

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

LABOUR:



THE FIGHT IS STILL ON

» Blair Return Project still shaky

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Pic: @labGND

» Fight for conference policy on workers' rights

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For Conference policies, against Starmer



Labour policy, a “senior Labour source” told the *Guardian* during Labour Party conference, on 27 September, is “what Keir says it is”.

On 26 September the conference voted overwhelmingly for a left-wing “Socialist Green New Deal” motion on climate change, including nationalisation of the energy companies. The same day Starmer told the BBC he would not nationalise energy.

Starmer’s “ten pledges” in last year’s Labour leadership election specifically called for “common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water”.

Tax the rich

Both Starmer’s pre-conference pamphlet, and his conference speech, stressed a “pro-business” turn, praise for the “private sector”, talk of what employers had told Starmer they wanted from workers more than of what workers might tell him we want from bosses.

Yet the Pandora Papers remind us of the need to attack the vast accumulated wealth of the rich in order to restore working-class living standards and pursue working-class interests.

As a motion to the conference from Newark and Newcastle East CLPs, ruled



out of order, put it:

“We need to take back wealth, including through a wealth tax, increased corporation tax, capital gains tax and taxing very high incomes; and taking banking and finance into democratic public ownership.”

Blairism mark 2?

Starmer is pushing towards a weak Blairite-style agenda for Labour – small welfare and climate tweaks only as market priorities and low taxes for the rich allow. This at a time when climate action, and unwinding inequality sharpened by the pandemic and the Tories’ post-lockdown clawbacks, are urgent.

But the Blair Return Project is as yet very far from full victory.

In the heyday of Blairism, until long after Blair’s election in 1997, the leadership machine had Labour conference sewn up. Most members supported the leadership or were willing to fall in behind it to “unite against the Tories”. Blair looked sure to win the general election, or had won. Starmer still has wretched poll figures (and, instructively, no boost to them from his conference “showcase”).

The 2021 conference suggested there is still a left-wing majority among the Labour membership, though with a shift to the right since 2019. Constituency delegates voted repeatedly for left-wing policies, in many cases as left-wing as the policy passed in 2019.

Numerous speeches, and wider discussions around the conference, made the left-wing bent of many delegates clear. And unlike during high Blairism, the leadership did not feel confident to declare to the conference itself that motions would be ignored.

The unions

In the 90s most trade unions were dominated by soft-Blairite “new realism”. Unions now are on the back foot. But they mostly have left policy and left or leftish leaderships, and recent union elections have reinforced that trend.

Starmer dropped plans to return to an electoral college with a special vote for MPs to elect the party leader. He got through his other anti-democratic rule changes. Those are designed to insulate the leadership from policies supported by the membership which are or might be passed by conference.

However, the bulk of the rule changes only passed because the leadership and machine of Unison voted with Starmer, in many cases violating their own union rules and policies. Anger about that may help Unison’s left, which recently won a majority on the union’s national executive for the first time, to win a majority also in the current elections for its separate Labour Link structure. If the left wins and consolidates

control of Unison’s intervention in Labour, things could shift rapidly and significantly.

The decision of the Bakers’ Union to disaffiliate, while understandable given the Labour leadership’s provocations, is a mistake.

As yet, even “left-wing” unions mostly put up little fight in the party. If they begin to use their weight in party structures well, they can reverse Labour’s rightward drift.

Labour’s three biggest affiliates are three of the four big health workers’ unions – Unison, GMB and Unite. Even the more leftish Unite did nothing to raise its 15% / £3,000 pay claim at the conference. The unions should push Labour to get on the streets in support of the NHS and NHS workers – at least as much as Blair Labour was pushed onto the streets in 1994 to (successfully, then) block Royal Mail privatisation.

Policy is key

In the run up to and at the conference, the biggest Labour left group, Momentum, took little interest in the policy debates, focusing on leadership election rules. Its “The World Transformed” festival once again had minimal connection to what was happening at the conference.

The left certainly needs plans to reverse Starmer’s anti-democratic rule changes and democratise the party. But, also, to give life to the left policies passed at conference by action on the streets, by preparation to sharpen them at next year’s conference, and by calling MPs to account on them. □



Corrections

The word “not” went missing from Zack Muddle’s article “Less carbon emitted means less pasture farming” (*Solidarity* 607): should have read “We should not celebrate this change in itself.” And our note on skipping a week got all the dates wrong: we skipped the week of 29 September. No.608, this issue, is out on 6 October, not 13 Oct. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Thursday 7 October, 6.30-8pm: Workers’ Liberty students: Imperialism and anti-imperialism

Saturday 9 October, 12-1.30pm: Meat: environmentally bad, good, or a non-issue? – Environmental socialist reading group

Saturday 9 October, 2-3.30pm: Rebel footsteps – a radical history walk in New Cross

Sunday 10 October, 2pm onwards: Socialist Feminist reading group on *Berlin’s Third Sex* at 2pm, Hootananny, SW2 1DF.

Tuesday 12 October, 6:30pm: Fighting cuts in Network Rail (organised by Off The Rails).

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources – including a comprehensive list of local student meetings, see workersliberty.org/events or scan QR code □



Covid: jab speed-up needed worldwide



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

Covid vaccines are working. Large parts of the world urgently need more of them: labour movements must press for requisitioning of Big Pharma and vaccine know-how to enable a rapid drive to expand manufacturing, distribution, and donations of vaccines to poorer countries. Africa is still on only about 0.1 jabs per 100 per day (a quick jab drive is about 1/100/day). Maybe the fact that much of Africa is in the Southern Hemisphere, where the seasonal factors are favourable in the coming months, will give more leeway (case and death counts have been decreasing in Africa); but Africa still has only 4.5% of people fully vaccinated.

The UK and world death counts, and even the death count in the USA, where vax-refusal is wider, are edging down. But experience in Israel,

and lately Serbia and Russia, shows that wide vax does not rule out new surges. In the Northern Hemisphere winter, ill-understood seasonal virus patterns, more indoors crowds, and fading of voluntary precautions make measures such as full isolation pay for all, workers’ control of workplace safety, better ventilation, emergency boosting of the NHS, mask mandates, still high priority.

Australia has become the first of the countries with rigidly closed borders to announce a reopening plan. The federal plan is to reopen borders from when 80% of over-15s are fully-jabbed (it’s currently 57%, but 80% first-jabbed).

Queensland, where Covid rates are lower and vax rates too (49%), has said it will “not necessarily” reopen its borders with other states and with the world when it reaches 80%. It is using that stance to press the federal government for more cash for hospitals to cope with the inevitable rise (smaller or greater) in Covid cases that will follow reopening. □

Italian GKN workers' resistance shows the way

By Hugh Edwards

Forty thousand or so workers and others marched in Florence on Sat 18 September behind the banner, reading "Insorgiamo" ("we are in revolt"), of the 400 GKN workers sacked via email two months ago.

The hastily-convened decision the day after of the local industrial tribunal to uphold their claim of unlawful dismissal by the British-based multinational confirmed the effectiveness of the workers' resistance.

This was a crucial first success for their struggle, their determination, and their ability to galvanise and sweep up a growing army of workers and others in an inspiring triumph for collective solidarity.

It reflected no merit of any kind on their union leaders, regionally or nationally, who passively went along with the workers' independent actions without ever committing themselves on the terrain of action of any kind. Those trade union bureaucrats have been complicit with employers and with the government of Mario Draghi, which in July had given the green light to the bosses "right" to cut workforces, suspended during the Covid emergency periods.

The GKN workforce are only one of a veritable rash of workforces summarily locked out or in the pipeline for it.

The success of the GKN workers raises sharply the need to unite all of those fronts of struggle and resistance,



40,000 workers were on the streets protesting the GKN layoffs

posing concretely the demand for a united all-out action against the employers and the government.

Italy currently has a coalition government embracing the full profile of bourgeois parties, from centre-left to centre-right, minus only the neo-fascist Brothers of Italy

The bosses of GKN have acknowledged the tribunal decision against them, but have reserved their right to contest it, signalling that they have no intention to revoke the closure of their operation in Florence. The bosses' federation Confindustria has warned the government not to "validate" what they termed the "atmosphere of mounting anti-business culture surfacing among the workers".

Draghi hastily sought to reassure them that the hastily passed anti-delocalisation bill was only a regularisation to prevent any further "accidental" decisions such as happened with GKN.

Lessons for solidarity from 1 October

By Pete Radcliff

In Britain protests were held in many cities around the anniversary on 1 October of the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. London and Nottingham showed very different ways of organising solidarity.

In London, a coalition had been drawn together to organise the protest, including the left wing Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong (LMSWHK) campaign.

When the LMSWHK heard that right wing Tories, including Tory councillor Peter Golds from Tower Hamlets, were invited, they objected. Golds recently [tweeted](#) a picture of himself alongside a supporter of Anti-Communist Action, a US based organisation with white supremacist and neo-Nazi involvement.

But the organisers of the London march told the LMSWHK that the invitation for Golds to speak remained open. LMSWHK had to withdraw from building the London march, which ended up smaller than previous ones.

Opposition to repression in Hong Kong and East Turkestan has long been misused by well-funded Tory-led operations like Hong Kong Watch. They have given anti-communists like Iain Duncan Smith a high profile in their work. They have taken leading Hong Kong dissidents to stand alongside Priti Patel and give her photo opportunities to enhance her reputation. They have done little or nothing to expose the support of Tory-supporting banks and corporations for the repression in Hong Kong.

The government's eventual and cynical declaration of "solidarity" with the GKN workforce is hypocritical and opportunist. A ruthless restructuring is underway in industry, transport, public services etc, underlining a bloody-minded offensive in the pursuit of a capitalist recovery programme. The billions already handed to the bosses, with more on the way, will boost it.

Against that, the workers' movement urgently needs to forge in struggle and resistance the widest and most militant unity. The crucial lesson of the GKN success the need for more than single, isolated, factory-by-factory responses.

The battle now is more critical than ever to render the living, burning disputes of the moment into one collective and general declaration of battle against the employers and the government, crowned by the demand: "Workers of Italy, Unite! Forward to the general strike!" □

HK: workers will rise again

By Ralph Peters

The final conference of Hong Kong's only independent trade union confederation, the HKCTU, was on 3 October.

At a press conference following the HKCTU's decision to disband, a prepared statement was read out by Vice-Chair Leo Tang, who was himself imprisoned a year ago. The statement expressed its confidence "that the workers' power of resistance will not therefore fade away. Contradictions bring opposition. Exploitations lead to struggles... One may block the river, but without a way to channel the water, the only result would be a deadlier flood."

On Thursday 30 September members of Hong Kong's socialist League of Social Democrats marched against the political imprisonments in both Hong Kong and China. On Friday and Saturday 1-2 Oct, defiant street protests were held with HKCTU banners still flying.

Repression is increasing, too. On 29 September seven young activists were brought to court under the National Se-

curity Law, one of them 15 years old, two others 16. One of the 16-year-olds, Yuen Ka-him, was still in the school uniform he was wearing when arrested the previous day.

Laws were brought in on 30 September that would make "doxing" – being abusive on social media to public figures – punishable with a sentence of up to ten years in jail, and insulting the Chinese flag with three years.

The HKCTU was the last of the mass organisations that supported the demands of the democracy movement for universal suffrage and against the increasingly repressive powers brought in by the Beijing-controlled Hong Kong Authority. Many of the leaders of the HKCTU are in prison being investigated or facing trial for subversion, as are almost all leaders of that democracy movement who have not made it to exile. Pro-government media, the unofficial mouthpieces of the Chinese Communist Party leaders in Beijing, have declared that the HKCTU's contact with international trade union networks such as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is foreign collusion and subversion. □

Helping Len rewrite his history



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The autobiography of Unite union leader Len McCluskey, *Always Red*, sounds pretty good – if you believe the *Morning Star*. The paper calls it “an incisive political memoir with lessons for the entire left.”

If so, then *Always Red* must be a considerable improvement upon Len’s previous literary effort, the banal and self-regarding *Why You Should Be A Trade Unionist*, published in 2020 but written before the 2019 election (Len’s explanation for this strange timing being that the book “never was intended to be a political rallying cry”). Mind you, the *Morning Star*’s editor Ben Chacko reckons *Always Red* is “written in the same engaging style as [the] earlier book”, so we have been warned.

Chacko’s review of the book (in the MS of 27 September) turns out to be an almost hagiographic paean to Len the man (“witty... can be hilarious”), Len the thinker (“there is serious strategic



thinking in these techniques about how unions can win”) and Len the far-sighted sage who, it seems almost single-handedly ushered in the Corbyn era by backing one member one vote in the Labour Party in 2014. In fact, such was Len’s visionary foresight then that he eclipsed even the *Morning Star* itself: with a note of humble self-criticism, Chacko notes that “many other union leaders were baffled by Unite’s support for the change – frankly, so was the *Morning Star* – but developments were to show how right it was.”

But there is a note of bitterness that

cannot be avoided: “McCluskey’s account of the 2017-19 period is dispiriting”, caused entirely, it seems by Labour’s “renegeing on the promise to respect the EU referendum”, a view that means Len “is in agreement with the analysis consistently made by this newspaper.” A particularly culpable example of the “infestation” of “Remainitis” that Len points to is Emily Thornberry having the effrontery to wear a blue dress and a gold star necklace “in an effort to look like a walking EU flag.” The one criticism of the otherwise saintly Jeremy Corbyn is for “failing to give the clear lead that might have stopped the rot” (i.e. doing what Len specialised in: ignoring the wishes of the members).

Strangely, if we turn to Len’s earlier page-turner *Why You Should Be A Trade Unionist*, we find him in full support of Labour’s 2019 position and, indeed, claiming that Brexit doesn’t really matter very much: “I have always supported Labour’s approach to bringing the country together by trying to speak to all of it, not just half of it, while dismissing the other half, as the other main parties have done. But even as I write about Leave and Remain, I reject these labels. In or out of the EU, it is the

class questions that matter.”

Still, the *Morning Star* is hardly going to criticise someone for re-writing their own history, given the record of the political current (Stalinism) the paper represents.

And, of course, Chacko and his paper owe a huge debt of gratitude to Len and Unite: when Gorbachev cancelled the USSR’s bulk order (12,000 copies a day) in 1990, the paper was saved by the leaders of several British trade unions pumping money in. In recent years Unite has effectively replaced the USSR in ensuring the paper’s survival via bulk via bulk orders, generous payments for advertising and subsidised special editions for union conferences, the TUC, Tolpuddle, the Durham Miners’ gala, etc.

Whether this cosy relationship continues under Len’s successor Sharon Graham remains to be seen – but the *Morning Star* has already carried a number of articles in praise of her, most of which avoid mention of the embarrassing fact that the paper did not support her in the Unite general secretary election. But history is once again being re-written, and the sucking-up continues. □

“Blockers” and age of consent



Letter

The article by Angela Driver welcoming the Court of Appeal’s overturning of the *Tavistock vs Bell* judgement ([Solidarity 607](#)) is headed “A win for teenagers’ rights” and states that the decision “is good news for young trans people under 18.” In fact, the decision applies to children under the age of 16 who are struggling with their identity and considering gender reassignment.

I have to say that I have serious doubts about the Court of Appeal’s decision and think the judges in the *Tavistock vs Bell* case made a good point when they said there would be enormous difficulties for young children weighing up the relevant information and deciding whether to consent to the use of puberty blocking medication: “It is highly unlikely that a child aged 13 or under would be competent to give consent to the administration of puberty blockers [...]



Keira Bell took blockers at 16, later detransitioning

It is doubtful that a child aged 14 or 15 could understand and weigh the long-term risks and consequences of the administration of puberty blockers.”

I am aware of the fact that the medical consensus is that the physical effects of puberty blockers are reversible if the individual stops taking them. However, the *Tavistock Clinic*’s own Gender Identity Development Service states on its website: “The blocker is a physically reversible intervention... However we don’t know the full psychological effects of the blocker or whether it alters the course of adolescent brain development.”

The concluding section of Angela’s article (“Even when ‘protectors’ mean well, such ‘protection’ can often result in oppression”) would, it seems

to me, logically mean opposition to the age of consent.

Workers’ Liberty, unlike several other tendencies on the left, has always supported an age of consent, and has stated: “Any fixed age of consent is necessarily arbitrary, but 16 (the age of consent in Britain) does coincide with other markers of adulthood and economic independence (age of marriage, school leaving age, full-time employment). We oppose the call for the abolition of the age of consent.”

Of course, this statement was in the context of consent to sexual relations and not about elective medical interventions: but I think the same principle applies.

Solidarity and Workers’ Liberty are quite correct in supporting the right of adults to transition – and, of course, to oppose discrimination against trans people. But we must also protect the interests of children who are likely to be incapable of making complex and potentially life-changing decisions. □

Jack McDonough,
Birmingham

Draft Angela Rayner?

Even Alison McGovern MP, former chair of the Labour right-wing group Progress, is now annoyed with Keir Starmer (because of him writing for the *Sun*).

Some socialists are talking about a leadership challenge. Comments I’ve heard include “This must be the end for Starmer... Would we, for instance, support Rayner to challenge Starmer (assuming he doesn’t simply stand down)?”

“Starmer is actively carrying out a turbo-New-Labour strategy of transforming Labour away from any kind of accountability... The turfing out of Starmer and the Blairite faction is imperative and a soft left leadership under Rayner would be a limited step forward”.

Problem is, to force a leadership contest requires 20% of Labour MPs to nominate a challenger. Even a majority vote of no confidence by MPs does not by itself force a contest, as we found in 2016.

A “draft Rayner” campaign, pressing all left Labour MPs



to nominate Angela Rayner, would be unlikely to “work”; but certain to imply giving political credit to someone who has given no guarantees at all of differentiation from Starmer.

If Rayner should kick over the table and seek nominations against Starmer – it looks unlikely for now, but if – then that would create different choices. We might advocate people giving her their second votes in the Alternative Vote system used. But even then, surely, our primary pressure on MPs would be to nominate a left candidate? □

Alan Gilbert, London

“Anti-sleaze” ploy won’t fix police violence



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

The trial of Wayne Couzens revealed he used his police warrant card and handcuffs to kidnap Sarah Everard off the street before strangling her with his police belt and burning her body. He claimed to be using the extraordinary Coronavirus police powers, the same powers his colleagues later used to disperse the Sarah Everard vigil on Clapham Common and arrest campaigners present. Couzens is one of fifteen police officers convicted of killing women since 2009.

The news follows findings that 26 Met officers have committed sex crimes in the past five years. Two of the officers were jailed for their offences in April – a month after the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard. The offences include rape, possessing indecent images of children, and voyeurism, dating back to 2016. Last week it also



emerged that Everard’s killer allegedly exchanged “misogynistic, racist and homophobic” text messages with five other serving police officers, two of whom are now under investigation. The judge presiding over Couzens’ sentencing highlighted that his Met colleagues had spoken for his character despite knowing he had pled guilty to the rape and murder of Everard. On 3 October, a serving officer in the Metropolitan Police, David Carrick, of Stevenage, Hertfordshire, was charged with rape.

The suggestion that women worried they may be about to be attacked by a Police Officer “wave down a bus” seems to have done little to restore the

Met’s reputation. Met Commissioner Dame Cressida Dick is seeking to see off calls for her resignation with the appointment of an “anti-sleaze” advisor. Dick said that she hoped to announce a “high profile figure” to lead the review. The “anti-sleaze” advisor will be chosen by the commissioner and report to her, “weeding out predatory officers”. “This person will also work alongside me, challenging my senior team and our leadership on standards, corruption, sexual misconduct and how the Met responds when things go wrong,” the Commissioner wrote in the *Evening Standard* on Monday 4 October. Added to this, there will more police officers! The unfortunately but possibly accurately named “Predatory Offender Units”, will include 650 new officers in key “hotspot” locations for offences of violence and harassment. It seems likely the “anti-sleaze” ploy was intended to avoid a fuller public enquiry into misogyny in the force (which, in some form, the government has now ordered anyway). The police don’t have a great record on marking their

own homework at the best of times, and we don’t suppose that is about to change any time soon,” a Reclaim the Night spokesperson said. The choice of “sleaze” as euphemism for more serious charges of misogyny and violence against women betrays the inability of the Met to recognise the issue.

With horrendous timing Nick Thomas-Symonds, Labour’s shadow home secretary, has launched a new group called Labour Friends of the Police. Several MPs have already joined, the party says, and its patron is Lady Hilton of Eggardon, a Labour peer and a former Met police commander. The labour movement should not be seeking to save the reputation of the police at a low point of public confidence. As Kelly Rogers writes in *Women’s Fightback*: “The primary role of the police is to protect private property, patrol borders and wage campaigns on behalf of the state (from the war on drugs to crack-down on anti-social behaviour) which are proxies for a policy of racial and social exclusion and oppression.” □

Is the Fairphone fair for workers?



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

If you own a smartphone, you’re almost certainly contributing to several big problems in the world. These include a negative environmental impact, the production of mountains of e-waste as perfectly good phones are thrown away, and of course the exploitation of workers in the supply chains, from the mines in the Congo to assembly lines in China.

A decade-old Dutch company, Fairphone, has set out to change all this by producing an “ethical” smartphone. Last week they announced their latest – and by far their best – model, the Fairphone 4. Thousands of people participated in the online launch event.

Fairphone boasts that it uses ethically-produced minerals, including Fair-trade gold, where possible. It fights against planned obsolescence by making the phone easily repairable by users. Each phone shipped includes a small screwdriver so you can open your phone and remove parts, including the battery. (Try doing that on an iPhone.) Their efforts have gotten Fair-

phone recognised as a “B Corporation” – one of the highest standards for ethical behaviour in the corporate world.

As for the workers who make the phones, Fairphone says it’s committed to “develop innovative programs to improve job satisfaction and representation, and to open the lines of communication between workers and management.” They say that they “listen to what the workers want to change, involve them in the implementation of solutions and empower them to have an influence on their working conditions.”

And now we come to Sherlock Holmes’ famous “dog that did not bark in the night”. Because in all the lovely words about “involving” workers, and “opening lines of communication” and “listening” there is absolutely no mention of the one thing that we know actually works if you want to empower workers in the workplace.

And that thing is trade unions.

Why does Fairphone have nothing to say about unions? For the simple reason that their phones are manufactured in China, a country where the only independent trade union – the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions – has

been forced to shut down, and its leaders jailed. China is one vast “union-free” zone, with workers denied the most basic rights enshrined in the core conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

When I first raised this with Fairphone several years ago, I was told that of course they would love to work with unions, but that there really was no place in the world other than China to manufacture their phones.

Have they not heard of companies like Samsung, LG, Sony and Asus? They manufacture some of their phones in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – countries which have thriving, independent trade union movements.

In those countries, workers don’t need the patronising language of “listening” and “involving”. Instead they have mass organisations, collective bargaining and powerful tools like the right to strike. Workers in China – the workers who make the Fairphone – have none of these rights.

The bottom line is that Fairphone seems very well intentioned and have carved out a niche market among people who care about the environment and, to a lesser degree, the rights of workers. And to be fair, they have managed



**Activist
Agenda**

Campaigners at the Uyghur Solidarity Society of students at SOAS university in London (soasuyghursociety@gmail.com) have launched a week of action 11-15 October, and they’re calling for students and staff on university and college campuses everywhere to join them.

On Monday 11th, they will be spreading the word with public stalls on campuses. On Wednesday 13th, they will protest at the shops of global brands complicit in forced Uyghur labour (in London, that will be Apple on Regent Street at 1pm). And on Friday 15th, a nationwide online meeting to hear from some expert speakers and discuss next steps collectively.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and its allies were down in Brighton campaigning for a solidarity motion at Labour Party conference, 25-29 September. Unfortunately, it didn’t get prioritised

to raise wages and improve working conditions for people who make their phones.

Maybe a little bit of pressure from the labour movement might help convince Fairphone to re-think where they make their phones.

If you want to make a truly

for floor debate. But USC activists say: “we spread the word about the cause, and met lots of new supporters – and were pleased to have the support of John McDonnell MP and the leader of the Bakers’ Union”.

USC runs Uyghur-rights protests on the 5th of every month. Next one 6pm Tuesday 5 October, Embassy of China, 49-51 Portland Place, London W1B 1JL.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement is supporting the refugee solidarity demo on 20 October in London. (bit.ly/20-oct)

Neurodivergent Labour is celebrating its win at Labour Party conference on reference-back of the relevant section of the National Policy Forum report, working on follow-up to make sure Labour adopts some decent policy, and preparing for its AGM (probably 5 December). □

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

“ethical” and “fair” phone, at the moment you can’t do that in China. Fairphone must find another place to make their product. □

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

John Archer: a black pi



Black History Month

By Sacha Ismail

"My election tonight marks a new era. You have made history tonight. For the first time in the history of the English nation, a man of colour has been elected as mayor of an English borough... That news will go forth to all the coloured nations of the world and they will look at Battersea, and say it is the greatest thing you have done" – John Archer, 1913

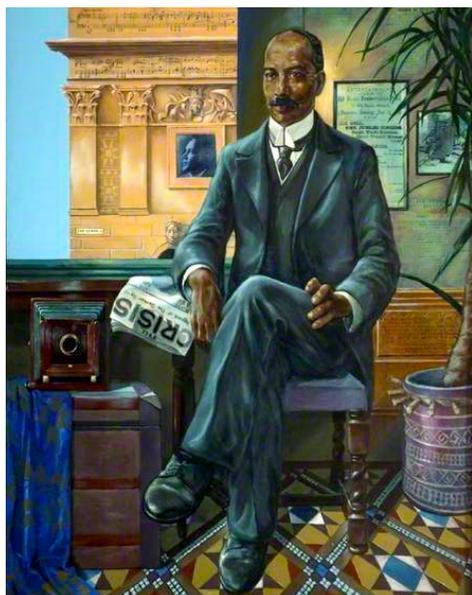
In January Workers' Liberty published a pamphlet on Shapurji Saklatvala, the revolutionary socialist and Indian nationalist who became the first Labour MP of colour – in the South London borough of Battersea, in 1922. Saklatvala entered Parliament in large part due to the support of another pioneer of ethnic minority representation in the British labour movement.

Saklatvala's selection to stand in Battersea North and his two successful election campaigns were driven in large part by John Archer, who in 1913-14 had been Battersea's mayor (council leader, not just ceremonial mayor).

Archer's election caused a sensation, because of the colour of his skin. Of half-Barbadian and half-Irish descent, he has often been described as Britain's first black mayor. In fact that was Allan Glaisyer Minns, a Tory elected mayor of the small Norfolk town of Thetford in 1904.

Archer's emergence as the first black leader of a London borough, the first black leader of a Labour-run council, and the most prominent black representative in Britain's pre-war labour movement was highly significant. Like Saklatvala's election, it was not a fluke, but rooted in the distinctive internationalist political culture of Battersea's labour movement and left.

John Richard Archer was born in Liverpool in 1863, in a predominantly Irish and Jewish working-class area. His fa-



ther was a ship's steward from Barbados, his mother from Ireland. (He was brought up a Catholic and remained personally observant – while refusing to attend religious ceremonies in his official capacity.)

Liverpool, built on the slave trade, was a centre of organising to win UK support for the Southern slave-owners during the American Civil War; but it also had working-class protests against such support, though on a smaller scale than Manchester and elsewhere in the North West. As a child, not long after the war, Archer saw a black stage-adaptation of the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; in 1918 he said that "from that moment the seeds of resentment were planted within me that have resulted in making me the race-man I am". In 1913 he expressed pride at being mayor of Battersea during the 50th anniversary of the US Emancipation Proclamation.

After travelling the world as a seaman, Archer settled in Battersea with his wife Margaret, a black Canadian, in the early 1890s. Plausibly the borough's very large Irish population was a factor.

One of many remarkable facets of Archer's story is the woman who lived with him and Margaret in Battersea for a number of years: Jane Roberts, a former American slave who had later mar-

ried the first president of Liberia.

There are indications that Archer studied medicine and was a professional singer. He eventually set up a photography studio: there is a plaque on the building where it was on Battersea Park Road.

Around the turn of the century, Archer became involved in local left-wing politics, and wider black activism. He attended the Pan-African Conference held at Westminster Hall in 1900, which called for an end to racial discrimination and for Britain to grant self-government to black colonies in Africa and the West Indies "as soon as practicable" (that cautiousness was common among colonial rights movements at this point).

He was elected to the executive of the short-lived Pan-African Association set up at the conference, one of two representatives for Great Britain. The other was black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Archer's friend as well as political associate until his early death in 1912.

At the conference Archer also met US black leader W E B Du Bois, with whom he established an ongoing connection.

Battersea

In 1906 he was elected as a Battersea councillor on the ticket of the labour-movement-Liberal "Progressive" alliance which had run the council since 1894. Another black activist, Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams, who had taken the initiative to organise the Pan-African Conference, was elected as a Progressive candidate in Marylebone.

Archer and Sylvester Williams were encouraged and supported to stand by [Dadabhai Naoroji](#), the Indian nationalist leader who was radical Liberal MP for Finsbury Central in 1892-5 and gravitated towards the socialist left. Naoroji actively supported the 1900 conference.

So Archer was a link between Naoroji and his more radical successor as "MP for India", Saklatvala.

Battersea was an early centre of independent labour movement politics. It was a stronghold of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation. A founding Battersea SDF activist, John Burns – who played a key role in the 1889 London docks strike – was elected Battersea's representative on the London County Council in 1889 and as its "Independent Labour" MP in 1892.

The Battersea labour movement was, however, intertwined with the left wing of the Liberal Party. Burns the MP quickly went over to the Liberals; he was re-elected five times as a "Lib-Lab" candidate and in 1905 became the first working-class cabinet minister, in the Campbell-Bannerman Liberal govern-

ment.

The Progressive alliance which took control of Battersea council in 1894 was dominated by the Trades and Labour Council, but that body included local "radical" Liberal organisations and the alliance included Liberal candidates too. Battersea's labour movement did not split off permanently until 1915, then sweeping the 1919 elections.

Archer's political journey reflected this. He joined the semi-labour, semi-Liberal Battersea Labour League set up by John Burns to elect workers to political office. After the national Labour Representation Committee expelled Battersea Trades and Labour council for its Liberal links in 1906, and a good chunk of the local labour movement left to establish a Labour Party-affiliated body in 1908, Archer remained with the League and the Progressive alliance. However, he ended up with the Labour Party.

By the end of 1906 he was already prominent enough to speak for Battersea Labour League at a large public meeting in Battersea Park celebrating the council's work over the previous decade. From then his rise was steady.

How did the Battersea labour movement come to elect London's first BAME council leader and the first BAME Labour MP?

Battersea trailblazing was not limited to Archer and Saklatvala. In 1912-13, Archer's immediate predecessor as mayor was Thomas Brogan, a radical Liberal and trade unionist who was prominent as an Irish nationalist. In the 1918 general election, when Labour and the Liberals stood against each other in Battersea for the first time, the Labour candidates were Arthur Lynch and Charlotte Despard, both Irish nationalists. Lynch had previously been elected as an Irish nationalist MP while under sentence of death for fighting against the British empire in South Africa!

Despard, a pioneering socialist feminist, was chosen for the first election in which women *could* stand. She was one of only 17 women candidates in 1918, out of thousands, and one of only four Labour women (not counting socialist Republican Constance Markievicz in Dublin, the only one elected).

A large section of Battersea's working class, and labour movement activist base, was Irish. Campaigning for Irish rights, equal rights here and self-determination in Ireland, was a central strand in the left politics which became dominant in the borough.

Battersea was a centre of opposition to the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Many local organisations campaigned against the war, as did the council. Battersea Stop the War Committee in-



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oneer of labour politics

cluded the SDF, the Labour League and the Liberal and Radical Association. George Lansbury addressed a demonstration of five thousand in Battersea Park. (John Burns' opposition to the war combined anti-imperialism with virulent antisemitism.)

In 1902 Battersea was the only council that refused to celebrate Edward VII's coronation, reported by one newspaper with the headline "Battersea versus the British Empire". It refused to fly the Union Jack on Empire Day or give school children time off to celebrate.

During the 1905 revolution the council passed a resolution protesting the massacre of Russian workers. In 1919 it passed resolutions calling for an end to the blockade of Bolshevik Russia by the UK and other states and for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland – both seconded by Archer.

Racism

In 1913, once Archer's nomination for mayor by the Progressive alliance became known, there was a press frenzy, some of it very ill-informed. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that he was born in Burma...

Press speculation pushed Archer to declare he was "prepared to meet any man on a public platform on the question of colour prejudice". The *Daily Mail* quoted a Progressive councillor saying "we are united in supporting the election of Mr Archer... we do not recognise any colour prejudice in Battersea".

Despite that and despite Archer's elated speech when he was elected (quoted above), it seems Battersea was not completely united in its anti-racism. He complained publicly that as mayor he had received abusive letters, calling his "mother some of the foulest names... because she married a coloured man".

But Archer's response to racist abuse was militant: "It is a great victory such as never gained before... I am the proud victor. I am a man of colour."

Archer's political stance on the First World War is hard to make out. The council itself maintained unity by nei-

ther explicitly opposing nor supporting the war. As mayor in 1914 and then as a councillor and member of the Board of Guardians providing welfare, Archer focused on energetically defending local working-class living standards. Like Minnie Lansbury in East London, he became known as a fighter for the rights of ex-servicemen and the unemployed.

African Progress Union

His prestige in London black circles were strong enough to be chosen as the president of the African Progress Union (APU) set up in Autumn 1918. The APU was a network of black people from various parts of Africa, the Caribbean and the US, mostly students or recent ex-students. Its aims were to "promote the general welfare of Africans and Afro-Peoples"; to spread "knowledge of the history and achievements of Africans and Afro-Peoples past and present"; and to create "a public sentiment in favour of brotherhood in the broadest sense". In 1919 it set up a residential and social club for black activists to stay and meet up in London.

Archer was a propagandist for those African "achievements", regularly speaking about about the stories of prominent black people in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and particularly African Americans.

The APU lobbied in 1918 against Germany's African colonies being returned to its control after the war, and for an African delegate to the Peace Conference.

In June 1919 Archer led an APU delegation to his home town of Liverpool to discuss the "race riots" that had convulsed the city that month. This was part of a wave of violence against ethnic minorities and migrants that swept many British seaports in 1919 – in addition to Liverpool, Glasgow, Hull, South Shields, East London and several parts of South Wales. A noxious tradition of working-class and even trade union agitation against ethnic minority and foreign workers interacted with post-war unemployment and housing shortages to produce a nationwide chain of racist explosions.

As well as meeting the Liverpool authorities, the APU partly paid the fees of Afro-Guyanese lawyer Edward Nelson, who defended black men arrested in the Liverpool clashes.

As APU president Archer struck a militant tone, telling its 1918 conference that "it will be 'demand' all the time that I am your president. I am not asking for anything, I am demanding." However, although he was clearly moving leftwards, the wider message was still ambiguous. He sharply attacked the British empire but also implied it could be supported if it changed its attitude to the black peoples within it.

However, he seems to have shifted further. As a delegate to the second post-war Pan-African Congress organised by WEB Du Bois in London, in July 1921, he chaired a session on colonial freedom – and introduced Shapurji Saklatvala to speak, an intransigent Indian revolutionary.

Saklatvala had just been selected as the Labour candidate for Battersea North, with Archer's strong support. In the jingoism-dominated election of 1918, Battersea stayed Liberal, but there was a good chance of it going Labour this time. Given Archer's politics, it makes sense that he wanted a dark-skinned member of one of the empire's subject peoples as the candidate. It provided a channel to link his wider internationalist and anti-racist politics with Battersea labour movement work.

“Archer's election was rooted in the distinctive internationalist politics of Battersea's labour movement and left.”

Given Battersea labour's politics, Saklatvala's selection was in a sense unremarkable. It was however a striking stand in a labour movement some of whose rank and file had participated in the 1919 riots – and whose national leadership were abandoning their criticisms of the British empire as they prepared to administer it (the first Labour government came to office in January 1924).

In conditions of post-war instability, there were three elections in two years. Saklatvala was elected Labour MP for Battersea North in 1922; narrowly lost the seat in 1923; and narrowly regained it in 1924 as a Communist Party of Great Britain candidate with local Labour support.

Archer ran all three campaigns. In 1924 he helped negotiate Labour support for Saklatvala, despite the recent ban on Communists standing as Labour candidates; and chaired the final mass rally of Saklatvala's campaign.

Despite the growing persecution of Communists in the Labour Party, the Battersea labour movement remained fairly unitedly through the May 1926 General Strike. After the strike's defeat, a drive from the national party to split Battersea Labour pushed leaders and activists to choose a side. After the publication of a letter from Saklatvala to the CP leadership, seized by the police when it raided the party's headquarters, urging "merciless measures to fight the Labour Party" and attempts to get direct trade union affiliations to

the CP, many on the Battersea left felt obliged to side with the Labour right.

In 1929 Archer would run the Labour campaign which ousted Saklatvala from Parliament.

The CP's new "Third Period" policy (not backing Labour even against the Tories and where the CP had no candidate) surely did not help. Some also suggest that a desire to remain in local political leadership through the Labour-run council was a factor. That are different sides to that.

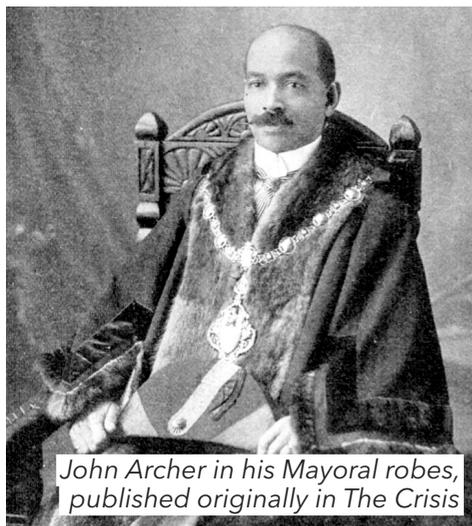
A sort of careerism might have been involved. Equally, Battersea's council was not like the wretched Labour councils of today. It did nothing comparable to the Poplar rates rebellion of 1921, but it did actively support Poplar. And it did over many years help mobilise Battersea's working class to demand and carry through major improvements in their lives.

Later life

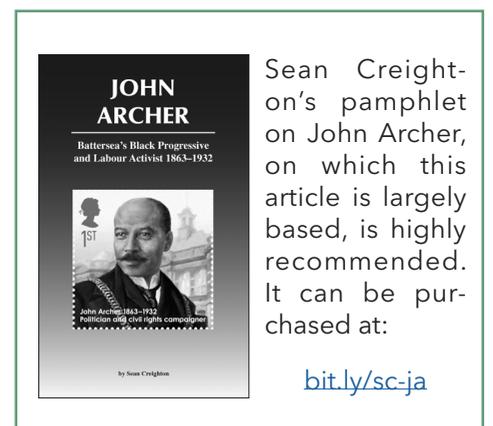
In a sort of mirror image of Saklatvala, who became less and less interested in local issues and more and more focused on global anti-imperialism, the last years of Archer's life were spent heavily focused on Battersea Labour and council politics. He held positions in the council and in municipal life right up to his death in 1932. His distinctively black political connections seem to have faded from the early 1920s.

John Archer was, at least for a period, clearly part of the radical left of Britain's then very powerful labour movement. Oddly, however, he does not seem to have talked very much at all about socialism. He was not a Marxist or a revolutionary. His story still has plenty of positive things to teach today's left and labour movement and inspiration to provide.

Sean Creighton, a South London labour movement historian and expert on Archer, summed up neatly: "He knew which side of the political argument he was on: against injustice whether on racial or class grounds, and the importance of local government in the creating of a fairer society that could help meet a wide range of needs that capitalism was not providing for the majority of people". □



John Archer in his Mayoral robes, published originally in *The Crisis*



Sean Creighton's pamphlet on John Archer, on which this article is largely based, is highly recommended. It can be purchased at:

bit.ly/sc-ja

Rounding up after Lab

Labour Party conference in Brighton, 25-29 September, was hailed by Labour's right wing as a triumph on the strength of rule changes pushed through at short notice and of Keir Starmer's speech.

In between the rule changes (in the first days of conference) and Keir Starmer's speech (at the end), conference was more lively.

The speech got standing ovations, but leaders' speeches pretty much always do. Even sceptical delegates know that the media is watching. And, as usual, many delegates had already gone home. Their places in the conference hall had been filled with pre-selected Starmer supporters.

Everything depends on progress in the unions, on constituency Labour activists sticking to it rather than despairing at the right's cries of triumph, and on how well the labour movement fights the coming attempts by Tories and bosses to cut costs and balance budgets post-Brexit, post-lockdowns. The fight is still on. □

Socialist Green New Deal

This is Edinburgh Central CLP delegate Hannah Taylor's speech for the left-wing Green New Deal motion the conference passed.

Capitalism is incapable of solving the problem it's created. Left to their own devices bosses will continue to extract profits, exploit workers, lobby governments to halt change, and argue that our demands are radical, unreasonable, unworkable.

Do not believe corporations when they say little individual lifestyle changes are good enough. Even with a global lockdown, emissions in 2020 were only 7% less than in 2019. Only structural, systemic change can save workers here, those in global South, and climate refugees. We must forgive the debt of low-income countries so they can fund their just transitions.

A just transition does not mean leaving workers behind, but putting our class front and centre, with retraining and funding to put skills and experience to best use in socially useful work. Born in Middlesbrough, raised in the North East, I saw the long term effects of Thatcherite deindustrialisation. We must ensure we replace fossil fuels on our own terms, redistributing the wealth that our class creates, sharing the benefits.

We must invest to create secure, well-

What Labour conference demanded

By Mohan Sen

Despite Starmer's success, with the help of the Unison machine, in getting his rule changes through, the conference consistently voted for left-wing policy. We must mobilise the labour movement in support of these policies, in the party, in workplaces and on the streets.

Policies passed included a "Socialist Green New Deal" with:

- full public ownership of energy
 - creating millions of well-paid, unionised green jobs with publicly-owned bodies
 - a just transition with a comprehensive retraining program and job guarantee on union rates for affected workers
 - expanded and publicly-owned transport, with free local bus services
 - debt relief and financial and technological support for climate action in poor countries
 - repeal of all anti-union laws so workers can freely take industrial action to drive solutions to climate chaos.
- Text for public ownership of the

banks submitted by the Fire Brigades Union and the Bakers' Union disappeared in the compositing meeting. The conference also unfortunately passed, by a much narrower margin (59-41), a motion from the GMB supporting "green gas".

Policy passed on workers' rights included:

- a £15ph minimum wage
- statutory sick pay at living-wage-level for all workers
- full rights from day one of a job
- measures to require employers to bargain collectively with unions
- repeal of all anti-union laws.

Shadow Secretary of State Andy McDonald, who had just published a "New Deal for Working People" [Green Paper](#) as left-wing as anything under Corbyn, was told by Starmer to block a £15 minimum wage and living-wage-level sick pay in compositing, and resigned in protest.

The conference also voted for:

- Not just stopping, but reversing, local government cuts.
- A pro-trans rights stance, including

measures to deal with the scandal of backlog in trans health services.

- A "national food service", with access to food guaranteed by law.
- Condemnation of the Australian nuclear-powered submarines pact.
- To "remove profit" from the social care system.
- To oppose the current plans to reorganise the NHS round "integrated care systems" and reverse privatisation to re-establish a universal, comprehensive, public health service.

Clear proposals for full public ownership of social care were removed in compositing, and so was the call for a 15% increase for NHS workers got taken out.

All motions passed are in the Conference Arrangements Committee reports at bit.ly/2021-lp. The conference also passed many "references-back" on parts of the National Policy Forum report. This included one on [neurodiversity policies](#) promoted by Neurodivergent Labour. Momentum absurdly refused to support any references back! □



paid, unionised green jobs in every industry. We can renationalise the energy sector ensure a sustainable, net-zero future. At the same time as ending the scandal of "fire and rehire", we can repeal all the anti-trade union laws, not just the 2016 Act. We should build on the Green New Deal by bringing public transport into public ownership and democratic public control, along with banking and finance.

We need to be on the right side of history. We need to be bold and transformational, just as were in 1945 when we created the NHS. That is the kind of legacy we can leave for future generations, by tackling the biggest issue of ours. The past we inherit, the future we build.

Conference vote for composite 1 – for a Socialist Green New Deal! □

Attacks on Labour democracy

Rule changes were pushed through with minimal debate which claimed to be a necessary response to the EHRC report on antisemitism, but were actually a stitch-up of already undemocratic disciplinary processes (bit.ly/c-proc). Elaine Bolton of the Campaign for Labour Democracy has summarised the other rule changes which the platform pushed through with the claim that they would "get the party election ready" for campaigning. In fact, she explains, the rule changes:

Increased the proportion of MPs that a candidate needs to secure in order to get on the ballot in a leadership election from 10% to 20% of MPs;

Raised the threshold needed for a "trigger ballot", whereby local parties can submit incumbent MPs to a full selection process ahead of an election, to a majority of party and affiliate branches (these form an electoral college, with party branches voting with a weight of 50% and affiliate branches with a weight of 50%);

Scrapped the "registered supporter" category; and

Introduced a six-month freeze date, meaning members must have six months continuous membership prior to the timetable being agreed

for the election of national officers of the party.

All of these are designed to prevent another Left candidate emerging for leadership; to give MPs in safe seats a job for life, and to prevent people from joining the party to vote for a leader.

If we look at the actual votes cast [on that package], however, these show that the Right were not as predominant as they may have thought among CLP conference delegates: CLPs, for: 23.57%, against: 26.43%. Affiliates, for: 30.10%, against: 19.90%. Total, for: 53.67%, against: 46.33%...

And here lies my first reason for hope: with Unite voting against these rule change packages, a different vote from just one union, Unison, would have caused many of these rule changes to fall. This union's position may be very different at future conferences. Unison's recent EC elections showed a significant swing to the Left, albeit unfortunately too late to influence the make up of its delegation to this conference. Things may be very different in just a year's time.

• Elaine Bolton's full article is on the CLPD website at bit.ly/eb-clpd

Labour conference 2021

“We need socialism, but democracy helps”

Labour conference rejected Proportional Representation, with CLPs voting heavily for and unions voting heavily against. We believe PR is more democratic, but are concerned that much of the drive for it is implicitly a drive for an “centrist” electoral pact and coalition with Lib-Dems as a “temporary” substitute for winning a socialist majority. Billy Hayes, a member of the executive of the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER) and former General Secretary of the Communication Workers’ Union (and also a member of Labour’s Conference Arrangements Committee), spoke to us. He gave the interview in a personal capacity, and as his view alone.

The CLPs voted 80% for PR. What we’ve yet to do is convince the bulk of the unions. Only four unions voted for – the Musicians, the Bakers,

ASLEF and TSSA. Of course the Bakers are gone now. Unite and GMB voted against, Unison abstained. Large general unions are by their nature complicated and harder to shift on things. But only one, GMB, has actually discussed PR and taken a stance against.

Unite is discussing at its policy conference and as you know Unison is neutral. So I think overall it’s a big step forward and the amount of CLP support was a major political achievement.

If we had won, obviously that wouldn’t mean the party would automatically do it. You have to fight to make things hegemonic. Look at the minimum wage, that was originally opposed by most of the unions. Now no one would dream of opposing it. The fact we got such a huge vote from the CLPs means that we’re well on the way.

I certainly don’t see PR as a panacea. We need a socialist transformation of

society, or first of all steps in that direction. Democracy by itself is never an answer, but it most certainly helps the struggle. It’s not a silver bullet, but it is ordnance. There may be a bit of a tendency to see it as a cure-all, but equally I think there’s a risk of underestimating its importance.

Some on the left say this is a distraction, but it’s no more a distraction than votes for women was, or the Chartists’ demands. I’m sure Feargus O’Connor and Emmeline Pankhurst were constantly told there were more important things to worry about too.

What was your take on the conference more generally?

Well, the left did well on policy, but not on the rule changes. Defeating the electoral college wasn’t nothing, but the other rule changes are a problem. However on international issues, on so-

cial issues, on the £15 minimum wage, on public ownership, the positions were very left-wing. The Green New Deal was good, though with the two motions there was a bit of classic facing both ways. Overall if you look at it the centre of gravity in the membership is still left-wing social democratic.

Back in the 70s we had to create the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy because Wilson wouldn’t carry out conference policy on nationalising the big monopolies. It’s the same kind of fight we need now.

I’d add however that it’s not enough to fight for policies in the party. You need to get out and popularise them. Do the research, the detailed work and then get them out to the wider public.

All this is a very big job of work, but we need to stick at it. □

• Rest of the interview: bit.ly/bh-iv • More on PR: bit.ly/zm-pr

Unison activists protest stitch-up

From the *Time for Real Change* in Unison campaign

We are angry and dismayed that Unison has voted for the Labour Party rule changes it did... particularly the increase to 20% of the threshold of MPs by which leadership candidates are nominated. The Unison vote was key to it passing.

This vote contradicted formal Unison Labour Link policy set in 2018 to reduce the nominating threshold to 10%. The Unison Conference delegation had no mandate or rulebook

right to overturn National Labour Link Committee policy in this area and has chosen to set a dangerous precedent.

Unison also opposed the original proposal in the Collins Review that the threshold would be 20% on the grounds that this would not only deny members a voice but would reduce diversity of candidates, decreasing the likelihood of women and black members being on the ballot.

Unison has a proud record of standing for diversity and equality... History shows that such a threshold will have a

significant negative impact on women and black candidates making it onto a leadership ballot.

Unison is in a state of flux since a new Left leadership took control of its NEC in June. Events yesterday reflect this and the final throes of the Right’s remaining power. That they were prepared to vote against equalities and Unison policy shows their desperation.

Unison Labour Party conference delegates are mostly elected in Unison’s regions. Get involved in Labour Link in

your region and agree left candidates for Labour conference 2022. Don’t mourn: organise!

If you are Unison member please support the following candidates in the current Labour Link regional elections [till October 13]: East Midlands: Anjona Roy; Greater London: Ruth Cashman; Northern: Helen Smith; North West: Joanne Moorcroft; South East: Billie Reynolds; South West: Aileen McLoughlin; Yorkshire & Humberside: Paul Holmes. For more info contact: tfrc.unison@gmail.com □

The World Transformed: scratching the surface

By Sara Lee and Abel Harvie-Clark

The World Transformed, the left-wing festival that takes place alongside Labour conference, was an informal, accessible place for people – including curious Brightonians – to at least check out left ideas. Many speakers were from Momentum, but Momentum as an organisation did not have a strong presence. There was a small and inconspicuous stall for sign-

ups that wasn’t always staffed.

A lot of radical things were said at the festival. As one participant said, however, many speeches only scratched the surface. Clear political conclusions or concrete demands weren’t always drawn out. For example, at a panel on “Kill The Bill,” speakers said that we cannot support police reform and that we must instead “abolish the police” – all the while talking about the negative implications of the

Police Bill. Occasional jibes were made at “white people talking about Trotsky or whatever, telling us how to do a revolution.” A lot of sessions were similar: interesting but politically confused – on Latin America, on climate change, on “rank-and-file strategy” for trade unionists and many other issues...

A real highlight of the festival was the Stop TUI anti-deportation demo. TUI is the holiday company which holds

the principal government contract for carrying out deportation flights. The demo had the support of a local anti-racist student group and was led by Nadia Whittome MP, who had just spoken on a panel about refugee and migrants rights. Around 250 people turned out and marched to the local TUI branch (well protected by a line of cops), part of a wave of similar protests across the country.

• More: bit.ly/t21-twt □

Workers’ Liberty at conference

We sold almost £1,000 worth of our literature, including over 120 copies of our new booklet *Corbynism: what went wrong?*

• Having drafted and pushed for motions, we argued in compositing meetings and spoke in the debates.

• We helped Momentum Internationalists hold regular caucuses and produce five issues of a daily socialist conference bulletin (bit.ly/2021-lp).

• We helped raise solidarity with Afghan refugees and with the Hazara people in Afghanistan, including through a demonstration outside conference and a fringe meeting; helped Free Our Unions; joined trans rights, Uyghur rights, and TUI (refugee rights) protests round the conference. We helped with the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and Another Europe is Possible fringe on the labour movement and migrants’ rights.

• We leafleted for consistently democratic, internationalist politics on Israel-Palestine and on tackling antisemitism. That was the only alternative voice on the issue. □

Pedantic, empty, and fa



Debate

By Paul Hampton

It is unfortunate that Matt Cooper chose the eve of international climate mobilisations for his belated foray into Marxist ecological politics (*Solidarity* 607, 22 September 2021). His musing is vacuous, error-strewn and offers no alternative. Worse, he disparagingly misrepresents the ecological Marxism that underpins the AWL's climate politics. His essay serves only as an exercise in stale pedantry.

Marx

During the mid-1840s, as Marx and Engels developed their materialist conception of history, they were already engaged with ecological questions. They conceived of nature as totality, with humanity an organic, evolving part of it, dependent upon the planetary environment for existence. They also recognised that human activity impacts on the natural environment, reshaping it in both constructive and destructive ways. They attempted to conceptualise the dynamic interaction of these tendencies, avoiding both the dissolution of society into "nature" and the free-floating "social" that ignores nature.

Marx and Engels tried to capture these co-evolutionary, co-constitutive, interdependent, co-regulatory relationships, drawing on a range of contemporary ideas. In their early writings, they explored "alienation". Although elements of human alienation from

nature exist, it is one-dimensional, negative conception: they were right to discard it.

Instead, Marx and Engels eventually settled on the term "metabolism" to express these relations. They became aware of the word in 1851 from their comrade, the doctor Roland Daniels. Marx sculpted his own conceptions of metabolism over the remainder of his life, after studying a range of natural scientists. He was heavily influenced by Liebig and later Fraas, who used metabolism to discuss contemporary ecological matters.

Marx took the term metabolism from organic chemistry, but transformed it to express wider phenomena. In 1881, two years before his death, in *Notes on Adolph Wagner*, Marx wrote: "I have employed the word [Stoffwechsel] for the 'natural' process of production as the material exchange... between humanity and nature."

Marx used the term metabolism in his mature political economy, notably in *Capital*, to conceptualise at least three important insights, which help ground ecological questions within Marxism:

First, the labour process is "an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of humanity. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between humanity and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live."

Insights

This means production is the place to locate ecological matters, rather than personal consumption. If labour is the key to humanity's relationship to nature, then all the insights from Marxist political economy, such as exploitation and working class struggle against it, are relevant to ecological questions. Labour, both as a force combined with means of production to produce the surplus product – and crucially labour as the social agency of emancipation – become operative. Working class action can be integrated into ecological movements, rather than marginalised or bolted on from the outside.

Second, class societies (especially capitalism) produce "an irreparable rift in the interdependent process between social metabolism and natural metabolism..." If ecological crises ("rifts") are products of class societies and capitalism the root cause of contemporary ecological problems, then we can use class analysis to understand these questions across the range of

scales, from global to local, and working-class action to start tackling them. Marx and others understood the damage wrought by pre-capitalist modes of production. However capitalism accelerates and expands these tendencies across the globe, notably with climate change.

Third, socialist society will "govern their metabolic interaction with nature rationally, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing this metabolism with the smallest expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature". Marx did not mean the "restoration" of pre-capitalist relations between humanity and nature – he understood the devastation fashioned before capitalism. Rather, socialism as the rational, free, collective, democratic self-control of human society is the best form of global self-rule that can simultaneously tackle the ecological nightmares created by class societies (especially global capitalism) and ensure that the future relationship between humanity and the planet is sustainable.

Misrepresentation

Cooper takes umbrage with the word "metabolism". It offends his terminological taste. He criticises Marx for not sticking to the modern, narrowly biological meaning of metabolism. This is anachronistic. Marx wasn't drawing rigid analogies. Cooper gets bogged down in pedantic hair-splitting because Marx employed metabolism in various ways. He gets hung up on Marx's ephemeral examples, rather than the substance of Marx's engagement with ecological questions like soil fertility and deforestation.

Marx opted for the term metabolism, giving it a distinctive, extensive meaning for dynamic nature-human relationships. Marx's usage does no particular harm to the regular meanings of the word during his time or since. The issue is what insights it yields. Metabolism is the starting point for serious Marxist engagement with ecological questions. Marx's metabolism is not the end, or the whole answer. Marx did not know the modern science of climate change, but his method can help socialists today formulate our political responses.

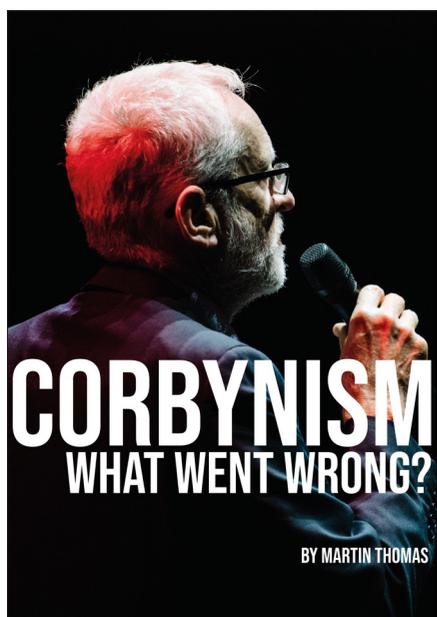
Cooper completely misrepresents subsequent Marxist discussion of metabolism. It is simply untrue that metabolism was only discovered in the 1970s with the Penguin translation of *Capital*. Bukharin discusses metabolism in *Historical Materialism*, first published in English in 1925. Similarly, there were



debates in the 1920s around metabolism in the journal *In Defence of Marxism*, including by Marxist geographers such as Wittfogel.

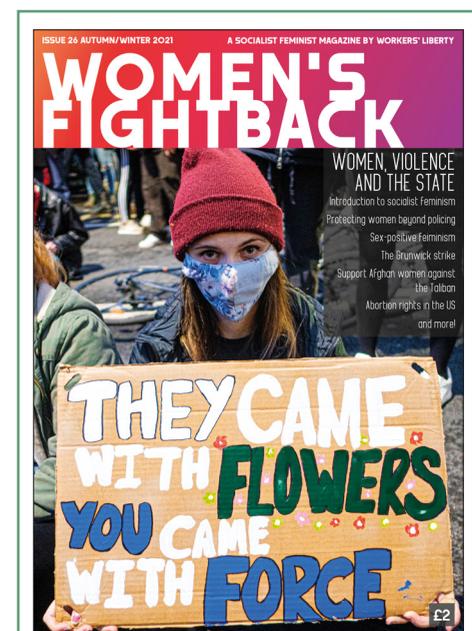
Cooper makes the ridiculous claim that "the Frankfurt school were uninterested in the concept [of metabolism]". Alfred Schmidt's *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1962) includes an extensive discussion of Marx's metabolism. Schmidt misunderstood the origins of Marx's usage, but did not have access to the sources available today. His reading of Marx dissolves much of historical materialism into "nature" and is pessimistic about working class action and socialism. This has been critiqued by many Marxists since. But Schmidt's study, including on metabolism, was valuable when translated into English in 1971.

Marxist geographer Neil Smith's *Uneven Development* (1984) includes a discussion of Marx's metabolism and propagates the fertile notion of the



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Use on “metabolic rift”

“production of nature” to describe how human activity completely reshapes the environment all the way down. Smith pointed to climate change as a particularly prescient example of this tendency.

John Bellamy Foster is subjected to Cooper’s scorn. Foster has written much in *Monthly Review* on imperialism, monopoly capitalism, China, Cuba and Venezuela that I have criticised many times (including on the environment). However his work on Marx’s ecology is immensely fruitful, both as a reading of the founders’ contributions and as the inspiration for Marxist studies of today’s ecological problems. Cooper also ignores entirely the contribution of Paul Burkett, who has drawn out the value of Marx’s political economy for environmental sustainability.

Cooper is quick to rubbish the conscientious efforts of Kohei Saito. Yet Saito has conducted the most extensive investigation of Marx’s ecological writings to date, including much unpublished material and notes unavailable previously. Saito’s original work deserves better than impressionistic dismissal, by someone who clearly hasn’t read even the rudimentary texts on these questions.

Utilising the term “metabolism” is no guarantee of Marxist ecological rectitude. But Marx’s metabolic reflections suggest that capitalism is the cause of current ecological problems, that workers’ struggles are key to tackling them and that socialist society is the only global regime capable of resolving these questions. These are the key conclusions to base our own efforts on.

Town and country

Cooper says that “The one programmatic proposal to follow from Marx’s view on the ‘metabolic rift’ was that the distinction between town and country should be abolished”. This is plain falsification.

The demand to abolish the dichotomy between town and country predates Marxism. I regard it as a relic, a leftover from utopian radicalism – though not particularly harmful.

In *Principles of Communism* (1847), Engels listed among the measures of communist revolution:

“9. The erection of large palaces on national estates as common dwellings for communities of citizens engaged in industry as well as agriculture, and combining the advantages of both urban and rural life without the one-sidedness and disadvantages of either.”

Marx expressed this in condensed form in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848):

“9. Combined operations in running agriculture and industry, making for the gradual elimination of the antithesis of town and country.”

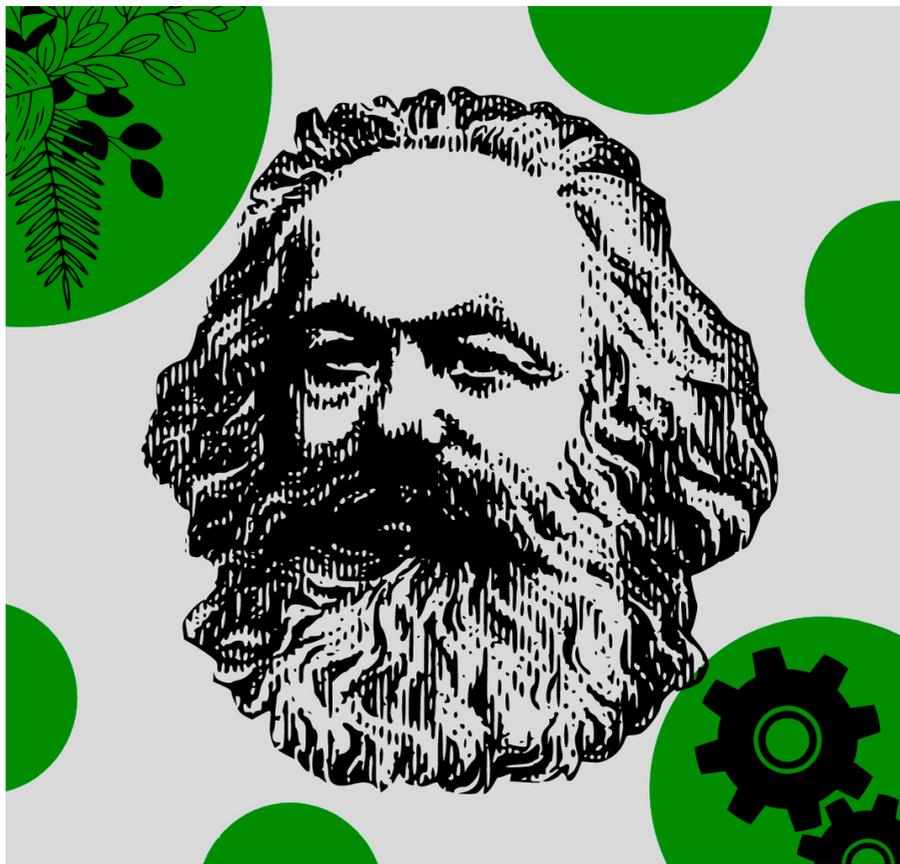
Marx wrote this text three years before his earliest known use of the term “metabolism” and almost two decades before he had worked up his mature conceptions. Marx did not develop his views on metabolism and then conclude that abolishing the town/country dichotomy was the central demand. The demand was operative before Marx’s metabolism, not a consequence of it. And the demand was not central to Marxist-led parties.

Marx and Engels pointed to real class divisions of their time. The countryside, globally mostly consisting of peasants, could not be the basis for socialism. The isolation of rural life was not (and is not) conducive to collective, democratic control. Correspondingly, appalling conditions in Victorian cities required remedy. But today the dichotomy is largely superseded: town and country are under the command of capital.

Worse, Cooper argues that metabolism leads to advocacy of small communes of 3,000 people under socialism, as expressed by Engels in *Anti-Dühring* (1878). Such communes were advocated by utopian socialists such as Fourier and Owen, as Engels notes. However Engels does appear to endorse the idea in this text and elsewhere, like *The Housing Question* (1873). If so, then Engels was wrong.

Metabolism does not logically commit Marxists to small communes. Cooper conjures a convenient straw argument in his invective against the word “metabolism”. Marx’s ecology does not inexorably lead towards village-living under socialism. It is pure invention to suggest that Engels’ mistake “follows” from Marx’s metabolism.

I have specifically rejected Engels’ formulation on this question. I also explicitly advocate the advantages of urban life under capitalism and for socialism, extending that to the role of cities in tackling climate change. Cooper underestimates urban squalor in many cities across Asia, Africa and Latin America, but his fundamental ar-



lary, the AWL’s last full conference document, *Fighting climate crises* (2020), also mentions metabolism. *Solidarity* has carried many articles and reviews. Cooper apparently was not paying attention.

Rather than taking cheap shots at Marx and Engels, and at efforts to develop an ecological Marxism, Cooper should tackle some of the hard questions about aviation, gas, nuclear, HS2 and bioengineering, where climate activists are crying out for Marxist answers. Sadly, Cooper prefers ruinous, nonsensical quips about the pandemic requiring more rifts with nature.

gument for cities is not disputed.

Marxist ecological politics

Cooper’s assault on metabolism concludes that “Marx did not have the worked through ecological perspective... let alone the greater theory”. He cannot even manage an honest rendering of Marx’s position. He offers no alternative Marxist framing for ecological questions. He has no framework after discarding Marx.

His ruminations offer no theoretical referents and no guide to action.

In the last two decades, the AWL has made a positive contribution to current ecological questions, building on insights from other Marxist writers. AWL conferences in 2008 and 2013 carried resolutions on climate change, both referring to metabolism. These resolutions are reprinted in the pamphlet, *Climate Change, Capitalism and Working-class Struggle* (2018). Simi-

For decades, Green Parties, social democrats and conservationists have claimed that Marxism is redundant or reactionary on environmental questions. They denounce Marxism as Promethean, productivist, technological determinist and the progenitor of ecological destruction. Cooper’s destructive position leaves socialists with nothing to answer critics and activists who dismiss Marxism.

The AWL is right to join a range of thinkers seeking to develop an ecological Marxism. The rediscovery of ecological thinking within Marx’s mature political economy is an important step forward. This is the real significance of metabolism in recent Marxist discussion. Marx’s metabolism is only a starting point; but at least it is a beginning. Cooper’s pedantic, empty and false pontification is a dangerous retrogression. □

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NHS pay: move to formal ballots!

By Alice Hazel

As the backpay for the 3% pay award, due from April, arrived in the pockets of NHS workers this month, the simultaneous rise in cost of living reinforced how worthless it was. For many health workers the miserly 3% has also tipped us into the next pension bracket, meaning that our take-home pay each month is actually less than it was, and we owe our Trusts pension payments from April. Many of us are being told this will be taken out in one chunk next month, just before Christmas. This is the latest background to the ongoing dispute on NHS pay.

A decade of pay restraint, ever-increasing workloads, 100,000 NHS vacancies, 18 months of Covid, a rising mental health crisis amongst workers, and the whole service reaching breaking point could be a trigger for the health unions to get their act together

and focus on a serious strategy to organise in workplaces. Unfortunately, they are remaining firmly sat on their hands.

Large majorities in all the main unions voted against the government's pay award, although on relatively low turnouts. Members are still waiting for the next steps. The GMB has announced they will be moving to formal ballot (after a 93% no vote) but no date has been announced. Unison (80% against, on a 29% turnout) has announced a further indicative ballot. Again, no date set. The RCN (91.7% against, on a 25.4% turnout) is still considering its position. In Scotland the RCN is holding a second indicative ballot from 12 October to 8 November. Unite (90% against, 25% turnout) talks about a "a campaign of targeted industrial action and days of protest", but without detail.

Unison's local government group, which has a left majority, has decided

to move to formal ballot on a 79% vote against their employers' pay offer, on a 20% turnout. Unison now has a left National Executive, but its health service group executive is still controlled by the right. Unison should co-ordinate these disputes. Holding formal ballots in both sectors would be a good start.

NHS workers need to take motions to our union branch meetings this month pushing for serious campaigns to mobilise members to vote in the forthcoming ballots. We need to spell out the ABCs of organising – members' meetings, recruiting workplace reps to build the campaign, to form future industrial action committees, workplace walk-about, phone banking, using union data to effectively target workplaces and build turnout and working to convince members.

The different positions on the claim of the unions should not stand in the way of building cross-union campaigns. At

branch and national level the health unions have to work together to build the campaign. If they are not prepared to do this cross-union rank and file organisation should ensure this unity is built in workplaces.

The dispute over pay in local government also gives us the opportunity to work across the public sector. □

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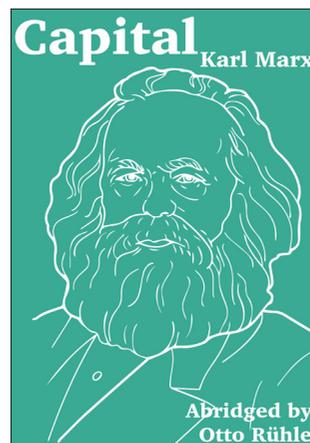
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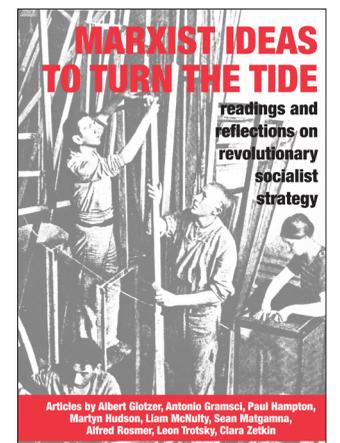
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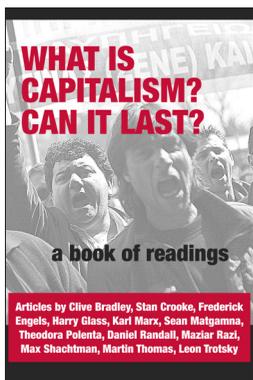
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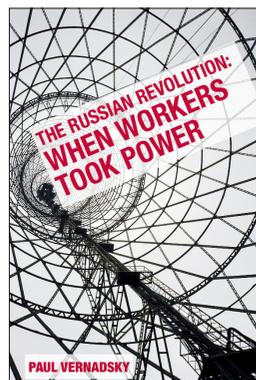
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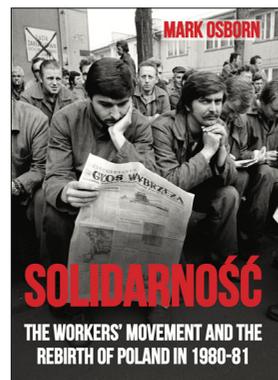
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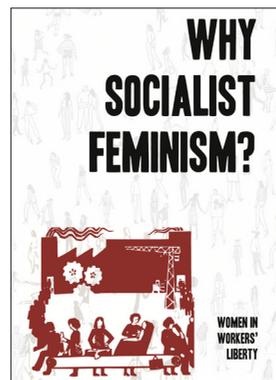
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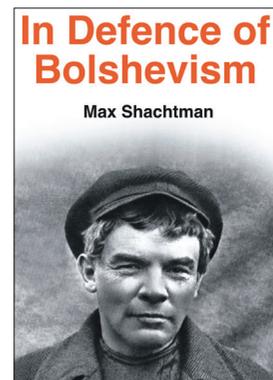
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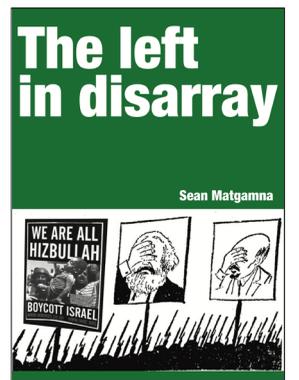
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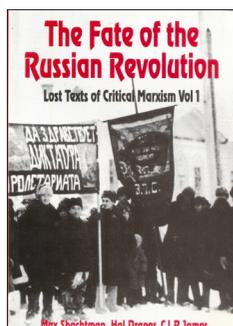
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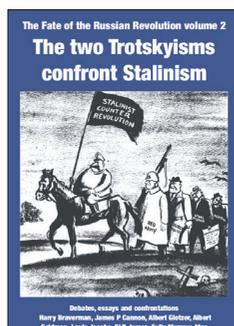
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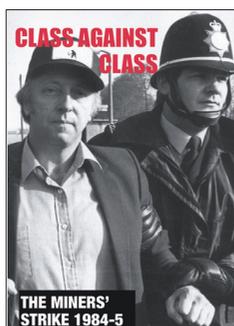
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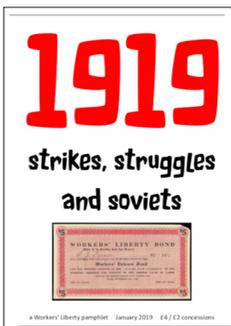
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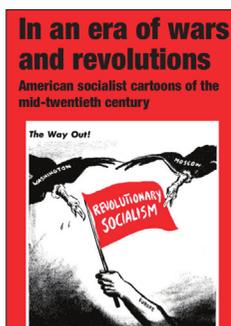
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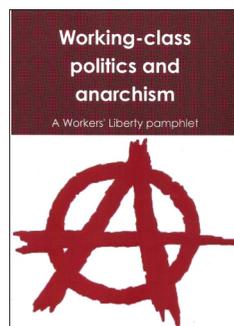
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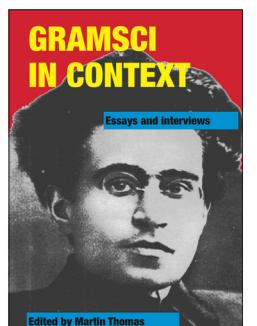
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Vote Martin Powell-Davies in NEU!

By a Lewisham school worker

Voting in the election for the first ever elected Deputy General Secretary (DGS) of the National Education Union (NEU) opens on 4 October, with ballot papers being sent to members' homes. Voting closes on 29 October.

Socialists, rank and file activists, and members should vote for Martin Powell-Davies, the Education Solidarity Network (ESN) candidate. Martin is standing on a 10-point manifesto:

1. Action to protect the health, safety and welfare of staff and our communities from Covid-19

2. End excessive workload, and end the high stakes testing that drives so much of it.

3. A Union that builds workplace strength.

4. A Union that supports NEU reps and officers.

5. No to a pay freeze. No to cuts, fund schools and colleges to fully meet needs.

6. Reverse the privatisation of education.

7. A Union leading the battle against discrimination and inequality in schools and communities.

8. A Union that recruits, organises and fully represents all education workers working in our schools and colleges. Win negotiating rights for support staff colleagues.

9. A genuinely democratic union.

10. A campaigning, socialist, Deputy General Secretary.

Martin also says he will not take more than the average teachers' salary for the role. Workers' Liberty urge NEU members to vote Martin for this positive programme. We believe if elected he will strive to achieve these goals.

We are also advocating a second

preference vote for Niamh Sweeney, who is on the right of the union but generally seems honest and fair in her dealings with union members who disagree with her. We do this because the other candidate, and favourite to win, Gawain Little, is a member of the Communist Party of Britain. He represents the worst section of the "NEU Left". He is viciously hostile to our politics and has no concern for democracy. A victory for Little will be a significant setback for building a rank and file left, and put him in prime position to run for General Secretary in two years' time. □

UCU victory in Liverpool

By a Cambridge UCU member

Liverpool UCU has announced: "The Liverpool branch of the UCU (University and College Union) representing higher education staff at the University of Liverpool (UoL) last week called off their months-long industrial action, having saved dozens of jobs from compulsory redundancy.

"In January, university management announced that 47 staff would be made redundant as part of reorganisation plans in the health and life sciences faculty (through the so-called 'Project SHAPE'). However, the local UCU branch's sustained action stopped all compul-

sory redundancies and won major increases in severance packages for those who have opted for voluntary redundancy.

"By combining marking and assessment boycotts, sustained strike action, and an external 'global boycott', although it did not succeed in stopping all job losses, it outright saved the jobs of 26 staff, and won much-enhanced voluntary severance packages for 21 others. This was the longest strike in the history of the branch, and shows how higher education workers can fight back against management attacks on jobs; there is much that can be learned from the Liverpool dispute across the sector." □

David Miller and Bristol University

By Chris Reynolds

David Miller was sacked on 1 October from his academic job at Bristol University.

The tight-lipped university [statement](#) explicitly refused to give details, but said that in light of the University's "duty of care to all students", "Professor Miller did not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from our staff".

Miller is appealing, but has given no details either, claiming only that "Israel's assets in the UK have been emboldened by the university collaborating with them to shut down teaching about Islamophobia. The University of Bristol is no longer safe for

Muslim, Arab or Palestinian students".

Almost all the objections to Miller being sacked have been from people endorsing his reactionary view of the world being run by "Israeli lobbies" through "Israel's assets" (Jewish people who have empathy with Israel, however critical).

Other objections are possible. Up to 1933 Germany was and had long been the world's foremost centre of mathematics. After Hitler's victory, almost all the leading mathematicians fled. One exception: Helmut Hasse. Hasse was a good mathematician, but also a nationalist. He tried to join the Nazi party. He was refused because of

distant Jewish connections, but remained pro-Nazi. After 1945 he was sacked from his university job by the British occupation authorities in the name of denazification. He found academic jobs in East Berlin, where the Russian occupiers were less fussy, until 1950, when he could move to Hamburg. Better if the British had allowed him to stay in post. Academic freedom, the right for qualified researchers to keep their jobs even if they have despicable politics, is important.

The university insists that it respects academic freedom, and suggests it has moved against Miller only because of his personal behaviour towards Jewish students. □

CWU to debate Labour links

By a CWU member

The agenda for the 7-9 November Special Virtual Conference of the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) [has been released](#). Motions from branches were only permitted on subjects designated by the NEC. That said, this will enable activists the first opportunity in a long time to debate some key issues.

The event will open with a section on Anti-Racism, which is unlikely to be controversial, followed by one on Politics, which certainly will be. Here the choice will be a complete break with Labour or a reduction in financial support to the party. The latter is the National Executive Committee (NEC) position and is likely to prevail.

The section on a New Deal For Workers sets some laudable objectives, but we can only wonder how much enthusiasm there will be for arguing for improvements in the condition of workers in industries where in recent years things have gone in the opposite direc-

tion. The biggest section is on Recruitment and Organising, not surprising given this is the most pressing issue for an organisation with a rapidly declining membership. Unfortunately most of the proposals are a restatement of previous initiatives which have failed.

One of the standouts on this agenda is a motion from the left-led Greater London Combined branch which calls for an extension of Public Ownership to the utilities and broadband. It will be interesting to see what attitude the NEC takes to this.

There are a number of motions not admitted to the agenda, and for some it is hard to see why. One from the tech workers branch UTAW is in this category. It is an excellent internationalist motion to "develop and strengthen comradely links with unions elsewhere in the world – particularly the Global South" and it is to be hoped that the sponsors will use the facility to make an appeal to conference for it to be placed on the agenda. □

Council pay: campaign for strikes!

By Katy Dollar

Unison members in local government have voted by 79% to reject a 1.75% pay offer. On 1 October the union's Local Government Committee voted to ballot members on industrial action. Members will start to receive ballot papers in November or early December.

The National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) covers the largest group of employees for collective bargaining purposes in the UK economy. Over 1.4 million workers have their pay and conditions determined within the national framework negotiated in the NJC. The claim submitted by the unions includes a 10% pay rise for local government workers.

There is a lot to do on the ground to win a strike ballot under the anti-union laws, especially with many workers being atomised by working at home.



Strikes would require the largest turnout in a single ballot since the 2016 anti-union law came in. Local government activists should be organising local joint union campaigns to raise the profile of the pay campaign.

The pay offer falls far below what council and school workers need and deserve. It would provide only:

- A 1.75% pay increase (2.75% to those on the lowest pay point)
- Completion of work on term-time-only arrangements
- Discussions on homeworking and mental health joint guidance
- Commitment to incorporate statutory provisions on neo-natal leave and pay. □

669 What we stand for

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

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- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
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- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
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- Open borders
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- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
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The language they understood



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

While people at the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) trace the origins of some illegally-tipped carbon fibre, I go to Nottingham to look at the processing of Incinerator Bottom Ash (IBA). S, an operator who used to work in waste processing, kindly offers to come along to back me up. The yard is surprisingly small, walled on all sides by piles of ash. W, the head of operations, shows us the belt which loads IBA into their plant. He shows us a raised tunnel where unburned waste is dropped into a skip by picking workers.

Me "Can we see inside please?"

W "I'm afraid that's confidential."

Me "But that's the area where you're having problems?"

W "Since the matting came through everyone in there's in hazmat suits – gloves, boots, face-shields, hoods – you think it's hot out here, imagine what it's like in there. Our staff haven't trusted IBA from Sheffield since the matting because they're not confident it won't be full of black fibre."

I note that W and the drivers are wearing t-shirts, hi-viz, boots and gloves. If the workers on the belt were wearing

something similar before they complained, their arms would have been exposed.

He shows us the fibre – huge piles of IBA are riddled with it. Some is bundled into dense rolls, the rest is tangled around bits of cable and shards of metal, making it impossible to separate. We put on thick gloves and take a few samples.

I look at the closed sorting chamber, and we watch as unburned waste is dropped through a hole in the floor into a large skip. After sorting the IBA is fed through a fierce gas flame, then shaken and rolled through trommels into different grades of coarse or fine gravel.

S asks "Do you have a lot of demand for your product?"

W: "It's actually a good time in the market right now. A lot of people are doing work on their houses and gardens, so we sell a lot of product as a foundation material, or aggregate for back-filling underground works like pipe-laying."

We sit in a miserable office and I ask for further clarification on the processes. A passing driver asks if we're here to get rid of the black matting – S assures him we are.

Me "What do you do with the unburned waste picked off the line?"

W "It goes to our recycling contrac-

tor; they process what they can and send the rest to landfill."

Me "Would they be able to process the pile of contaminated IBA with the matting? If so, could send me a quote so we can get that moving?"

In the end, the company agree to accept our IBA, and quarantine any loads they deem have too much "unburned" in them, which relieves pressure on the plant. We send photos and take samples of every batch, reporting on the quality and condition. They won't process it. Then one day my manager comes back from a call with the director, and says:

"They will process all our IBA, including the stuff in quarantine. We will pay to dispose of the black matting, and then send the bill to the transfer station that sent us the illegal waste."

Me and the operators are shocked, we've been arguing with them for weeks.

N: "How did you manage that?"

G: "I told him the contract would be invalid if they didn't fulfil their obligation to us. I just spoke to him in a language he understood." G rubs his fingers together in a gesture meaning "money".

S laughs "They're fucking crooks." □

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



Greek refugee experience



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I'm not sure how much relevance Greek director Theo Angelopoulos' film *Trilogy: The Weeping Meadow* (2004) has to the notion of the "right of return" which has been discussed in the pages of *Solidarity* recently, but there are some parallels. The film demonstrates the precarious nature of the migrant experience even in a country considered to be their "motherland".

It is 1919. The long-established Greek community in Odessa is displaced by the Russian Revolution and they even-

tually land on the shores of Greece, near Thessaloniki. However, there is no welcome for them and they are forced to build their own village on boggy, desolate land. Here, they eke out a precarious living surrounded by hostility or indifference.

Their reception and fate is not dissimilar to that experienced by Greek refugees from Turkey following the Greco-Turkish war and the destruction of Izmir (Smyrna in Greek).

The film focuses on the harsh life of the orphan Eleni (Alexandra Aidini), her adolescence and eventual marriage to the musician Alexis. She gives birth to twin boys but they are taken away from her. World War Two and the Greek Civil War that follows only add to her difficulties. □



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Royal Parks on strike



John Moloney

Outsourced cleaners and attendants in London's Royal Parks are striking throughout October. We began the strike with a successful rally on 1 October. We have more workers participating in the strike this time, which is a good sign, especially as a month-long strike is a significant escalation.

We've had good support from across the labour movement. Jeremy Corbyn and Andy McDonald sent solidarity greetings, and John McDonnell addressed the strike rally. Fundraising is particularly important, as we want to ensure strike pay at a level as close as possible to workers' full wages. We don't want to see our members being starved back to work.

We have a meeting with the company on 7 October. We are hopeful for a settlement but are planning that no deal will be struck. With participation in the strike growing, we hope the old

adage "the longer the picket line, the shorter the strike" will apply. If we can win without having to strike for the whole month, that'll be excellent. But our members are prepared to see the strike through if our demands aren't met.

Driving examiners have now voted overwhelmingly to strike against imposed increases to workload, with over 90% voting yes on a turnout of over 80%. Strikes are planned for 18-19 October, and we are planning for more action in late October and November. A renewed ballot will also take place over four weeks shortly in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DLVA) complex in Swansea, where our dispute about Covid safety continues.

The Tories have begun blaming the DVLA dispute for the HGV driver shortage, but this is desperate nonsense. Management at DVLA Swansea continue to insist on increasing the number of staff working in the office, despite rising Covid cases amongst the workforce. The dispute also includes other issues, such as how management treat workers with "Long

Covid", and underlying it all is a set of principles about how the workplace is run. In immediate terms it is a dispute about workplace safety, but it is also by proxy dispute about control and power in the workplace.

We are also hopeful of progress in our campaign to get the employer to recognise building-wide workplace safety committees in sites where multiple government departments occupy a single building. The union has met with the Government Property Agency, the body which oversees the running of much of the civil service estate and they have agreed to run a pilot of the joint committee in a large building in London. If successful this should model should be run out across the rest of the estate. In any case, we are encouraging our reps to convene them as rank-and-file bodies for the purposes of workplace organising over safety issues. □

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



Barnoldswick workers reject deal

By Ollie Moore

Workers at the Rolls Royce plant in Barnoldswick have voted overwhelmingly to reject an offer from management aimed at settling the latest phase of a dispute over job losses.

The offer does not include a key union demand, for a five-year guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, and workers feel it does not go far enough in terms of concrete guarantees to implement previous commitments around minimum staffing levels.

The deal was rejected unanimously by the works section, and by 98.5% by other staff. Unite will now organise meetings of its members to discuss next steps, which could include a resumption of industrial action.

A previous round of strikes at Barnoldswick ended in apparent victory, with management committing to maintain jobs at the site, identify additional work streams, and create an on-site academy to guarantee future jobs. The dispute resumed when it became clear these commitments were being renegeed on. □

Rail: fight for public ownership



From Tubeworker

Yet again a private rail franchise, this time Southeastern, has been shown to have its hands in the till, as "errors" meant that £25 million of public money was not returned to the government...

seven years after it was due.

As a result of this "serious breach" of the franchise agreement, the government has handed the franchise back to the state-owned "operator of last resort". This is the first time a franchise has been stripped for unashamedly trying to rip off us off.

The rail network, the NHS, utilities and the post, are all socially necessary and useful public services. A green and publicly run transport system is essential to efforts to halt the climate crisis. While it is run by privateers more interested in profits than running an efficient and accessible service, we all suffer. And nationalisation of the entire network is an increasingly popular demand, with polls showing around 75% of the public support it.

The Labour Party is, on paper, committed to public ownership of the railway, but Labour leaders make clear they only support taking franchises back into public ownership on a franchise-by-franchise basis when their contracts expire, not renationalising the whole lot all at once. And there is little word from them about the outsourcing (i.e., privatisation) of maintenance, cleaning, and other services.

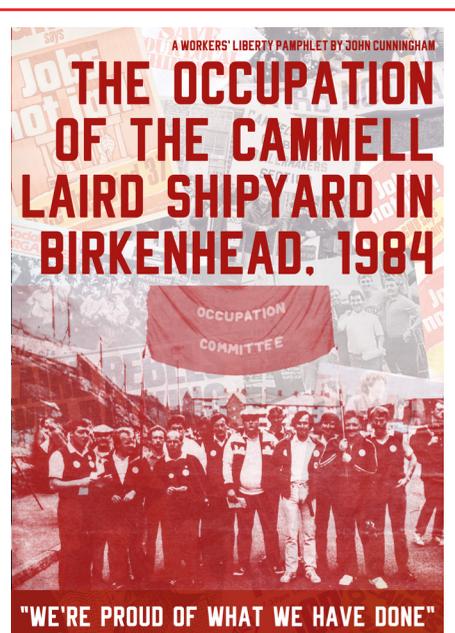
Although the government has taken over Southeastern, parent company Go-Ahead is still allowed to operate the Thameslink services, and remains the largest bus operator in London. Years of railway privatisation has seen billions roll in for shareholders and fat cat

bosses while services, safety, jobs, and conditions are under constant attack.

London Underground remains a publicly-owned railway, but there is plenty of privatisation under the TfL aegis. London Overground, DLR, the buses, and services like cleaning, catering, security, and track protection are all run by private companies. And the Tories' current demands for cuts on TfL could well be a mirror of its policies for the NHS... running down the service to soften it up for privatisation.

All the rail unions are united in favour of a nationalised rail network, but that must mean more than a press release each time a major failing gets media attention. It has to mean an ongoing, active campaign. Unions occasionally organise leafleting and petitioning activities outside train stations; we must step such activity up. And, whilst Britain's restrictive anti-union laws prohibit explicitly political strikes, we must discuss ways of challenging the logic of privatisation via industrial action.

A wholly publicly-owned system could deliver a cheaper, greener, and integrated transport system. A system that puts service, and the conditions and safety of its workers and passengers, at the forefront, rather than profit. A system where workers and passengers help to run the railway together. Unlike the government we don't want this idea to be the "operator of last resort". But to get there, we will need to fight. □



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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[020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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



Starmerism won't win elections

By Martin Thomas

Keir Starmer's Blair tribute act is promoted as the way to win elections. It is not.

"Mainstream" social democracy has done badly for decades in elections, as well as in bringing social progress.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the French Socialist Party was the strongest party in France, with 37.5% of the first-round vote for the National Assembly in 1981, and 49.3% in the second round.

Even in 1997, it had 23.5%. In 2017, it was down to 7.4%.

The Labour Party in the Netherlands was in government most of the time from 1946 to 2002. Its vote share has gone down from 29.0% in 1998 to 5.7% in 2021.

The Social Democratic Party in Germany had a small revival in 2021's election, when it got 25.7%. It is an uptick in a trend which has taken it down from 40.9% in 1998.

Social-democratic parties are in government in Spain and Portugal. But the trend is downwards there too, from 37.6% in Spain in 1996 to 28.0% in 2019, and from 43.8% in 1995 to 36.3% in 2019 in Portugal.

For decades Scandinavia was social democracy's heartland. In Sweden its vote has gone down from 45.3% in 1994 to 28.3% in 2018; in Norway, from 36.9% in 1993 to 26.3% in 2021; in Finland, from 28.3% in 1995 to 17.7% in 2019.

Long-standing mainstream conservative parties have lost vote share too. There have been ups as well as downs within the trend. Blair's 43.2% in 1997 was an up. Why?

The Tories were demoralised after their defeat on the poll tax and their ouster of Thatcher in 1990. House prices slumped drastically from 1989 to 1995. The Tories were way behind in opinion polls before Blair became leader, and for all the time from the economic "Black Wednesday" of 16 September 1992 through to 1997.

Blair did not win by confronting the Labour Party base. That came later. In 1997 he was still popular with the unions and with wide sections of the Labour Party membership (which had increased fast), often on the illusion that Blair would cunningly win the election with soft-soap policies and then deliver a "real" Labour government.



Blair had benefited from a twist in the road, not found a way to reverse the trend. At the end of the Blair-Brown era, in 2010, Labour's vote share, 29.1%, was lower than the 32.2% of December 2019 or the 34.4% of 1992.

The base of the trends has been the social-democratic parties' [adaptation](#) to the new world-market regime since the 1980s (neo-liberalism), rapid industrial restructurings and changes in economic geography, and successive class-struggle defeats which have left the stock of working-class assertiveness and confidence as yet insufficient to generate new Marxist parties of size and energy.

In this context, electorally the remarkable thing about the Corbyn era was the 40.0% vote share in 2017. Corbyn-Labour then showed energy, and will at least to push the envelope of neoliberalism.

Between 2017 and 2019 the Corbyn leadership failed to campaign for its positive policies of 2017. Instead it discredited itself by floundering on Brexit and on antisemitism. The left policies in the 2019 manifesto were popular, but spoiled by being dropped on the electorate a few weeks before polling day with only a few social-media posts to push them.

Even so, the 32.2% of 2019 was better than the 30.5% of 2015.

The way to win elections is to propose bold policies and act so that voters, working-class and younger voters especially, will believe the party really means to push them through. □



Uni workers fight for jobs and conditions

By Workers' Liberty students

On 4-5 October workers at the Royal College of Art struck in support of their long running campaign against casualised working conditions. 90% of staff are employed on "zero hours" and other forms of insecure contracts – the highest percentage of such employment in UK Higher Education. Strikes are scheduled for the next three weeks (linktr.ee/rcaucu).

RCA strikers will take heart from the important recent win at Open University, where 4,000 Associate Lecturers won significant improvements in their (fixed-term) contracts, including a pay rise and payments for all work.

At Goldsmiths in south London, staff are preparing for industrial action to fight the threat of job cuts, with more expected next year as management forces through its inaptly-named "recovery plan".

Staff in professional services have been told they have to compete for a diminished number of roles in a new, centralised structure of admin (similar structures have proved to be very dysfunctional in other Unis). The unions (University and College Union, UCU, and Unison) have been told 32 professional service jobs are under threat. These are important jobs without which univer-

sities cannot adequately support their students.

In addition 20 academic jobs in History and English and Creative Writing are under threat – here Goldsmiths management is slavishly following the government's downgrading of Humanities.

The cuts arise from years of poor financial decision-making followed now by an unnecessary drive to get rid of a deficit in just one year, kowtowing to a restrictive bank deal.

Goldsmiths UCU is now preparing for industrial action: [@GoldsmithsUCU](https://www.instagram.com/GoldsmithsUCU).

Over late September and early October, as the university year starts, Workers' Liberty people have leafleted Fresher Fairs and started regular sales at a number of universities. At Goldsmiths we sold 117 copies of *Solidarity* (a record for a single sale) and many pamphlets. Sales were also high at Sheffield Uni and SOAS.

This term we will be holding monthly online meetings about current political debates (on the meaning of imperialism, on left antisemitism and on free speech) as well as local informal face-to-face political discussions for students at the Bloomsbury campuses – SOAS, Birkbeck, UCL – in and around Goldsmiths, in Leeds and in Sheffield. □

• Inside, p.13: UCU victory in Liverpool.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

FUEL, WAGES AND BREXIT

The fuel shortages, queues at petrol stations and huge surrounding traffic jams which have choked up many cities and towns are an indictment of many aspects of our social arrangements:

- Low-wages and terrible conditions for HGV drivers.
- The ending of free movement between Britain and the European Union with Brexit, and the wider drive against migrants.
- The whole framework of vital industries, including transport and energy, being run for private profit.

The Socialist of 29 September carries an [interview](#) with a Socialist Party member who until recently worked as a driver. He vividly describes the dire working conditions in much of the industry, the stress and insecurity the companies' ruthless profit-making imposes on workers, and the absurd weakness of regulations.

He also highlights the weakness of trade unions.

The main union in the industry is Unite. This is surely a test for the leadership of new

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham, with its stated commitment to focus and push on workers' pay, terms and conditions.

Socialist and trade union activists should be on the look out to find ways to help rank-and-file drivers organise.

The Socialist Party being pro-Brexit, its coverage largely avoids discussion of Brexit and freedom of movement.

Socialists must support freedom of movement – not because want to provide more labour for bosses to exploit, but because we support workers' rights to move freely. Anything else means further weakening the ability to organise, by making workers more vulnerable to the combined power of their employers and the immigration system.

Our response to the temporary suspension of certain restrictions is to demand that free movement with the EU is restored, and expanded to other parts of the world. Workers should be able to move freely.

The fuel crisis is a reminder of the absurd irrationality of Brexit.

Yet stuck in a long-running pattern of not criticising Brexit, the bulk of the labour movement is currently unwilling to point this out.

The internationalist left needs to start thinking and talking about how to begin the job of addressing Brexit again. We should not accept the Tories' disastrous pseudo-settlement as the final resting place of the UK's relationship with the EU.

Last but not least, this crisis makes the case for putting public welfare above private profit. Like the energy industry itself, road haulage should be taken into public ownership – it was, under the post-war Labour government – and reorganised as a public service providing well-paid, secure jobs.

The UK economy's convulsions make the case against the whole capitalist system of private ownership for profit. Yet the Labour Party under Keir Starmer will not advocate even limited measures to put workers' rights and public good before profit. The labour movement must step up. □