's "interest theory of autism" got changed, by mistake, in *Solidarity* 601, to read "interesting theory of autism". The Gay Pride march in Budapest was on 24 July (not 28 June as in *Solidarity* 599). John Cunningham reports that it drew thousands and much support from abroad; it was not just a display of gay pride but a protest against the homophobic policies of Viktor Orbán. □



## Sol. 603 on 11 August

*Solidarity* will "skip" a week on 4 August, to allow our paper staff to take breaks or work on other projects. No.603 on 11 August, and then (provisionally) skip 18 August, 604 on 25 August, 605 on 1 Sep. □





# New Labour procedures are stitch-ups

By Martin Thomas

The Labour Party leadership have drafted the “skeleton” of a new complaints procedure and indicated that they want rule changes at the conference in September.

Cases to do with sexism, racism, antisemitism etc. will go to National Executive Committee (NEC) panels, and appeals to a new Appeal Board, replacing the National Constitutional Committee (NCC), and appointed, not elected: four lawyers, four HR people, four appointed party members.

This is a response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) calling for an independent procedure. It looks like the EHRC has ok'd it.

## Less independence

But it makes the General Secretary the manager of prosecutions and of the appointment of judges. It makes disciplinary procedures *less* independent of the Leader's Office and the General Secretary than they were before. And it's not clear when people would have a right to appeal, even to the new appointed Appeals Board.

There are no rules or guidance about proportionality of sanctions to offences, so the machinery can still expel some people for minor offences while leaving others unscathed or only reprimanded.

Even where the rule is fairly clear-cut, as in prohibiting support for anti-Labour candidates in elections, there is a lot that is arbitrary in the rulebook. A number of people were excluded in 2015-6 because they had recently opposed the Labour Party electorally. Or rather, because they had done that *and* lost. If they had won and then sought to cross the floor, they would have been accepted straight off.

The rules most used for exclusions

are even more arbitrary. You can be excluded for association with any political group other than an official Labour one, so in principle anyone could be expelled for supporting Friends of the Earth, or CND... or Progress (and with “support” defined vaguely). There's no defence, there's no appeal.

## Multiple channels for exclusion

So the Labour Party is developing a series of channels for exclusions. There's the new complaints procedure, for cases involving “protected characteristics”. Then a second channel is set up by the new bans, for auto-exclusions to be done in bulk and at speed.

A third channel: the new ban doesn't supersede the old blanket power to auto-exclude anyone associated with any group other than an “official Labour” one. Two Socialist Appeal people were recently excluded under that old blanket power, even before the new bans.

Channel four is indefinite suspensions: hundreds of people suspended, often without clear charges, for long periods, and with a warning that talking publicly about their suspension will be considered a disciplinary case.

Ann Black, a member of the NEC who voted for three of the bans and abstained on Socialist Appeal, reports “nearly 100 members still suspended after more than 18 months... more than 1000 complaints... unresolved”.

And the fifth channel, presumably, is a disciplinary process for charges not to do with racism, sexism, antisemitism, etc., and not subject to “auto-exclusion”, plain old misbehaviour like mis-handling party funds.

The big issue here straightforward bullying and cheating by full time officers. There remains pretty much no way to deal with that. On the contrary, we're beginning to get to the position where we cannot discuss the performance of Labour Party staff because it's subject to a staff agreement.

There is a current rulebook provision for Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) to initiate disciplinary cases, but it is not really workable, and in practice is not used. Remedies for straightforward rule breaking, ability to hold full time staff to account, and right of fair treatment for members, are non-existent.

Around the same time we've heard that the Labour Party is proposing to make redundant a quarter of its staff and employ dozens of agency workers to process complaints.

How are the agency staff trained? Who is accountable for the work? Who owns the agency? Who's making a profit on this?

There is no review process for the handling of complaints and nothing that we have seen has anything has tried to remedy that lack. When the

staff make a decision to prosecute, no-one knows if it's fair.

The EHRC discovered that in the 70 cases that they looked at, as a sample, a significant number had no documentation, no records of the interviews...

## No to court cases

As a matter of political approach, we're against taking the Labour Party to court. We want to resolve issues within the party. Others will think differently; but even on practical grounds their prospects are poor.

There was a court case about unjust procedures recently taken by a number of people who had been either suspended or accused of antisemitism. Fundamentally, they lost. That will give the Labour Party leadership massive confidence that the bars for action to be defined as capricious, perverse or arbitrary or irrational are exceedingly high.

A court permitted Iain McNicol (general secretary 2011-18) to kick 125,000 members out of the 2016 leadership

election. In 2016 a Socialist Appeal supporter, Jack Halinski-Fitzpatrick, raised £10,000 to get an injunction against his suspension, and he lost.

Sadly, we missed chances to change things in the Corbyn era: a rule change to delete the “auto-exclusion” clause, for example, was defeated after getting no support from the party leadership and the scrappiest of debates. The Labour Party's unfair procedures with rule changes will make the pushback a long battle.

CLPs can get rule changes considered only after long delays, and often have their proposals ruled out of order capriciously. The NEC has the power, and often uses it, to push through large rule changes at conference with only a few days' or hours' previous notice.

It's a long battle, part of the bigger long battle to transform the labour movement into a force capable of winning socialism. □

• Thanks for help with ideas and information to Dave Levy of Lewisham Deptford CLP (personal capacity).



## Upcoming meetings

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

**Thursdays 8pm, until 5 August:** Kohei Saito's Marx's Ecosocialism – study course

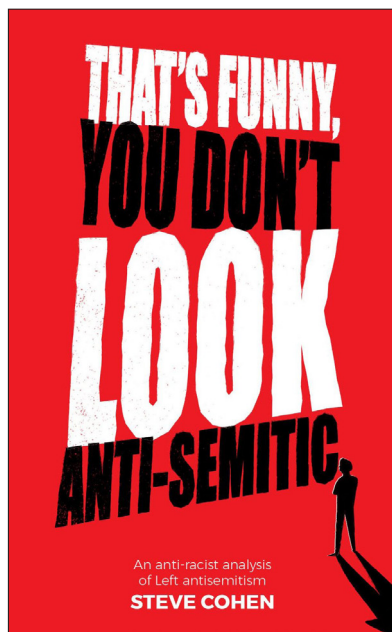
**Thursday 5 August, 7 – 8.30pm:** Neurodiversity – What's class got to do with it? With Workers' Liberty and PARC (Participatory Autism Research Collective).

**Sunday 8 August, 5-6.30pm:** COP VIEW – Green Bans and the BLF in the '70s

**3-5 September:** Workers' Liberty tent-only summer camp

**Including:** Meat: environmentally bad, or a distraction? – Ecosocialist reading group

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



A socialist dissects Left antisemitism. Third edition, 212 pages, £5 [bit.ly/shop-wl](https://bit.ly/shop-wl)



# Morning Star joins “war on woke”



By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star*'s editorial of 13 July, defending and promoting English “patriotism” (aka nationalism) against “those on the left who turn their backs on their own nationality” and listing “good reasons why English people can rightly feel patriotic” was no one-off aberration.

In the edition of 21 July, one Harry Dobson (almost certainly a pseudonym) pursues the patriotic theme, with an added element of psycho-babble: “people like to feel like their identity is distinctive... Refrains such as ‘We’re the worst drinkers, aren’t we?, or ‘I’m so embarrassed by English people abroad, we’re a nightmare’ are always said with a peculiar mix of self-pity and a grubby kind of pride: deep down, a lot of people want it to be true...”

Who these strange, masochistic people is not specified by amateur shrink Harry, but he goes on to identify a “second factor” he calls “Anglo-pessimism”, which “seeks to posit English racism and English fans as the most diabolical to be found anywhere, despite statistics that are directly contrary to this.” And Harry has no doubt about where “An-

glo-pessimism” comes from: it’s “exhibited almost exclusively by people who consider themselves to be on the left and specifically anti-racist.”

Disappointingly, Harry chooses not to share his (no doubt in-depth) research into this phenomenon with his readers: who, exactly are these anti-racist people “who consider themselves to be on the left” (i.e., aren’t really) who think English racism is more “diabolical” than any other form of racism – as opposed, perhaps, to being especially concerned by it simply because it’s happening where we live and we can do something about it?

But comrade Harry’s in full *Daily Mail* mode now, and continues: “Denouncing racism is not controversial any more – to get noticed why not denounce your own nation, and yourself in it? [...] At its worst, this nihilistic standpoint enables the afflicted to... remain an online pundit, awakening intermittently only to tell people they can’t support England or that they ‘can’t wait to move away from this racist island.’”

Again, one has to ask, who are these extraordinary people? How many of them does Harry know? And is that “can’t wait to move” quote something a real person actually said in Harry’s hear-



ing, or wrote somewhere that he could identify for us?

But, one suspects, none of this detail really matters to Harry because he knows where this madness comes from: “This woke syndrome shares an interesting amount of similarities with another online subculture: the conspiracy world...” Leaving aside the preposterous idea that internationalism and anti-racism is characterised by a predilection for conspiracy theories (Harry even, sarcastically, refers to the David

Icke theory about lizards being “in charge”), the use of the word “woke” represents a new low for the *Morning Star*.

As is well known, this is the favoured term of derision against liberals, leftists and – especially – anti-racists, regularly used by splenetic right-wing commentators in the *Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the *Spectator* and *Spiked*. Andrew Neil’s GB News even has a regular feature entitled Woke Watch. As far as I’m aware, the *Morning Star* has never used the word before (certainly not in this negative context) and supporters of the paper should be worried.

In the following day’s *Morning Star* (22 July) Emily Weir (women’s officer of the Edinburgh CPB) argued that “the left” shouldn’t “obsess over [Johnson’s] use of offensive language” and that we “rely on misrepresenting an article he wrote nearly 20 years ago...”

The article that Comrade Emily feels has been “misrepresented”? The one in which Johnson described African people as “flag-waving piccaninies” with “watermelon smiles.” Taken in context, argues Emily, Johnson’s words were merely “provocatively parodying” Tony Blair (!) and “could easily have appeared under the byline of many left-wing writers...” □

## Cuba: embargo, not blockade



I agree with much of what Sacha Ismail wrote in “Cuba: support the protests...” in *Solidarity* 601. His claim that “the US blockade has clearly made the situation for Cuba’s working class ... far worse” is more doubtful.

The language of “blockade” is that of the Cuban government. It blames its problems on *el bloqueo*, as do pro-Cuban-government activists. “Blockade” suggests a sea and air cordon around Cuba preventing goods moving in and out. There is no such blockade. What has been in place since 1960 is a US embargo making it illegal for American companies and individuals to trade with Cuba.

That was a response to the nationalisation of American

land and other holdings in Cuba. The Cuban government had every right to nationalise that property. For that and many other reasons, the embargo should be opposed.

Its economic consequences are difficult to quantify. It helped drive Cuba into an alliance with the USSR after 1960. Since 1991 Cuba has relied on international trade. Being cut off from the large market of the US for exports and as a source of tourism has had some impact. The biggest consequence is likely to be that US capital has not been able to invest in Cuba as Canadian and Spanish capital have.

But the US does not (on the whole) force third parties to join the embargo, as with Iran. The embargo does not stop Cuba buying food or medicines on the world market, and is not a primary cause of shortages in Cuba. □

Matt Cooper, London

## Myanmar solidarity action in August

By Michael Elms

Since the military coup that took place in Myanmar in February of this year, the workers’ movement in that country has been leading a fight for democracy.

The trade union movement in Myanmar has burgeoned since 2011, when the semi-military government first relaxed anti-trade union laws. The result has been a decade of strikes and organisation, centred in the garment factories of Yangon. Now, those organisations are fighting to end the coup government. At our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, 10-11 July, Myanmar trade union leaders Khaing Zar Aung and Moe Sandar Myint reported on the movement’s situation.

Since May, repression against trade union activists in Myanmar has become extremely intense. In the industrial districts of Yangon, many trade unionists have been



forced into hiding. Being a trade union militant in Myanmar is now extremely dangerous.

The trade unions of Myanmar are now demanding that international firms break off all economic contact with the country, in order to put maximum pressure on the Tatmadaw military regime. This means western garment companies should stop placing orders with factories in

Myanmar.

In the first two weeks of August, the Labour left network *Momentum Internationalists* will start holding street actions aimed at raising public awareness of these demands and increasing pressure on clothing companies and other chains to support this call from the Myanmar trade unions. We will also be supporting a fundraising drive: [bit.ly/Myanmarfund](https://bit.ly/Myanmarfund) □



# From Vostok to laughing stock



**Eric Lee**

By Eric Lee

On 12 April 1961, the first human blasted off into space. It was an amazing achievement and was a display not only of the remarkable technological prowess of those who designed and built the spacecraft, but also of the person courage of the man inside the capsule.

His name was Yuri Gagarin and he was just 27 years old. The craft he piloted was called Vostok 1. He is correctly honoured across Russia, and his memory revered, while the Soviet leaders of that time are long forgotten. Gagarin sadly died seven years later in a plane crash.

Sixty years after Gagarin's historic flight, the British billionaire Richard Branson and the American Jeff Bezos blasted off into space this month in vehicles built by their own private companies.

Branson's Virgin Galactic has had a mixed record of success with their attempts to build a working spaceship. In 2014, one its vehicles crashed, killing pilot Michael Alsbury.

Bezos' company, Blue Origin, has been around since 2000. It has named its spacecraft after the first two Americans in space, Alan Shepard and John Glenn. No mention of Gagarin, of course.

Branson and Bezos are hoping to trigger a new era of space tourism. There are already reported to be hundreds of wealthy individuals who have

signed up to pay staggering amounts of money for the privilege of a few minutes of zero gravity and remarkable views of Earth. What an enormous waste of resources that could be better spent elsewhere.

The contrast between the flight of Vostok 1 in 1961 and the billionaires' flights this summer could not be clearer – and not just because Gagarin was an actual cosmonaut whose flight lasted just under two hours.

Gagarin was a genuine hero, a pioneer whose extraordinary mission launched a new age of exploration, full of hope for all humankind. The Stalinist regime that stood behind his flight was a despicable one, but that does not take away from his heroism and the historic significance of what he achieved.

Similarly, when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin set foot on the moon just eight years later, the fact that they left behind a plaque with an anodyne message signed by soon-to-be-disgraced U.S. President Richard Nixon is not important. It does not take away from what they achieved.

Socialists are supporters of space exploration for the same reason that we support things like medical research – because believe in the potential of human beings to do great things. We know that there is plenty to invest in here on Earth, including ending poverty, dealing with the climate crisis, and so on. But we also know that we have the capacity as a global society to do more than one thing. At the same as we fix things here on Earth, we can also reach for the stars.

And we also know that much of the progress made in recent decades,

including landing on the moon or inventing the internet, was not done by private companies and individuals. They were the collective efforts of large numbers of dedicated and talented scientists and engineers, funded by the public sector. This was true both in the Stalinist USSR and in the capitalist USA.

Bezos and Branson emerged from their very brief flights looking like the arrogant fools they are.

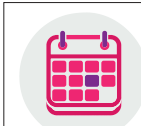
Branson, it turned out, had not even reached space according to some definitions of the word. Bezos flew a bit higher, just touching the boundary of space in his much-mocked penis-shaped rocket. Both flights lasted just a few minutes. Within days, NASA issued a clarification stating that neither Bezos nor Branson deserved to be called astronauts as neither had been "part of the flight crew" nor made "contributions to space flight safety".

Upon his return to Earth, Bezos thanked "every Amazon employee and every Amazon customer because you guys paid for all of this."

He was swiftly condemned by many, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who tweeted: "Yes, Amazon workers did pay for this – with lower wages, union busting, a frenzied and inhumane workplace, and delivery drivers not having health insurance during a pandemic."

In another sixty years, no one will remember Bezos and Branson. But Yuri Gagarin's achievement will still be the stuff of legends. □

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



## Agenda

The Uyghur Solidarity campaign, with the Hong Kong campaign LMSHKUK and the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and others, has called a protest at the Home Office (Marshall Street, London SW1P 4DF) for 7pm on Thursday 29 July: [bit.ly/ho-29jul](https://bit.ly/ho-29jul). It will denounce the Tories' new immigration proposals, and demand safe haven and equality for democracy activists currently fleeing Hong Kong and for all refugees. USC also has its regular monthly demonstration outside the Chinese Embassy in London on 5 August. □

• Links and info for these campaigns, and wording for labour movement motions on many issues, at [workersliberty.org/agenda](https://workersliberty.org/agenda)

## Workers' Liberty summer camp, 3-5 September

The Workers' Liberty summer camp will be on 3-5 September, near Haslemere in Surrey. A weekend of fires, partying, nature, good food and socialist education. In previous years we have run the camp in a farmhouse; this year, due to coronavirus, the camp will be fully outdoors, sleeping in tents only. We will have access to hot water, showers, and toilets. Information: [workersliberty.org/camp](https://workersliberty.org/camp) □

# Trump: crimes in 2020-21, plans to dominate in 2022-24

By Martin Thomas

Donald Trump is "our own American war criminal", said writer Carl Bernstein, famous for his Watergate journalism, on 25 July.

Bernstein cited Trump "fomenting a coup to hold on to office" and his "homicidal negligence" (not mistakes) over Covid which led to extra "tens of thousands of people" dying.

Trump's Covid demagoguery still weighs heavy, as the Delta variant sweeps the USA. In areas where only about 20% voted for Trump in November 2020, 60% of the population is fully vaccinated; in areas where 80% voted for him, only 30%.

Mark Milley, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, has not disputed the report in a recent book that as he observed

Trump's plans up to the 6 January Capitol riot, he said: "This is a Reichstag moment... The gospel of the Führer". (When Hitler was first made Chancellor in January 1933, many conservatives thought coalition-government constraints would control him. Hitler kicked aside the traces by exploiting a fire at the Reichstag [parliament] in February).

Milley had been worried about Trump straight after the November 2020 election, and consulted Trump's former National Security Adviser H R McMaster. The Trump axis was "some of the weirdest shit ever", McMaster told him, an alliance of "extremists", QAnon, evangelical Christians, Tea Party conservatives, and white supremacists. "They're not going to succeed", Milley told his military colleagues. That US democratic structures

were too resilient was not his argument. Rather: "you can't do this without the military... the CIA... the FBI. We're the guys with the guns". Milley made plans for how to block attempts by Trump to use the military to create a crisis which Trump could exploit between November and January.

In the event Trump was not coordinated enough to test Milley, or to push through against his own more sober-minded aides who blocked him sacking Milley. He continues, however, to sustain a political base. 70% of Republican voters believe Trump really won the November 2020 presidential election. Only 40% say they have confidence in the US electoral system. 29% think Trump will be reinstated as president before the end of 2021.

Using that base, Trump is

going after the few Republican members of Congress who have spoken out against him since 6 January, putting Trumpist candidates in place everywhere in primaries for the 2022 elections. In the USA's loosely-structured party system, usually dominated by factors of local candidates' personal connections and fund-raising, nothing like this loyalty drive has ever been tried before.

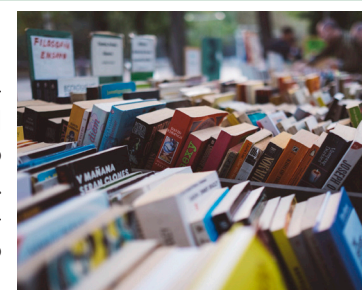
Republicans in state-level politics are vying to see who can be most Trumpist. Texas

Republicans are pushing heavy curbs on voting rights, have legislated to allow individuals to sue anyone who "aids or abets" any abortion after six weeks, and vow that if the Supreme Court overturns Roe vs Wade (ruling state criminal laws against abortion before 24 weeks unconstitutional), then they will ban abortion completely.

Much depends on whether the US left can rally to push back the Trump movement on the streets and undercut it politically. □

## Second hand books!

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit [bit.ly/2h-books](https://bit.ly/2h-books) for the current stock and prices, and to order. □





# XR plans for August action



## Environment

By Zack Muddle

The anti-G7 protests in Cornwall confirmed to me a trend I had suspected for a while: that XR, coming out of the year(s) of lockdowns, is by far the biggest activist environmental force around. However many criticisms we have of their politics, that makes it imperative for us to engage with them.

As well as organising and mobilising for national and international protests, there are countless local XR groups which are still – or becoming once more – active. Urgency was added to my longer-standing intentions to get involved, not only by the recent upsurge in [extreme weather events](#), flooding spreading to take out two London hospitals and cause wider devastation across the capital. Urgency was also heightened by my sense of regret at only too late finding out the details of a – quite badly advertised – set of XR actions against Bristol airport's proposed expansion at a nearby town.

It was not difficult to find and join the Bristol and even sub-Bristol post-code specific WhatsApp and Telegram groups, or to get the details of their local meetings.

On 26 July I went to one of these meetings for the first time. It was well worth going, and I found doing so exhilarating.

There were around twenty people there. Bear in mind that it was not particularly (or at least not well) promoted. I get the impression that this was not particularly better attended than other weekly meetings: plus it was *not* one of the "big" monthly ones. And most of their actions have, as you'd expect, a higher turnout still.

While the politics and demography of these twenty activists leaves much to be desired, if we had a better and comparably active environmental organisation, we'd be in a very different



situation. We have to start from where we are.

The main event was a speaker about fossil fuels, an educational in the run up to August's nation-wide week of rebellion. I thought she was overly heavy on the technical (and institutional) details, and light on politics. The former seemed to serve to boost "expert" credentials and obscure the limitations and liberalism of the latter.

### Politicising XR

Yet there were opportunities for me to make much-needed political counterpoints.

Pointing to net acceleration of coal-fired power station construction to record highs – mostly in India and China – I highlighted that a picture of coal production and consumption having peaked in recent years isn't as rosy as the speaker suggested.

Likewise, fossil fuel companies – coal, oil, and gas – have astronomical wealth invested in both fixed and circulating capital. Despite seeking and receiving many billions and trillions of investment cash and government subsidies respectively, they aren't anywhere near as vulnerable to divestment or market

pressures as the speaker suggested. We should oppose all investment and subsidies, and divestment movements have helped raise the profile of climate change: but we should not overstate how much we have and can win by such methods.

Indeed, carbon emissions are not only not falling, they are still *accelerating*.

Even insofar as market-based approaches can help, they won't take us far enough or fast enough. This is doubly true when we consider wider sectors which are currently enmeshed in the fossil industry, premised on fossil fuel use.

The solution, I submitted, is to take energy – and other sectors – into democratic public ownership, and directly make the transition from fossil fuels to renewables, as fast as possible. This dif-

ferent solution in turn shapes our targets and strategy.

Someone gave a brief intro to the plans, centred on London, for the 23-29 August rebellion. It will target the city of London and the financial sector. It will also be seeking to initiate many wider conversations about the climate crises, and co-organising a Kill The Bill demonstration with Black Lives Matter.

Direct action against financial institutions, pursued [periodically](#) by sections of the environmental movement, in many ways represents a severely fore-shortened critique of capital.

Nonetheless, my suggestion of collaborating with those trade unions and trade unionists campaigning to nationalise the banks was greeted with sympathy and some support. Even much of the more radical end of the environmental movement, however, after it correctly recognises the value of engaging with unions, does not do so well. Often "the union" is seen as synonymous with its leaders, and the approach the leaders are taking. This way of seeing things can produce understandable dismissal, or a bureaucratic way of relating to the unions and their membership.

The insights and involvement of class-struggle environmental socialists, with our workplace and rank-and-file orientation, become invaluable in this context. Similar interventions were key when we discussed, for example, putting pressure on local Labour MPs over the airport and environment.

I certainly will be attending future meetings, getting stuck into affinity-and working-groups, and participating in the week-long rebellion: and you should too! □

## Climate Emergency Centres: making links



## Environment

By Vicki Morris

Workers' Liberty argues that real progress on the climate will only happen when trade unionists embrace environmentalism and make it their own, and when the environmental movement learns to appreciate the potential power of workers to make change.

Bringing the two together is not easy but it is essential. One possible avenue opens up in the form of the new Climate Emergency Centres.

As 500 local councils declared a climate emergency in response to the youth climate strikes, a group called Space Generators, with experience in

the squatters movement and then Occupy, seized the opportunity to negotiate "meanwhile" leases on a number of empty buildings around the UK to set up Climate Emergency Centres – essentially, social centres – and many more are being initiated.

At an information session I attended for Nottingham activists considering this, I made the case for trade-union involvement in the setting up of a new centre, and the idea was received with enthusiasm. But there is no reason why trade unionists should not themselves take the initiative and be in at the start of setting up these centres which can act as a base for debate between environmentalists and the labour movement, and for them organising together.

Find out more about setting up a CEC: [bit.ly/cec-how](http://bit.ly/cec-how) □



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# Dadabhai Naoroji should be a hero for the left



## Book review

By Sacha Ismail

Review of Dinyar Patel's *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism*

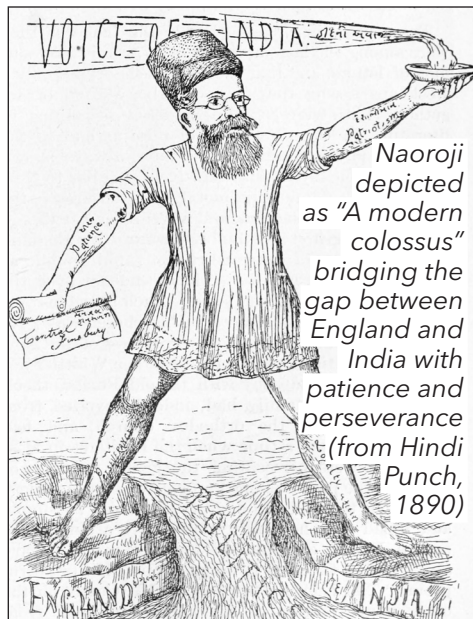
In the summer of 1893 Indian nationalist leader Dadabhai Naoroji, then living in Britain, returned to India for the conference of the Indian National Congress, of which he had been and would shortly be re-elected President. Greeted by vast multi-religious and multi-ethnic crowds as he travelled across northern India, he arrived in Lahore for the congress to cries of "Long live Dadabhai Naoroji!" – and "Long live Central Finsbury!"

In 1892 Naoroji had caused huge excitement and controversy by being elected to the UK Parliament from that North London constituency. (After his five-vote margin of victory, the British press played on his name, calling him "Narrow Majority".)

Indian historian Dinyar Patel's biography of Naoroji is a genuinely exceptional book: information-packed, thoughtful, extremely well-written and entertaining. It makes clear Naoroji should be regarded as a central figure in both Indian and UK history in general, but also an important figure specifically for the labour movement and socialist left. Publicising this history seems all the more important because Naoroji's legacy stands so sharply opposed to modern right-wing and Hindu-chauvinist Indian nationalism.

When Naoroji was selected as the Liberal candidate for Central Finsbury, Patel explains, he got strong support from the party's radical rank-and-file supporters, most of them working-class, in this longstanding stronghold of the left. But important Liberal power-brokers opposed his candidacy, in part on racial grounds, and manoeuvred to have him replaced.

A few years earlier the Tory prime



minister, Lord Salisbury, had publicly attacked Naoroji, suggesting in a speech that British voters would not and should not elect a "black man". The Liberals benefited from the outcry, but that did not mean the Liberal leadership was uniformly enthusiastic about actually having an Indian MP.

Naoroji triumphed over the machine-politicians and got elected because of strong links with and support from the wider left beyond the Liberal Party, including Irish nationalists, women's rights activists and socialists, whose agendas he largely supported.

By then he was 66. He had been a well-known figure in British politics for years; a central one in the UK's Indian diaspora for decades; and central in many aspects of India's national awakening for decades more. Increasingly he would become known and respected transnationally.

Only in Parliament for three years, Naoroji remained active and continued to move to the left long afterwards (he died in 1917 aged 91). He organised and made propaganda not only for the Indian struggle, but a range of battles against oppression – including struggles for women's rights and for black (African) rights.

In 1892 Naoroji had already developed connections with organised so-

cialist groups in the UK, particularly the Social Democratic Federation, and with a wide range of labour movement organisations and activists. It is noteworthy he was elected the same year as the first three Independent Labour MPs; and he made connections with John Burns and Keir Hardie.

His links with Western labour movements deepened, and a few years later he participated in the Second International in its pre-First World War heyday, taking part in the debates on India at its 1904 congress.

### A forerunner

In many respects Naoroji was a forerunner of 1920s revolutionary socialist MP Shapurji Saklatvala.

Both were known as the "Member for India". Both were from India's Parsi community, the small religious-ethnic minority descended from Zoroastrian refugees from the Islamic takeover of Iran. British imperialists and Parsi conservatives in India attacked the idea Naoroji could lead an Indian national struggle whose supporters and leaders were predominantly Hindu and Muslim. Saklatvala's Parsi background was attacked in a similar way. Both worked to build a cross-community, anti-sectarian Indian national movement and, in the case of Saklatvala, workers' movement.

I was pleased to read that Naoroji worked with John Archer, the black activist who would become mayor of Battersea and for a time a key ally of Saklatvala. Naoroji helped Archer first become a councillor in 1906.

In so far as Naoroji was a socialist – he surely was, by the 20th century – Saklatvala was one of a much more radical and consistent stripe. This is particularly the case as regards working-class struggle in India, which does not appear to have been much of a focus for Naoroji. But the main difference that struck me was in their approaches to the Indian national struggle itself.

From the start of his political life Saklatvala aggressively promoted complete Indian independence and the break-up of the British empire. As late

as Naoroji's attendance at the Socialist International in 1904 and for some time afterwards, he advocated "self-government under British paramountcy".

For a long time, in fact, Naoroji did not advocate what we would understand as self-rule for India at all. As an MP his main campaign was for reforms to open the Indian civil service up to Indians, which he saw as the key to ending what he called the "drain of wealth" from India to the UK and thus alleviating Indian poverty.

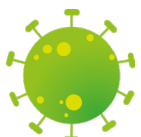
Unlike Saklatvala, he initially conceived – or at least presented – the election of an Indian MP as a good first step in the development of representation for India within the empire, rather than a platform and lever for the empire's destruction. His experience of advocating Indian rights in Parliament – under a Liberal government – disillusioned and radicalised him. That process continued until he came to advocate more-or-less full independence for India, from 1906.

In so far as Naoroji hesitated earlier on about connections with the UK socialist left, it seems to have been its radical positions on Indian independence and tactics to win it, not its wider social radicalism, that gave him pause.

In Naoroji's last years, many Indian leaders began to outstrip him in nationalist militancy, his advanced views on social questions notwithstanding. Many were sceptical of his continued emphasis on electing Indians to the UK Parliament. (In the 1895 election in which Naoroji lost his seat, another Indian MP was elected, in Bethnal Green North East – but Mancherjee Bhownagree was a pro-empire Tory.)

In the last phase of his activity as an Indian nationalist leader, Naoroji maintained complex and carefully-balanced relationships with activists in both its moderate wing and its growing radical one. Among the many stories Patel's *Naoroji* tells is that of the birth, rise and rising ambition of the Indian freedom struggle. □

# Covid isn't over: organise for the long haul



## Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

As of 26 July, the Covid case count in England is tentatively turning down. The hospital count, and the death count, will keep going up at least for a while.

Google Mobility Trends suggest that for now many people

continue to be covid-cautious despite the restrictions-easing on 19 July. Traffic at workplaces and on public transport remains more below norm than, for example, in Germany, which continues legal restrictions. By now vaccination and previous infections must have made individual (relative) immunity widespread, dampening virus-spread.

The government's bluster about "Freedom Day" may escape immediate punishment.

Cases may bump back up only slightly, then decrease for a good while. I don't know. In any case the labour movement must remain mobilised.

### Workers' Control

Dangers from still-high rates remain. For sure, some bosses will press workers to drop precautions and flout isolation rules. Workers' control of workplace safety!

Summer needs to be used to prepare for autumn and winter

conditions, with more time indoors; for the risk of more infectious variants emerging or vaccine effectiveness fading; and for a possible spike in flu and other viruses suppressed in winter 2020-1. We can best prepare by:

- Better ventilation
- Full isolation pay for all
- Funding for NHS pay and for the NHS to recover
- Taking social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for the

workers

- A drive to improve housing and end overcrowding.

World Covid case and death counts are still rising, and are higher than at any time in 2020. Vaccination rates lag, at 0.4 per 100 people per day worldwide; 0.04/100 in Africa; 0.02/100 in Bangladesh.

Requisition Big Pharma, to allow spread of technology and an emergency drive to produce and distribute vaccines worldwide! □



# Rod Webb, 1943-2020, and

By Janet Burstall

Without Rod Webb, there may not have been a consistent group of supporters of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in Australia, advocating the ideas and principles of third camp Trotskyism. It was because of Rod that I became a Trotskyist, and because of people he put me in touch with, even after he became less active himself, that I discovered the literature of the fore-runners of the AWL, made contact with Martin Thomas, and helped to establish Socialist Fight, as a group of co-thinkers of the now AWL. This is part obituary, and part story of how Rod's ideas and connections contributed to the founding of Socialist Fight.

Rod Webb died in May 2020, during Covid restrictions. Rod's "revolutionary years" from 1968-1979 were one of the significant periods of his life celebrated at a memorial gathering one year after his death.

Rod had become a Trotskyist in the years prior to 1968, in the Vietnam Action Campaign, and in Resistance, where he organised the Film Society at least from 1967. The US-SWP-aligned Resistance grew, changed its name to the Socialist Youth Alliance, then as the Socialist Workers League (SWL) attempted unification with other Trotskyist tendencies including supporters of Pablo and of the Mandeliste current. Rod was one of the leaders of the SWL from its founding in 1972, a member of the national and political committees, and Sydney Branch organiser. (The tendencies soon split.)

## Ideas

Rod took ideas seriously. As his friend and one-time comrade Ian Robertson recounted at the memorial, Rod joined both the SWL and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) because he believed in ideas and principles and wanted to change the world.

By the time I met Rod at Macquarie University in 1974, he seemed more supporter than member of the SWL and its paper, *Direct Action*. He was at Macquarie as the editor of the student newspaper *Arena*. In 1973 Rod was instrumental in enlisting the support of the NSW Builders' Labourers Federation for victimised homosexual Macquarie student Jeremy Fisher, union support which continues as an iconic reference point in radical labour movement and LGBTQI politics.

Rod took the time to discuss ideas with everyone who was interested, including me, despite the fact that I had joined the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), which he constantly criticised as Stalinist. Rod was very energetic,

intense, sometimes self-centred, and didn't hold back on expressing his differences with others. Paradoxically, although this made him some enemies, his principles helped to create a culture on the Macquarie student left of honest (even if sometimes unavoidably rancorous or petty) democratic debate, and non-sectarian co-operation across the spectrum of Labor, Communist, Trotskyist, feminist and other non-aligned students. There was one significant exception to Rod's spirit of co-operation and discussion, the Australian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS), of which more later.

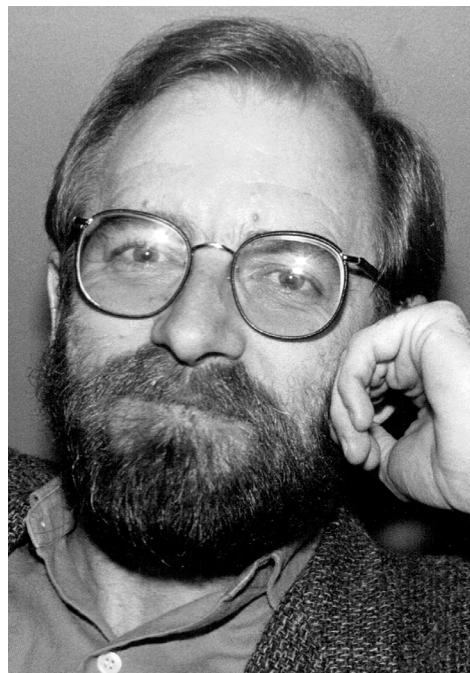
One of Rod's first direct challenges to me was about taking a clear political position. As I sat in the cafeteria, drafting my policy statement to run for Students' Council, he pulled to pieces my mealy-mouthed clichés promising to be responsible and honest. Anyone can say that, he told me. What do you stand for? On feminism? On students' rights? etc. I got the picture, and ever since have found candidate statements in all manner of elections to be lacking.

## Occupation

In mid 1974 over 300 students occupied the office of the Vice-Chancellor when he refused to negotiate over student demands. The VC was blocking a Students'-Council-voted increase in its annual student fee. And the administration wanted to impose a segregated staff bar in the student-staff Union building.

Rod's leadership was behind the demand for "Student control of student affairs", student strike committee gatherings in his editor's office, and the front lawn mass meetings that voted to occupy when the Vice-Chancellor refused to negotiate. The strike committee was particularly important, as a forum for all the activists behind the demands, to discuss through the issues, and come up with recommendations to put to a front lawn meeting. The context helped us to realise the contempt that the university administration showed for student organisation, in refusing to negotiate, in calling in of the police, and use of the Summary Offences Act to arrest us. It educated the participating students to understand the powerful as our enemies. It was an inspirational lesson in democratic self-organisation and clear leadership.

The *Arena* that Rod edited was informative, wide-ranging, and took ideas and debates seriously. Commentary on university administration and the business of Students' Council was regular. Diana Auburn (who sadly died of leukaemia around 1982) was the women's editor, then followed Rod



as editor, at a time when the women's liberation movement was demanding to speak for itself and be heard. It was from reading *Arena* that I first participated in action for gay and lesbian rights. The teacher's scholarship of a lesbian student, Penny Short, had been revoked because of her sexuality. The fictitious Noelene Pymble-Veneer's column satirised bourgeois suburban life. Rod also covered university sporting teams, the activities of clubs and societies, took most of the photographs for *Arena* with his trusty Minolta camera and an artistic eye. Under Rod's editorship, *Arena* made students think, made students aware of power, of the actions of authorities, and the demands of women, lesbians and gays, aboriginal people and Palestinians for liberation. He made me aware of the impact of a regular publication.

## Israel-Palestine and the Australian Left

Rod was one of the principal organisers of a national tour of representatives of the General Union of Palestinian Students, Eddie Zananiri and Samir Cheikh, in May 1975. This tour introduced the slogan "For a democratic secular Palestine" to student politics, and then Australian politics. It pitted the organised left against the Australian Union of Jewish Students. Despite AUJS advocating that Israel should concede independence to Palestinians, Rod and most supporters of Palestinians, myself included, demonised the AUJS as anti-Palestinian by definition of being Zionist, and ostracised Jews in favour of Israel's existence as pro-imperialist. The hostile debate that followed resulted in massive votes against the Australian Union of Students (AUS) leadership-backed "democratic secular Palestine" formula, and contributed to

the demise of AUS. It initiated in Australia a peculiar form of anti-Semitism on the left, similar to that in the British Labour Party. For several more years, I too supported the democratic secular Palestine answer to the dispossession of the Palestinians.

Then Socialist Organiser/I-CL (forerunner of Solidarity/AWL) rethought communal/national conflicts, particularly Catholic vs. Protestant in Northern Ireland, and in Israel/Palestine. The I-CL concluded that the road to peace between the conflicting national identities required mutual recognition of each other's collective identity and rights, not conquest of one by the other. This translated as an independent Palestine alongside a Jewish Israel, two states for two peoples. Because of my moral opposition to the injustices perpetrated on Palestinians by Israel, it took me some time to think through, and come to support a two-states solution.

I had the chance to discuss with Rod, maybe around 2010, that basing solutions to social injustice primarily on an "anti-imperialist" standpoint led socialists to advocate support for terrible reactionaries (such as Hamas), dictators, and the kinds of Stalinists that he had taught us to oppose. He had always rejected supporting political forces simply on the grounds that they were fighting imperialism, e.g. the Vietnamese NLF, or Fretilin in East Timor. By this time Rod was not politically active, but he was still interested and thoughtful, and said that he could see that we had a point.

Even though I was observing Rod while I was at Macquarie, learning from watching and discussing, I remained a member of the Communist Party until the sacking of the Whitlam government in 1975.

I had thought that the CPA had put Stalinism behind it when it denounced the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and criticised the regime in the Soviet Union. I was confused by Rod's criticism of the CPA for being Stalinist, but I must have been mulling over his exposition of the "Popular Front". The Popular Front was an approach originating with Stalin, in which Communist Parties seeking peace between their own government and the Soviet Union, formed alliances with bourgeois parties who might be willing to ally with, or at least not attack the Soviet Union. This was despite active hostility by those parties to the demands and the rights of workers. This became a policy for some CPs of identifying the most dangerous capitalists, and then supporting alternative, supposedly more progressive sections of capital. In Australia the



# and Trotskyism in Australia

CPA had become economic nationalists, agitating against transnational corporations (TNCs), and advocating for tariffs and government support for Australian manufacturing companies.

After Kerr sacked Whitlam, the CPA's weekly paper, *Tribune*, was published an extra six times over three weeks. I was embarrassed to sell it. Despite its socialist rhetoric, it was supportive of Labor's economic policies, did not place demands on Labor for the election, and despite extolling the massive anti-Fraser sentiment, it was not organising and agitating for unions (including those in which it had elected officials) to exercise power, and take strike action against Fraser's caretaker government.

I had learned enough of Marxism and class struggle politics to recognise that the CPA was not practising them.

## After Macquarie

My first year out of uni was 1977. No longer part of student politics, I searched for ways to be a revolutionary socialist. I joined the Municipal Employees Union, and attended monthly Women's Liberation meetings. I was now free from the social pressure of my Communist circle at Macquarie Uni, and more open to considering Trotskyism. Rod gave me Trotsky's *The Transitional Program* to read, and it was a revelation.

I was critical of the ideas of all the left groups in Sydney, which Rod willingly discussed. I didn't come across any individual members who would debate ideas (other than the Spartacists, but I had enough experience and sense to recognise their sterile sectarianism), rather than just try to recruit, taking for granted that they had the undisputable right line. I departed for Europe in late September 1977, where I did some political hunting. A friend in the SWL lined up meetings with people affiliated to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) in France, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Germany. Large demonstrations and their revolutionary optimism were exciting.

In London, unfamiliar with the Left, lacking contacts, I sometimes called in at the Islington bookshop of the International Marxist Group, scoured the weekly what's on column in *Time Out*, attended large protests such as Rock Against Racism, and occasional Women's Liberation meetings. But I found

*Socialist Fight*, early 80s.

Left to right:  
Paul White,  
Richard Lane,  
Tony Brown,  
Leon Parissi.

Front:  
Belinda Weaver,  
Janet Burstall.

Duggie Silins and  
Vassili Manikakis  
not in this photo.



no-one to talk to, and no real satisfaction.

## Discussing Marxism

When I returned to Sydney in the summer of 1978/79 Rod put me in touch with other people who were interested in critical discussions of Trotskyism. One was Tony Brown, also from Macquarie Uni. The others were Rod's comrades in Melbourne, Frans Timmerman and David Spratt. They were part of a Melbourne Marxist Discussion Group (MMDG), recently set-up by dissatisfied activists. Many were ex-members of the Socialist Workers Party (previously the SWL). I was able to get to Melbourne every few weeks. The MMDG met on Sundays to discuss three or four readings on the week's topic, for a theme that ran over several meetings. The themes included the Leninist party, women's liberation, trade unions, the Labor Party.

Tony Brown and I assembled a small group of interested people in Sydney and we pretty much followed the same curriculum as the Melbourne Group.

Frans, David and Simon Marginson were also part of a "Leninist caucus" inside the MMDG, along with Paul White, Richard Lane and Duggie Silins. I met with them whenever I could get to Melbourne. Paul had acquired the weekly British newspaper *Socialist Organisation*, and other literature, from Workers Fight (WF) and the International-Communist League (I-CL), forerunners of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Paul had come across this literature as a result of its distribution by Tony Bidgood, a former WF member in Britain who moved to Australia.

The I-CL was developing its own account of how post-World-War-2 Trotskyist analyses had degenerated, and accommodated to Stalinism and the

"anti-imperialism of idiots". The "Leninist caucus", minus Frans, David and Simon in Melbourne, and plus Tony Brown, Leon Parissi and me in Sydney, decided in 1981, at urging from Martin Thomas and the I-CL, to start publishing a monthly magazine, named *Socialist Fight*. The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan, and the Stalinist influenced left responded in support of the invasion, against US interference. Martin persuaded me, through debate and close reading of Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism*, that siding with the Soviet invasion was wrong.

This was the take-off point for my lifelong association with AWL.

## After Trotskyism

From time to time I told Rod about *Socialist Fight*, and asked him for advice. But it was movies that kept us in touch during the 1980s. Rod was Director of the Sydney Film Festival from 1983. He opened my eyes to Iranian, Polish and other Eastern European cinema. He chose humanist and political films that stood for human liberation and condemned dictatorship.

Rod always stuck to his principles of refusing to do the bosses' dirty work, and resigned from his job programming movies at SBS TV, rather than obey orders to sack a large number of his staff. He probably abandoned organised socialist politics mainly because it didn't fit with pursuing a career in the arts, in film and music, where his talents and interest lay. Rod's independent thinking would also have been at odds with the increasingly stultifying version of party centralism with minimal democracy adopted by the SWP.

It is a paradox that Rod was one of the originators of left wing anti-Zionism in Australia, and yet also helped to educate and bring together the peo-

ple who would reject the repressive, anti-working class methodology of anti-imperialism that anti-Zionism is consistent with.

Rod's abandonment of organised Trotskyism came before the SWP resolved its ideological contradictions in the early 1980s, by rejecting Trotskyism and adopting anti-imperialism as its primary principle. On the one hand the SWP held onto the idea that the one-party state controlled economies were some form of "workers' states", or at least anti-imperialist (and its successor in the DSP/Socialist Alliance still

holds to this view). On the other hand, Trotskyism stands for working-class self-organisation and liberation, which is incompatible with support for those regimes. It is that enduring principle of Trotskyism that I first learned from Rod.

Rod Webb's political legacy comes from a combination of intentional political organisation, discussion and activism, of deliberate fostering of contacts, and of serendipitous results of literature, people and ideas coming together. □

• More on the Workers' Liberty website about Trotskyism in Australia

Nick Origlass, 1908-1996: [bit.ly/origlass](http://bit.ly/origlass)

Bob Gould, 1937-2011: [bit.ly/b-gould](http://bit.ly/b-gould)

John Percy, 1946-2015: [bit.ly/jpercy](http://bit.ly/jpercy)



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

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



# An anti-Jewish pogrom by the B

By Sylvia Pankhurst

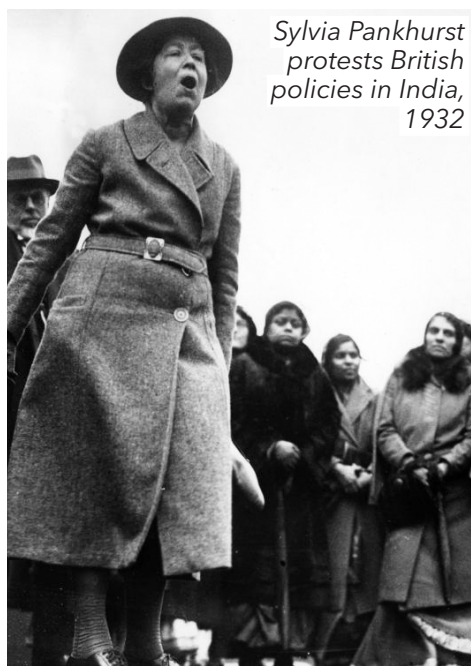
*This article is taken from Woman's Dreadnought, paper of the Workers' Suffrage Federation, 26 May 1917, where it was an editorial under the headline "A pogrom in London". It describes London's East End of that era, which also produced the Poplar council revolt four years later (described in [Solidarity 601](#)); and the big wave of anti-migrant agitation which had already produced the Aliens Act of 1905. Woman's Dreadnought changed its name to Workers' Dreadnought in July 1917; the group soon after changed its name to Workers' Socialist Federation, and in 1921 merged into the then-revolutionary Communist Party.*

The great Whitechapel and Commercial Roads run through the heart of the London Jewish and immigrant quarter. Russians, Romanians, Armenians, peoples of all oppressed nationalities live here, Jews forming the majority, for Jews, the people who have no country, are always most cruelly oppressed by tyrannical Governments.

Under the grey skies of this northern [European] city the people of the East still cling to the gay, rich colours they knew in lands where the sun pours from the cloudless blue sky unhindered by smoke or mist.

In the shops of the Whitechapel Road are vivid magenta and emerald coloured blouses in a style quite other than that which British workers obtain where they go shopping in Poplar or Bow. On the stalls of the open markets are gorgeous pine pattern stuffs, exceedingly low in price. A man passes by with a silk embroidered bed-quilt over his shoulder: its brilliant magenta-pink and ultra marine blue flash down the dingy street.

Old women fruit-sellers, who might have stepped from a picture of the Rialto by Carpaccio or Bellini, or who might have sat with their wares by the roadside watching Jesus on his way to work in Joseph's shop. One sees old ladies with wigs of stiff brown hair, relics



Sylvia Pankhurst protests British policies in India, 1932

of the head coverings which were once de rigueur for Jewish matrons.

It is a hive of industry. Almost every house has its tailoring, cap-making, fur-dressing, watching-making, millinery or other business. Behind the houses, erected in what were once their gardens, are further workrooms, where girls are bending over sewing machines, and tailors with long beards and black skull caps are sitting cross-legged at their work.

The teeming human population is packed away in any spaces not occupied by the industries from which they live. They are huddled closely together in block dwellings where trades also are carried on; in houses built for a single family which now shelter several families and branches of industry: in tiny hovels built in back courts and alleys with high walls barring out the sunlight and passages between the buildings sometimes barely three feet wide.

Everywhere is careful thrift and busy labour. Behind the tobacconist's counter the mother and daughter are making cigarettes: the daughter, with the pile of fragrant golden shreds before her, rolls them, the mother cuts the ends with a pair of curved clippers. In the tailor's shop the husband and wife leave their work to serve the customer,

and the wife finds time also to prepare appetising dishes from cheap ingredients, according to the elaborate rites of the Jewish faith.

To the smoke and squalor and devitalising atmosphere of this commercial city, on whose ground landlords exploit alike the native and the immigrant population, these Eastern peoples have brought with them the stores of energy possessed by those whose forefathers have lived a simple life. This energy may ebb from their city-bred descendants, but it is present.

One sees evidence of it in that most miserable of alleys which is built close up to the high wall of the railway, so that the rooms of the houses there never see the full light of day. The street borders upon the foreign quarter: its inhabitants are mainly British and deeply sunk in poverty, unfortunate people who can afford to live in no better place. All is drab and hopeless; cracked windows with dingy rags for curtains, weary, ill-clad women, pale and thin-legged children. One house stands out from the all-prevailing squalor: on its window skills are wooden tubs painted bright green in which flowers are growing. Jewish immigrants live there; they earn perhaps no more money than their British neighbours, but they have health and energy; whilst the fathers and mothers of the British families in the street are casual workers in poor health, people who are breaking down in the ruthless struggle for existence. But such contrasts one also sees amongst our native population: contrasts springing from similar causes.

**“Clubs raided; men seized by the road, dragged from buses.”**

For the most part the Eastern immigrants are skilled in many handicrafts, not spoiled by long contact with highly sub-divided modern industrial processes in which the workers are merely feeders of machines, and they have taught their children to be tradesmen.

“They take your work”, politicians with special ends to serve cry to the British people, and the despairing toilers in times of unemployment take up the tale: “They take our work!”

Under socialism, as today in our homes, we all shall benefit from the ready service of those who love work for its own sake. Their efforts, undeviated by the private capitalist, will go directly to increase the common stock in which all will share, and raise the common average of necessities and adornments.

Even under the present capitalist sys-

tem war has made plainer than ever before the value of labour, because the withdrawal of men to fight and of men and women to make instruments of slaughter has increased the importance of every productive pair of hands. We lack hands to cultivate the soil, to build ships to replace those which are being destroyed so wantonly from day to day, and to carry on all forms of industry.

And yet some men and women would clear out that hive of industry in East London. What farmer would be so foolish as to smoke out his hive of honey bees, leaving untouched the wasps' nest in his orchard. Yet we may liken the East End, with its teeming population of British and foreign workers, to a hive of bees; and the West End rich, who in the main live merely upon the work of others, to the wasps that eat the farmer's apples.

The British people long read with horror of the Russian antisemitic pogroms, but now, alas, we have had a pogrom of our own, and as in Russia under the Tsar's dominion, our British pogrom was carried out by the police.

On Friday night strange things took place in Whitechapel. Two young milliners, Misses R and A C, who had been to the Imperial Cinema at the King's Hall, Commercial Road, came out to find themselves in the midst of a throng of people, who were being hustled and pushed this way and that by masses of police and some Australian soldiers. A number of motor lorries filled with men and boys were drawn up in the road.

The girls saw a lad pause, as if in surprise, to look into one of the lorries, and then saw him seized by police and bundled in. The police were catching at any men they saw and pushing them roughly into a billiard club next door to the picture palace. The girls walked on: police seemed to be everywhere, and just past New Road they saw the police dragging men out of a restaurant. A police inspector roughly pushed Miss R C. “Oh don't push!” she protested,



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# British police: London, May 1917

whereat he struck her on the face, bruising her at the side of the eye.

"You swine, to hit my sister!" cried Miss A C, whereat the Inspector struck her to the ground. "Charge them!" he called out to a constable. The girls were dragged off to Lemon Street Police Station, which was thronged with men and boys. There the girls were searched and put in a cell lighted only by grating.

At 11.45 pm they begged the woman searcher to tell their parents where they were, and again when they were charged at 12.15 or 12.30 they pleaded with the officer who received the charge to send a message to their home. One of them called to an inspector who was passing the cell, "Do my parents know?" whereupon he shut the grating and left them in the dark.

The distracted father went from place to place, from police station to hospital, searching for them. On arriving he was at first told they were not there and only learnt of their presence on a second visit at four am. At six am they were released to him and ordered to appear in court next day, where they were fined £2 each for insulting behaviour. "Four pounds out of the family! Two pounds were all I earned last week! To strike me, and then make me pay for it!" protested Miss C.

But all over Whitechapel similar things were happening. Miss B—, a girl of 20, coming home with her father, aged 46, and her brother, aged 16, to their tobacconist's shop in the Commercial Road, suddenly found her father dragged away from her. "Why are you taking my father?" she protested. The policeman twisted her arm, and flung her aside. Then she saw that her brother had disappeared. Her father was kept till twelve pm; her brother till 4pm.

A man ran out of his house in his shirt-sleeves on hearing a noise of shouting. He was bundled into a motor lorry.

Miss C, of Elder Street, Norton Folgate, on her way home, was held up by the crowd which had gathered outside Commercial Road Section House. Quite suddenly and without warning she was pushed off the pavement by a policeman who used foul language and in endeavouring to get out of the crowd she was again assaulted and insulted by a man whom she took to be a policeman in plain clothes.

Restaurants and clubs were raided; men were seized by the road side, and dragged from trams and buses. Some were dragged either by policemen or driven in motor lorries to Lemon Street Police Station or to the Section House in Commercial Street. Some were hustled into clubs and restaurants, either for examination or detention until they could be removed to the Police

Station or Section House. Some men who showed papers were allowed to go free, but in what seems to have been by far the larger number of cases those who arrested them refused to look at their papers until several hours later.

In Whitechapel the number of men and boys detained is estimated to be from 1,200 to 1,500 or 2,000.

Some put the number as high as three or four thousand. Yet only nine men were charged in Court as absentees, and only four were handed over the Military Authorities.

Middle-aged men and boys under sixteen years were taken. Some of the lads were young enough to cry, and one bald-headed man who said he was a grandfather was beaten by several policemen and was bleeding at the mouth. In the Section House especially, men and boys were crowded together in dark rooms scarcely capable of containing the numbers that were forced into them, and treated with wanton violence.

Mr S G, a discharged soldier, of Kingsland Road, was at the St Mary's Temperance Club in the Whitechapel Road when the police entered at 10.30pm. He at once went up to the inspector, telling him that he was a discharged soldier, and offered to show his papers. The inspector brushed him aside with a threat that something would be done to him if he were not quiet, and handed him over to two constables who put the "arm-lock" on him and took him to the Section House. At 11.45 his papers were examined by an officer, and he was allowed to go at 12.45.

Mr J G, another discharged soldier, of Shoreditch, was taken at the same place. He also volunteered to show his papers, but the police refused to look at them. He was taken to the Section House, and put into a crowded room. He was told by an Australian soldier who was at the door to "push back". Mr G said: "It is impossible; there is such a crowd behind me." The soldier hit him in the stomach. A policeman standing by the soldier took out his truncheon, and hit Mr G on the shoulder; he was then dragged from the crowd, and handed over to a police-sergeant. The sergeant threw him into a cell. Mr G was discharged two hours later.

An Australian soldier took off his



coat, and offered to fight anyone in the room. A discharged soldier, who was there under arrest, said, "You are a disgrace to the uniform you are wearing." Whereat the soldier knocked him senseless.

**“60 boys crowded into a cell so tightly some fainted.”**

Mr P, yet another discharged soldier taken at the same place, showed the discharged badge which he was wearing, but was told that he might have bought it, and was detained for some hours afterwards. His brother, aged 15, was kept till four am at the Section House.

A father who took his son's papers to the Section House was asked his age. He answered, "Forty-seven". "Come in then; in you go!" was the reply and he was dragged inside.

All Whitechapel is astonished and dismayed. The lads and girls are indignant, the older people speak with a melancholy disillusionment.

Mrs S and her husband are Russians, they keep a shop in the City, but live in Whitechapel. Mrs S said: "I could never have imagined such a thing would happen. They seized on men walking quietly along and all were so frightened they got in as quickly as they could, or went with the policeman so quietly, you might have thought they were organised! The police took boys of 15 – kids, you know." She went to the Section House to inquire after her husband, who was arrested. The police refused to give her any information, but she saw one of them hit a little boy, who cried bitterly.

Mr S, a kindly, serious man, said that men who had been examined at the Section House were re-arrested by other constables before they go to the corner of Commercial Road. "It is a very bad system," he said sadly, "two or three hundred men in a room and

if one of them only wants to look out, the policemen bang him on the head."

Not only was Mr S arrested, but his two brothers.

Mr H S saw many acts of violence in the street. A man was knocked down by the police, and the man's brother protested that he suffered from fits, but the police kicked him as he lay there. A Russian, who was arrested said, "I came from Paris, and I have to go back there tomorrow". A policeman seized him by the throat and said, "If I had my

way, I'd have all your throats cut."

Mr H S was himself arrested. He saw about 60 boys crowded into a cell so tightly that they could scarcely move: some fainted. A constable immediately took him by the throat and struck him, but another, looking at the book, admitted that it had been stamped. Then a constable seized H S by the arms and using him as a battering ram thrust him far in amongst a crowd of men packed into a small, dark, filthy room. The police kept striking the men at the door, and calling: "Get back, you swine; get back or I'll murder you!" as the men within struggled for air.

Upstairs there were only 12 or 14 men in a large room. "And they imagine such things will make us fight for them," he said. "I will not fight, and kill other men. I want to fight no one. If they pass a law to force Russians into the Army, I have my business here, my wife is an English girl, but I will go to a neutral country and if they will not let me

*continued page 12 →*

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→ from 11

go they may taken me and shoot me: that I cannot help, only I will not fight. In Russia there is no law for objectors: they are shot." He spoke earnestly, with sometimes a little flickering smile and one felt that, just so, with his head held erect and refusing a bandage for his clear eyes, he would stand to wait the shots.

Mrs E, a restaurant keeper, said that police and soldiers suddenly entered her premises and ordered that no one should move. At first she thought that a robbery or murder must have been committed. They dragged men and boys in from the street, kept them prisoners for a time, and then dragged them away. "Had my boy to go?" she said, afraid, "he is only 16". The policeman told her to be silent. She never saw anything like it, except in Russia under the Tsar's government and never there on such an extensive scale.

A correspondent writes that one of his friends was returning home when a constable arrested him. On the way to the station the policeman said: "Are you a Jew? You look like one." "No" replied the prisoner: "you can see my

registration card" The constable answered "Oh never mind; as you are not a bloody Jew I don't think I shall detain you after all." Says our correspondent: "Such an example of rank antisemitism is worthy of old Tsar-ridden Russia!"

Yes, this is the first British antisemitic pogrom: let us hope that we never seen another, for such customs once started are apt to grow more cruel and violent.

In Russia, whenever the people struggled more desperately for their freedom the police were instructed to organise a pogrom against the Jews and always the authorities strove to make the Russian people believe that the cause of their troubles, the enemy that they must fight, was not Tsardom, but the Jews. When war broke out with Germany it was declared by the police that the Jews were spies and on 9 January 1916 an official circular to the police department inciting anti-Jewish propaganda was sent to all Governors, Prefects and Local Authorities.

The Russian government, desiring that Jews should fight in its army, promised to withdraw this circular, but on 3



June 1916, Tshenkeli complained that it was still being distributed and that others containing most hideous and unwarrantable accusations had been issues. As a result, many massacres took place, women and girls were outraged, old men were hung by the roadside.

But now Free Russia [i.e. Russia after the February 1917 revolution] has granted freedom to the Jews and we should like to believe that antisemitism is altogether banished from Russia. Are we to have a recrudescence of that old disgraceful savagery in this country?

The Conventions with Allied States Bill, which is passing through Parliament, will give the power to force the subjects of Russia, or of any other Allied Power, into the British Army. In the Bill as it stands they are allowed no option to go either to a neutral country or to the land of their birth. We offered free untrammelling hospitality to these fugitives: now our government holds them as prisoners, refusing them leave to go, refusing even the meagre rights of conscientious objection granted to British men. Yet the Jews were the earliest conscientious objectors.

There is much talk today of creating a Jewish state in Palestine and granting self-government to them there under British rule. Will the Jews be made conscripts also in Palestine? Anti-Jewish pogroms continue here. British mothers and fathers, you cannot save your sons by sending the sons of other nationalities to the slaughter! It is not these poor workers but powerful individuals who made the war and refuse to let it end! □



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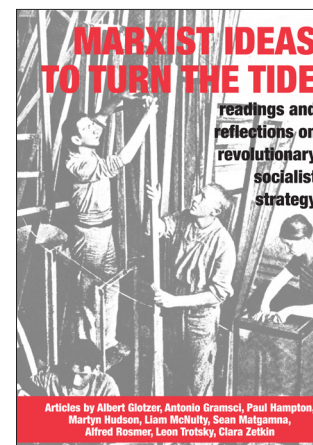
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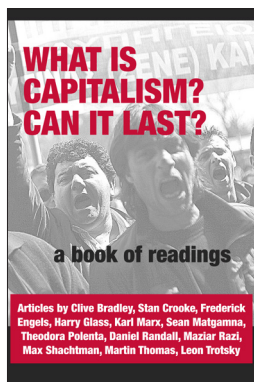
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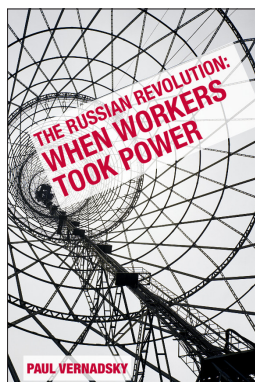
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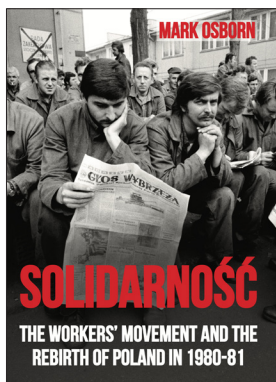
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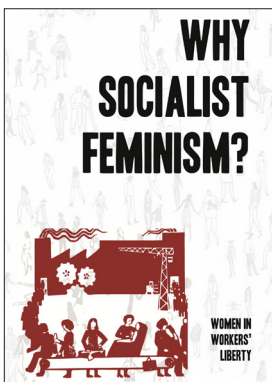
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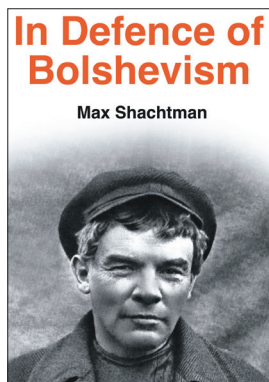
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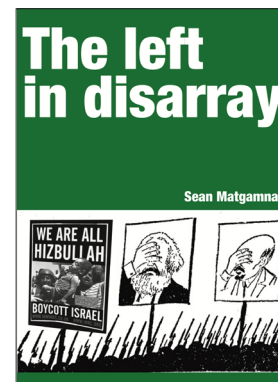
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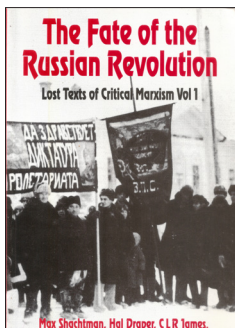
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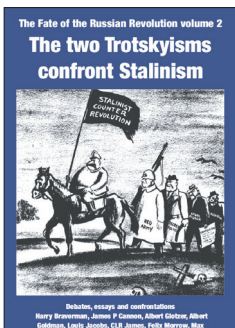
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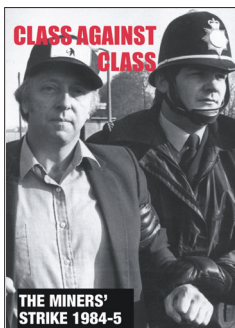
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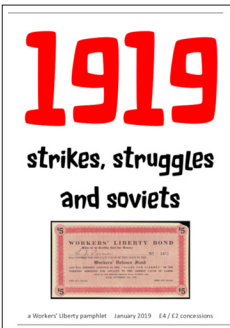
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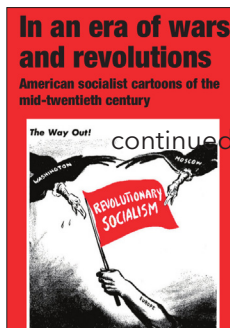
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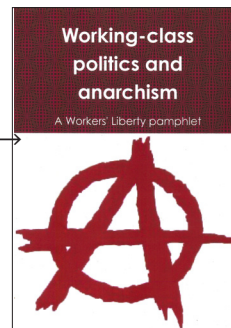
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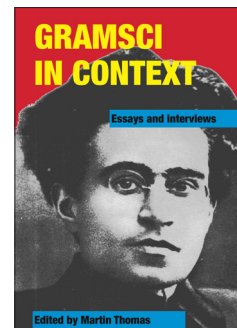
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# Calling the military to account



By Katy Dollar

Almost two-thirds of women in the armed forces have experienced bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination during their career, according to a parliamentary report that says the UK military is “failing to protect” female recruits. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) lifted the legal restrictions that usually prevent serving military from contributing to such inquiries. Around one in ten serving women gave testimony.

The report describes “truly shocking evidence” included gang rape and extensive institutionalised sexual harassment. Some women revealed how they were bullied for refusing sexual advances or had witnessed friends being attacked by groups of men but were too afraid to report it. The survey by the Defence Sub-Committee on Women in the Armed Forces found 64% of female veterans and 58% of serving women reported experiencing bullying, harassment, and discrimination (BHD).

Many readers will not find the reports as “truly shocking” as the Defence Sub-Committee. A strictly hierarchical organisation, with legal preventions on

whistleblowing, that exists for the purpose of violence and subjugation, would likely be a hotbed of sexual misconduct.

The report does not look into rape and sexual violence by military personnel against civilians. The International Criminal Court revealed in December 2020 that it would not take action against the UK, despite finding evidence British troops committed war crimes in Iraq. A 180-page report detailed abuse by British of Iraqi detainees. The ICC report refers to evidence of a pattern of war crimes carried out across a number of years by soldiers from several British regiments. Some detainees were raped or subjected to sexual violence.

Others were beaten so badly they died from their injuries. We may never know how many violent crimes the military commit against civilians.

The parliamentary report advocates removing the chain of command from dealing with complaints of a sexual nature. It also urges the MoD to transfer cases of rape and sexual assault from the military justice system to the civilian court system. Statistics reveal lower conviction rates by military courts, especially for rape. Between 2015 and 2020, the average conviction rate for rape in civilian courts was 34%, more than twice the rate of conviction in military courts (16%).

Serving in the military should not offer protection from prosecution for violent crime. The armed forces should not be able to cover up the extent of violence within the military and against civilian populations.

We are anti-militarists and want mass working-class action to dismantle the military complex; but we also raise demands for reforms that make soldiers accountable for crimes they commit, including sex and war crimes, and for the right of individuals in the armed forces to speak out about violence and to organise democratically against command structures that encourage and cover up abuse, including war crimes. □

## Build from below against NHS pay insult

By Alice Hazel

Following the government's 3% award to NHS workers, all the health unions will be running informal consultations of their members over the next month.

The award falls way below the claims of each union, Unison £2,000, RCN 12%, GMB and Unite 15%, and the current RPI rate of inflation, 3.9%, making it yet another real-terms pay cut. The fact that the government has met the Pay Review Body recommendation only shows how inadequate that body is.

All the unions have condemned the award. Unison, the largest health trade union, will be asking members if they

accept the award or reject it and are prepared to take action up to and including strike action. GMB will be consulting members with a reject recommendation.

The RCN has said it will consult on what action members are prepared to take, although the “what next” document they issued last month talked of a three-step process with an initial consultation on the award before seeking members' views on action.

Activists are organising for these consultations to see high turn-outs, overwhelming rejections of the award, and strong support for action. Our focus should be ensure that our union branches take the campaign seriously. Local unions should be running meetings, walk-about, and stalls in workplaces, and issuing publicity making the case for action.

New reps or campaign contacts should be recruited in every workplace. Activists can organise protests, and leafletting sessions to raise the profile of the campaign. The next steps to formal ballots need to be taken with the momentum that can come from big turn-outs in the informal consultations.

That some of the unions, including Unison, are consulting without a “reject” recommen-

dation is disappointing. With the current pressure on the NHS and the demands of the last year, workers are stressed and exhausted. They need a clear message that their trade unions are prepared to lead a fight on pay and that a campaign of action will be pursued to win.

We need to get that message coming out clearly from branches and the Unison National Executive Committee, and mount pressure for a reject recommendation in the formal ballot.

The *Health Service Journal* says that “senior union sources have suggested to *HSJ* that although there will be significant noise around the [3%] offer, the larger health unions are unlikely to put up major resistance”. That judgement will be proved wrong only by pressure from the base.

Members' control over any action will be key. Cross-union networks need to be built in the course of this campaigning. Activists should be raising issues of workers' control of emergency cover, disaggregated ballots, solidarity action and strike funds now so that we are equipped to discuss these issues with members and organise effective formal ballots and effective action. □

## New settlement in British Gas

By Ollie Moore

The GMB union's dispute with British Gas formally ended on 20 July, when the union accepted a new settlement on pay, terms, and conditions. Engineers in GMB had struck for 44 days, but then new contracts were imposed via fire and rehire, with 500 workers leaving the company.

The GMB says the company has made concessions on overtime rates, increasing them to “time-and-a-half”, and on unsocial hours payments, as well as agreeing limits on unsocial hours working. The new deal also strengthens the criteria for emergency call-outs, which potentially gives workers greater grounds to refuse being pressured into unsocial hours working. New starters will also be able to join the existing pension scheme, something British Gas wanted to change.

The union says the deal also “opens the door” for those

who left the company to rejoin. There is a lack of clarity over the terms. Reps and activists are arguing that anyone who rejoins should be considered to have continuity of service.

The imposed contracts also included a three-year pay freeze; the new settlement gives GMB the right to submit a new pay claim if there is a “significant” increase in inflation, “difficulties in recruitment and retention”, or a return to profitability for the business.

The deal was approved by a 75.5% to 24.5% majority. After a long and bitter dispute, many workers are fatigued, and the concessions secured in negotiations were seen by many as the best that could be achieved. While British Gas succeeded in imposing its contracts, the concessions are real. They would not have been secured without the stand taken in the strikes. □

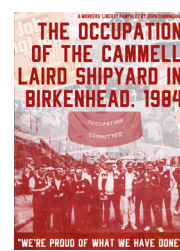
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This pamphlet remembers the brave workers who occupied their shipyard to try and save not just their own jobs but the jobs of future generations. □

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

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

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

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# “Smoke issuing, persons reported”



## Diary of an engineer

By Adrian Noble

It's 11.50pm on a Thursday night. We're getting ready to settle down to bed when the lights come on and the bells go down – we've got a shout.

I drop my bedding in a heap, run out of the dorm and slide down the pole to the fire engine. You've got sixty seconds from the bells going down to the appliance having to be out the bay doors. I step into my fire boots and pull my leggings up by the braces in one movement.

The guvnor comes round the corner from the watch room with the tip sheet in his hand. He shouts out to us: “Smoke issuing, persons reported”. My heart rate quickens. Persons reported. It's on our ground and I'm down as one of two initial breathing apparatus wearers tonight, so if there's really a fire, I'll be the first in.

As we pull out of the station, the guvnor shouts for us to get our sets on. B and I prep so we are ready to throw them on when we arrive – putting our masks around our necks, turning the air cylinders on and taking the set from its bracket. It's easier said than done, fiddling with an awkward 15kg set while



being thrown from pillar to post in the back of the cab as we swerve aggressively through traffic.

We pull up and I practically throw myself out of the truck, carrying a thermal imaging camera and a long line. We reach the building, with an opening through the building leading to a courtyard with a dozen residents looking on. To the left is the staircase to the flats; to the right, fire is punching out of a small room and beginning to catch the ceiling.

B and I get under air, starting up our sets, putting on our masks. T, the driver, is pulling out a hose reel, the quickest method of attack to deploy, and getting the pump to work. B and I give our telemetry tallies to K, who is the entry control operative, responsible for monitoring our air consumption and radio

comms. We rush through our checks – checking each other's PPE for gaps, confirming our gauge readings, checking our radio comms.

B grabs the hose reel and attacks the fire – the guvnor tells me to make entry to the staircase so we can get up to the flat where the reported trapped persons are.

The door to the stairs is locked. More firefighters have arrived – one runs to get breaking in gear, but I ask the residents for a key fob and gain access. Another breathing apparatus crew arrives with a 45mm main jet, more powerful than the hose reel, and takes over the firefighting.

B and I bound up the stairs, my heart beating out of my chest. The first and second floors are filled with grey smoke, although I still have reasonable visibility. I pound on the door to the flat. “London Fire Brigade, anybody there?”. No answer. I knock again, the door shaking in its hinges. Nothing.

The smoke isn't hugely thick and the flat is two floors above the fire, but given that they made the 999 call, you have to assume the worst and act accordingly. We're going to need to break in. But K radios – the occupants are among those in the courtyard, and the fire is under control. I exhale. □

• Adrian Noble is a firefighter

## Alliances, democracy, and internationalism



## Debate

By Luke Hardy

Much of what Andrew Northall argues in his [reply](#) to my [letter](#) about the “Anti-Monopoly Alliance”, no socialist with any sense of the reality of the world we live in would disagree with.

He advocates “a comprehensive range of economic, social, political and democratic demands which proceed from what working people actually need and deserve in the here and now, not what capitalism or its media says is ‘realistic’, ‘credible’ or ‘affordable’”. In many cases they proceed from demands made by workers in struggle and by progressive movements for democracy, equality and justice and point to the need to challenge the capitalist system itself in order to make real progress”. However, if the “Anti-Monopoly Alliance” meant that, then it would be a puzzle why its advocates have called it “anti-monopoly” rather than “anti-capitalist”. In fact, I think I've shown that all the versions of the Communist Party's “anti-monopoly” or “broad democratic” policy since 1951 (at least) have been quite different.

Working-class consciousness is at a low ebb. Our programmes today must

flow from an analysis of why our socialist movement is in such a state and what demands can counter this and help renew our movement.

On at least three levels “Britain's Road to Socialism” and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) approach in general fail that test. Firstly, there is little reckoning with the horrific record of the police states that call themselves socialist, and which represent what many people think of when they hear the word “socialist”. We must be clear that the kind of socialism we advocate is about working-class democracy.

The CPB still sows illusions in states like Cuba and China. Instead, we need to be advocating a deeply democratic workers' government utterly removed from the murderous tradition of Stalin.

Secondly there is the issue of democracy with the movement. Many of the defeats we have had since the 1980s have been somewhat self-inflicted, wounds due to the bureaucratic leadership. One example is the demobilising of the 2011 public sector strikes just as momentum began to build.

Our demands need to include calls to transform our movement so the rank and file membership are in charge. By contrast the CPB's approach to politics is based around alliances with more “leftish” top officials. Where we should be encouraging criticism and open dis-

cussion of the actions of the leadership of our movement, the CPB's approach is to promote “unity” on the basis of not levelling such criticism.

And, thirdly, demands need to point to the international nature of the working class. The overthrow of capitalism will not be completed in one country, but demands an international revolutionary movement. The British Road to socialism was a left nationalist document from the start, and deliberately so. Even today the CPB was enthusiastic backers of Brexit, push an autarkic view of the socialist economy, and are for immigration controls and against the free movement of labour.

That approach breeds in our movement and among the most advanced parts of the working class, not internationalism, but a very nationalistic view of the world, undermining the working-class solidarity between nations and between settled workers and migrant workers vital for socialist advance.

We need to be honest with the most advanced workers and fellow socialists. To transform the world, we also need to utterly transform our own labour movement, and that means moving decisively away from much of what passes for socialist common sense. The politics of Britain's Road to Socialism hinder and trap our movement, not advance it. □



# Building-wide safety committees



**John Moloney,  
PCS AGS (p.c.)**

The outsourced workers' strike at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on 19-21 July was totally solid. I had the honour of addressing their picket line, and there was good support from elsewhere in the union and the wider movement too. It was especially good to see young activists from the UK Student Climate Network's London chapter support the picket line, emphasising climate change as a class issue. BEIS is a key department in terms of climate strategy, so it's especially important the links are made. The perspective now is to build towards further action in September when ministers return from their summer break.

Talks are ongoing with Just Ask, the outsourced contractor which employs cleaners in the Royal Parks. They've moved somewhat on guaranteed minimum hours and holiday pay, but not enough on the key issues of job cuts and parity with directly-employed staff, so the strike planned for 30 July will go ahead.

In the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea, a huge backlog of work has built up due to the action we've taken. Our current ballot mandate runs until September, and we want to get the maximum use out of it. A section of the workforce, in a section called drivers medicals, will strike throughout the whole of August. We'll then look to re-ballot the entire

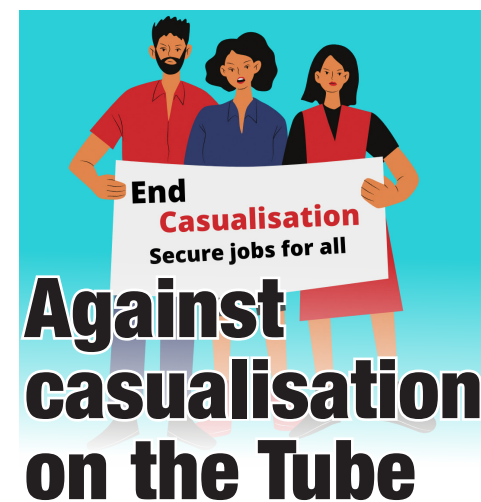


workforce for further action. That'll be challenge, but the union has grown throughout the dispute and we've elected many new reps, so we're starting from a higher level of organisation this time.

Our campaign to force Mitie to commit not to using fire and rehire tactics continues, though we have had a victory as they have backed off on changes to pay. I pushed strongly for us to respond to Mitie on a company-wide basis, rather than contract by contract, and that approach has paid off, as they've backed down from the imposition of new contracts. They haven't, however, given a firm guarantee that they won't use fire and rehire tactics at any point, so our fight will continue until they do.

I'm also continuing to push strongly for the creation of building-wide health

and safety committees in workplaces used by multiple departments. There's a clear logic to having a single committee for the whole building, rather than each department having its own committee. We're starting to get some traction for that approach now, and some indications that the employer will recognise those committees. In London, where there are numerous sites of that type, we could look to set up an overarching structure that brings the reps from those committees together to discuss common issues, and creates an additional channel of accountability. It's early days, but if structures like that were built up and strengthened, they could be a base for fighting for much more workers' control over how safety is monitored and improved in civil service workplaces. □



From Tubeworker

Tube (London Underground) management are showing how they intend to achieve the "savings" and "efficiencies" they are desperate to find – by attacking our job security. London Underground Ltd (LUL) has revealed its plan to extend the use of fixed-term contracts and non-permanent labour (commonly known as temporary workers). LUL plans to hire over three hundred of these in fleet depots and workshops.

These workers are entitled to secure, permanent work, not to be picked up when management want them and dropped when they don't. And the permanent workforce are entitled to secure jobs without the incursion of casualisation into the workplace. It is essential that we defend every job and our overall staffing levels.

The RMT union is balloting its LUL fleet members for strike action and action short of strikes. Vote yes, yes! □

# A film from Georgia: Blue Mountains



**Kino Eye**

By John Cunningham

Although a small country, Georgia has produced some brilliant film makers, Otar Iosseliani, Mikhail Kalatozov, Nana Jorjadze, Tengiz Abuladze and Eldar Shengelaia to name only a few. Shengelaia made *Blue Mountains* in 1983, an absurdist satire which lampoons Soviet bureaucracy and could be seen as a precursor to the "Glasnost" ("openness") movement associated with Mikhail Gorbachev.

Soso is an aspiring novelist who regularly visits the local publishing house, desperately trying to get someone interested in his latest writing. However, the staff are lazy, frequently out for lunch, boozing and generally "on



*The publishing staff finally notice that the building is crumbling around them*

the make". Soso's manuscript just get passed around from one so-called editor to the next and everyone is "too busy" to read it.

The publishing staff don't even notice that the building in which they work is crumbling around them and could collapse at any moment. Which towards the end of the film is precisely what happens.

The staff are then transferred to a brand new, modern building. Anyone

expecting a corresponding change of attitude is disappointed as they continue in their old ways. Soso's manuscript remains unpublished. It is a difficult film to track down, but worth the effort. Some versions do not have English sub-titles. □

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## Strikes against Rolls Royce reneging

By Ross Quinn

*In 2020, strikes by workers at the Rolls Royce plant in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, forced Rolls Royce to abandon a plan to offshore work and cut jobs at the site. Strikes have now resumed after the employer reneged on commitments. Ross Quinn, a regional officer for Unite, spoke to Solidarity.*

At the end of April, it was reported that a senior manager announced that the training school, which was part of the settlement that ended the strike, guaranteeing future jobs at the site, would be demolished after two years. It was also reported that the company would essentially be reverting to the original plan which workers struck against last year, with some minor tweaks, leaving only 200 jobs on site.

Quarterly and half-yearly reviews were built into the agreement, so we challenged management about those comments, which they didn't deny. We've also used those reviews to remind management of the need to consult us about ongoing work on the site, and the requirement as part of the agreement for them to explore all opportunities for bringing new work onto the site, especially linked to green technology. We identified a number of instances where the company wasn't following the agreement they'd signed just a few months earlier.

The agreement included a commitment to retain a baseline minimum of 350 jobs on site, but in the very first review management were saying they were planning for 250. We made it clear this wasn't acceptable, and that we needed guarantees the agreement would be honoured. They countered that the agreement also included commitments to efficiencies on our side that hadn't yet been delivered, but these are only possible

in the context of an ongoing commitment from management to protect work at the site, not to run it down past the agreed minimums. Moreover, the minimums were only a baseline; the company should be planning above them, not below.

The employer held a meeting with site and national convenors where they responded directly to some of our questions. Their responses weren't satisfactory, and reps told the company that unless we saw tangible evidence that they were enacting the agreement, including actively sourcing new work streams for the site, we'd be back in dispute. We held a consultative ballot and told the employer we'd strike if our demands weren't met. In response, they offered a commitment of just seven additional jobs.

That's clearly not acceptable, so strikes have resumed. We first balloted a group of 17 maintenance engineers, who struck for two weeks, concluding on 23 July. Even though this is a small group of workers, they have significant leverage within the site. There's now a planned two-week shutdown of the whole site, after which the maintenance engineers will strike for another two weeks. Meanwhile, we're balloting the rest of the workers at the site, which will conclude on 13 August.

Nationally our reps at other Rolls Royce sites have communicated their complete solidarity with striking workers at Barnoldswick.

The workers at Barnoldswick are as determined as they were during the initial dispute. We're holding regular meetings to discuss the direction of the dispute and decide the next steps, so the lead is very much coming from the shop floor. Rolls Royce could end the strikes by committing to uphold the agreement; until they do that, action will continue. □

# Organise for Labour Party conference!

By Michael Elms

Labour Party conference 2021 will take place from 25 to 29 September in Brighton, in-person unless a new Covid spike brings new curbs by then. This will be an important point for the left of the labour movement to regroup and halt its retreat and dissipation.

Getting good rule changes through Labour conference is always a long and intricate process, so probably the best chances for political regrouping will be around motions and policy. The deadline for motion submissions is 13 September. Many local Labour Parties have already decided their motions. Others will decide in August or early September.

Starmer won his election as Labour Party leader with 60% of the vote in 2020. This was an indicator of how badly the Corbyn project had been discredited. Corbyn's chosen successor, Rebecca Long-Bailey, got a much lower vote share than Corbyn received in 2015 and 2016.

But Starmer was elected on the basis of a manifesto that promised a continuation of at least part of Corbyn's left-wing political platform, and with the advantage of being independent of the widely (and rightly) mistrusted fixers in Corbyn's leader's office, Murray, Milne and Murphy.

Since his election, Starmer has shifted substantially to the right, reverting to the Miliband-era tactic of agreeing with the government on the fundamentals and offering small, qualified criticisms here and there – a "small target" strategy that avoids doing anything bold, decisive, or setting out an alternative agenda. He has sought to shore up his authority by picking fights with the pro-Corbyn left through high-profile disciplinary measures. Most recently, that office-led fight against the left has been stepped up with a decision by the National Executive Committee to introduce speedy summary expulsion for associates of Socialist Appeal and other pro-Corbyn groupings.

Left-wing policies winning out at conference



would be a signal to the rest of the movement that the Labour left has not gone away. It would provide a boost to attempts to re-organise the Labour left more broadly.

In particular, the politics of the internationalist left need to be re-asserted, against any and all accommodation to Johnson's Brexit nationalism and anti-migrant demagoguery. We want working-class, socialist internationalism, rather than the Blairite internationalism of NATO and global capitalist institutions.

Momentum Internationalists is backing the "left consensus" candidates for the Conference Arrangement Committee (Seema Chandwani and Billy Hayes: voting 5 July to 13 August) and for the National Constitutional Committee (which Starmer hopes to abolish in favour of an appointed, not elected, body), and is focusing effort on motions including these ([bit.ly/lp-m](https://bit.ly/lp-m)):

- Build Back Fairer – working-class demands on how society should be rebuilt in and after the pandemic
- China, Hong Kong and the Uyghurs – a motion expressing solidarity with the Hong Kong democracy movement and the struggle of the Uyghur people against repression and genocide; and taking a position against Cold-War rhetoric from western powers
- Global climate justice – for a serious and socially-just response to climate change
- Migrants welcome – a motion from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement. □

• More on the Labour Party: page 3





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**



## DEFEAT NHS CUTS, CARVE-UP, AND WAGE-SQUEEZE!

**By Mohan Sen**

New figures from the TUC say that after the 3% pay rise the government is proposing, NHS workers will still be 7.5% worse off than in 2010. Other figures have suggest the pay cut is bigger. Certainly for many NHS workers it will be much bigger.

The Tories are also saying that 3% must come from existing NHS budgets, i.e. from cuts to services. We demand a 15% increase, and fully funded.

Under pressure from NHS campaigners, Labour and the unions eventually spoke out against the Tories' privatisation- and cuts-driving [Health and Care Bill](#) and the Parliamentary Labour Party voted against the Bill at its second reading on 14 July. It is now moving to "committee stage".

The Bill proposes that England is carved up into 42 Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), modelled on the Accountable

Care Systems in the United States.

Private companies will have seats on the ICS boards and be able to influence decisions about where NHS money is spent. The Bill abolishes competitive tendering, but that means that NHS contracts will no longer have to be tendered; ICSs can just hand them out to any contractor.

But the Labour leaders, and even the unions, have done very little to mobilise opposition.

We should demand that unions and the Labour Party actually start campaigning, including by calling a national demonstration to support the NHS workers, oppose the Bill, and demand an emergency funding-increase and privatisation-decrease for the health service.

Even by Keir Starmer's standards, the Labour Party's disarray here has been spectacular. When the Tories proposed the

NHS pay review body go for 1%, Labour advocated 2.1%. Now the pay review body has proposed 3%, and the government has accepted that, Labour is left blustering. It calls the proposal "shameful" but previously proposed a worse figure, and still advocates no alternative. The Labour government in Wales has announced... 3%.

We should also demand the labour movement speaks out on social care. The Tories still haven't produced a plan for the sector, but the media says one is coming. It seems it will maintain a fragmented and privatised system and only introduce a very limited cap on costs.

The last Labour Party conference voted for a free, public social care system. But at Labour women's conference shadow cabinet member Thangam Debbonaire attacked the idea, saying it would "give the Tories a stick to beat Labour with". □

• More on NHS pay: page 13