

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STOP THE FOSSIL FUEL REBOOT!



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Stop the fossil-fuel reboot!

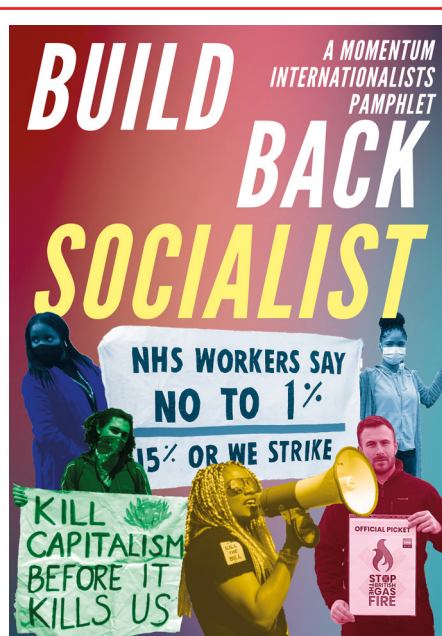


"Build back better, blah blah blah. Green economy, blah blah blah. Net zero by 2050, blah blah blah... Climate neutral, blah blah blah." This is all we hear from our so-called leaders. Words. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises... They've now had 30 years of "blah blah blah" and where has that led us? Over 50% of all our CO2 emissions have occurred since 1990, and a third since 2005. – Greta Thunberg, 28 September 2021

After a summer of fires, floods, and freaky weather, the gap between widespread green rhetoric and the facts of fossil-fuel reboot is starkly inescapable.

The problem isn't that the world is being "too slow" in reducing greenhouse emissions. It's bloodcurdlingly worse: we're moving in the wrong direction.

The changes forced by the Covid pandemic – a pandemic birthed, in part, by environmental destruction, and pursuit of profit before health – caused a temporary slight downturn in global emissions. Yet, already, 2021 seems set to be second only to the pre-pandemic 2019. Indeed, this spring, global emissions from power generation, industry and housing were already [at least as high](#) as the same period in 2019.



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

momentuminternationalists.org

Worse is in the pipeline. Russia's gas goliath, Gazprom, has increased its production and exports so far in 2021 to close to a historic high. This October, the Chinese state has ordered over 70 [coal mines](#) in Inner Mongolia alone to increase production by around one hundred million tonnes; their six-point plan for tackling the energy crisis centres on [ramping up coal](#). Meanwhile, Qatar Gas Company is announcing a new project to [ramp up](#) natural gas extraction. In the UK, many have called for increased gas reserves.

Yet it is possible to rapidly turn off the industrial-quantity pumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, while keeping the lights on, avoiding energy crises like recently in the UK and China, and maintaining a high quality of life.

Expansion

A rapid expansion of solar, wind, hydro-electric, nuclear, and geoengineering power, coupled with a phasing out of fossil energy, could meet our energy needs. This expansion and transition requires large upfront public investment in power generation. An artificial market in energy, with electricity transported and distributed using outdated technology, is inefficient, ineffective, and unjust. A more sophisticated and democratically co-ordinated energy grid than the current one is necessary to reduce energy waste and tackle energy poverty. This will be doubly so when more of energy production is weather-dependent, or scales up and down short-term less easily.

The interests and pursuits of powerful and profitable sections of the energy sector can no longer dominate. Their interests must be ignored: their activities actively suppressed. This all cuts against the forces and logic of the current economic regime.

Fossil carbon is also used directly for transportation of people and goods, for heating of buildings and water, for cooking, and for industrial heat. These processes can be electrified, the energy use reduced – and then powered by renewable and nuclear energy.

Quality of life and the environment would be helped by efficient electric low-cost long-distance rail and local public transport, and policies to support walking, cycling, and shorter necessary journeys. This applies to goods as well as people. Flights and fossil car use should be repressed. Halt airport expansion, phase out most short-haul flights, introduce a punitive frequent flyer tax or rationing. Immediately ban sale of new hydrocarbon powered cars, coupled with a car-scrappage or retrofitting scheme to make electric vehicles available where necessary.

This would require substantial public funding; overriding markets in trans-

port, freight, and vehicle production; and tackling entrenched lucrative industries and companies – aviation, car production, even overpriced private railway companies – head on.

Johnson's latest scheme on home heating provides a model of how not to approach the transition. The government will be offering [£5,000](#) for homeowners to install "low carbon heating technologies like heat pumps... when the time comes to replace their old boiler." An atomised house-by-house approach is necessarily much less energy efficient, requiring more electricity overall. Crucially, this scheme is far too slow and ineffective.

Most estimates place the installation of an air source heat pump at considerably above [£5,000](#). Ground source higher still, and a boiler costs perhaps [£400-£2,500](#).

Heat pumps typically last longer than a boiler, and will probably save energy bills, so overall may be cheaper. But that considerable upfront cost will be a barrier to most working-class homeowners and short-termist landlords. And with boilers typically lasting 10-15 years, the policy, even if universally adopted, implies many homes still heated by fossil gas well into the 2030s. Johnston's article in *The Sun* gives us a [flavour](#) of this approach to transition.

There are plenty of resources and reservoirs of wealth available for these much needed and expensive transitions. Johnson's scheme is committing a mere half billion. Labour's "five demands to 'keep 1.5 degrees alive'" published 13 October call for a paltry "£28bn every year until 2030 to tackle the climate crisis", up from Corbyn's £25bn/year but with no mention of public ownership. The more ambitious "One Million Climate Jobs", originally published one decade ago and supported by many unions, calls for [£66bn/year](#).

Official figures of tax avoidance, fraud, and non-payment alone – likely a serious underestimate – put it at [£35bn](#) this year. Much of that will be avoidance by the rich: closing loopholes could more than cover Labour's demands. That, in turn, is dwarfed by conventionally legal theft by the super-rich. In Spring 2021 the [Sunday Times Rich List 2021](#) found that "annual rankings saw the wealth of each of the UK's 250 richest people grow at an average rate of more than £1 million a day". That is a total of £1bn every four days, or £91bn in a year. And this is before we consider hidden wealth, pre-existing wealth, or wealth of those multi-millionaires unlucky enough to not make the top 250.

Climate change is the biggest threat facing humanity: we must wield the resources currently stolen and hoarded



by the rich to halt and reverse it, and accommodate to its unavoidable impacts.

We have seen, time and time again, the ruling class resist tooth and nail any attempts to regulate industries they control, if it will curb their profits. We cannot leave them in control – as Labour's five demands propose – with the power, leverage, and desire to evade and fight back against even the most minimal measures necessary to start moving things in the right direction. We much confront their power head on.

Significant and powerful sections of and tendencies within the capitalist class will fight every major change that is necessary to stop climate catastrophe.

Rich

The rich's economic power, and from that their political and ideological power, is created by workers in the workplace. Of the vast wealth we produce, they give us wages enough to survive by, and take the rest for themselves. It is here – where the shape of society, the wealth of humanity, the power of the rich, and the greenhouse pollutants, are largely produced – that these can be transformed, redistributed, tackled. Workers, organising at work, are the key to stopping climate change. We cannot look for environmental change to "businesses", which are controlled, warlord-like, by our class enemies.

Nor can we look to "the state" as if it is a neutral body, which after this or that election can bring the changes we need. The state as it currently exists serves the interests of the ruling class, and its power rests upon institutions which are tied to that class. It is no coincidence that, around the world, governments have failed to take meaningful action. They will fail, once more, in COP26.

As workers, organised at work and in trade unions, we have the interest and power to change things. As a start: organise a stall, photoshoot, or workplace delegation to a local demonstration as part of the 5 November Youth Climate Strike and Workers' Mobilisation Day. Get your union to organise a delegation to a 6 November demonstration as part of the "global day of action for climate justice". Get in touch and join Workers' Liberty's delegation to Glasgow, 7-10 November. □

200,000 in Rome against fascism

By Mohan Sen

On 9 October thousands of right-wing anti-vaccine demonstrators protested in Rome, and fascists from the Forza Nuova party smashed their way into the [offices of the CGIL](#), Italy's biggest union federation.

On 16 October, trade unionists and left-wingers responded by demonstrating in Rome to say "Mai più fascismi" ("Never again fascisms"). The organisers, Italy's three biggest union federations, claimed 200,000, while the media said 50,000.

Many report that demonstrators carried pro-vaccination slogans as well as anti-fascist and pro-union ones.

The Italian labour movement's fight against the far right seems far from ad-

equated, as we will explain. Nonetheless, the demonstration was impressive. It's a long time since our unions organised a protest that big at a week's notice.

Repeated attacks

The attack on the CGIL was not an isolated incident. This year has seen repeated violent [attacks](#) on trade union activists, particularly migrant workers, with at least one [killed](#).

As Riccardo la Torre from our Fire Brigades Union put it: "Full solidarity to our brothers and sisters in the CGIL. The events on the 9 October have shown we must resist far-right violence. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters in the Italian trade union movement in resisting these attacks on organised workers and de-

mocracy."

We are far from being able to advocate detailed tactics for Italy. However, some problems seem clear.

On 16 October the leaders of the big unions called for Forza Nuova to be banned. That seems to be almost their main emphasis. Obviously we want action against those committing violent acts against the labour movement. But calling for or relying on generalised state repression is short-sighted. It is likely to rebound on the left.

Moreover, it evades the bigger problem. Forza Nuova is gaining confidence in a wider right-wing political climate. A string of opinion polls since June have the "post-fascist", extreme-right Brothers of Italy party in first place (before that it was mostly the Lega party, also

on the far right). The labour movement will turn things around only through aggressive struggle for workers' interests, again a disastrous status quo. The battle of sacked Italian [GKN workers](#) shows what is needed, on a much bigger scale and with political generalisation.

Italian prime minister Mario Draghi visited the CGIL headquarters after the fascist attack on 9 October and warmly embraced the federation's general secretary, Maurizio Landini, in front of the cameras. But Draghi is overseeing the attacks on workers and the authoritarian, nationalistic policies which are driving the growth of the far right. Fascism, and the far right more broadly, cannot be defeated without a struggle against the capitalist class. □

Wind back Brexit!

By Gerry Bates

Brexit is already contributing heavily to economic chaos. That contribution may get bigger.

In UK-EU negotiations over trade arrangements between Britain and Northern Ireland, the EU has now offered sweeping removal of checks on animal and plant products entering NI. The UK's negotiator David Frost has told them to get lost.

The Tories are letting talk circulate that they will kick over the table and unilaterally suspend the Northern Ireland protocol, the deal they themselves signed less than

two years ago to avoid a hard border within Ireland.

EU states including France, Germany, Spain and Italy are reported to be pushing for options which range from tariffs on UK imports to termination of the entire trade and cooperation deal.

We are not advocates for the EU governments and bureaucracy, obviously. But socialists must emphatically condemn both the UK government's recklessness and its whole policy here. We are against a hard border in Ireland.

The labour movement must break out of its self-imposed silence on Brexit, loudly con-

demn the Tories' policy and fight for an alternative. As a basic step, the left needs to fight to reopen the discussion. For ourselves, we support the UK rejoining the EU. But as a first step to remove the hard border threat the labour movement should support what a motion to last month's Labour conference from Neath's local Labour Party proposed – rejoining the European single market and customs union, which entails also restoring free movement between the UK and the EU27. □

• Fuel, wages and Brexit: bit.ly/fuel-wages

South African metal strike grows

By Sacha Ismail

Many tens of thousands of metal and engineering workers in South Africa, members of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA), have been on indefinite strike over pay and conditions since 5 October. NUMSA is calling for an 8% wage rise for everyone in the first year of a deal, and inflation plus 2% in the following two years.

Employers offered 4.4%, then inflation plus 0.5% and inflation plus 1%. Under pressure they have now added an offer of 6% for the lowest paid.

Last year NUMSA agreed to no wage increase due to the impact of the pandemic on

the industry. That helps explain workers' anger and determination now.

The union is also making demands on sick pay, paternity and family responsibility leave, transport costs, family funeral benefits and an allowance for those working underground.

Another union, the Metal and Electrical Workers' Union of South Africa (MEWUSA) has announced that its members are now out on strike. There are about 300,000 workers in the industry; MEWUSA has about 16,000, NUMSA 155,000. A third union, UASA, says it is in dispute but not yet on strike.

The strike seems to be characterised by big rallies and

vibrant demonstrations. Violence by police and security guards against strikers looks to have escalated, with many injured by rubber bullets.

South Africa's biggest union federation, COSATU, is not very vocal about the strike. NUMSA is part of another, more left-wing federation, SAFTU, and critical of COSATU's support for the pro-capitalist ANC government. COSATU is a central pillar of a political regime which has continued to oversee dire poverty and precariousness for most of the country's workers. □

• More info and tweet solidarity to [@Numsa_Media](https://twitter.com/Numsa_Media) – use hashtag [#EngineeringStrike](https://twitter.com/EngineeringStrike)

Indian farmers remobilise

By Mohan Sen

In another sign of a revival of Indian farmers' struggle against the Modi regime, thousands of farmers and supporters blocked train tracks across the country on 18 October.

The "Rail roko" ("Stop the trains") mobilisation, organised by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha coalition of farmers' unions, was focused on demanding the resignation of minister Ajay Mishra, after a car carrying his son mowed down and [killed four protesters](#).

The farmers' movement is aimed at winning repeal of three pro-capitalist agricultural ["reforms"](#) passed by India's Hindu-nationalist-dominated parliament last year. It began in August 2020,



surged following the December 2020 general strike, but then fizzled down from about April because of Covid-19.

Support India's farmers and workers! □



Upcoming meetings

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

Sunday 24 October 6:30pm: John Archer: black pioneer of Labour politics

Tuesday 26 October 6:30pm: Mom Int/Labour Left Internationalists - C L R James on history and black struggle

Monday 8 November, 7:30pm: Northern Workers' Liberty: Corbynism, what went wrong?

Workers' Liberty Student meetings (online)

Thursday 4 November, 6:30pm: Confronting Left antisemitism

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/events or scan QR code □



Disorder at the border: Lexiters backing Johnson



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

During the EU referendum, the “leave” side almost entirely ignored the implications for Northern Ireland, and when concerns were raised, dismissed them as part of “project fear.”

When it became clear that Brexit would have a seriously destabilising effect on Northern Ireland, Johnson and the hard-line Brexiteers (including the DUP) opposed the May government’s “backstop” which, for all its faults, was an attempt to mitigate the problem and avoid a hard border.

Now, together with his Brexit tsar, the malevolent clown David Frost, Johnson is deliberately using Northern Ireland and agitation against the “protocol” that the two of them negotiated and hailed as a triumph to provoke the EU and keep Brexit xenophobia alive as a potent force within UK politics. But it’s no secret that (in the words of a “former cabinet colleague” quoted in the *Guardian*), “Boris doesn’t give a stuff about Northern Ireland”. The problem for left Brexiteers (or “Lexit” supporters, as they like to be known), is that

although they largely agree with Johnson, they do also care about Ireland – or at least care about appearing to.

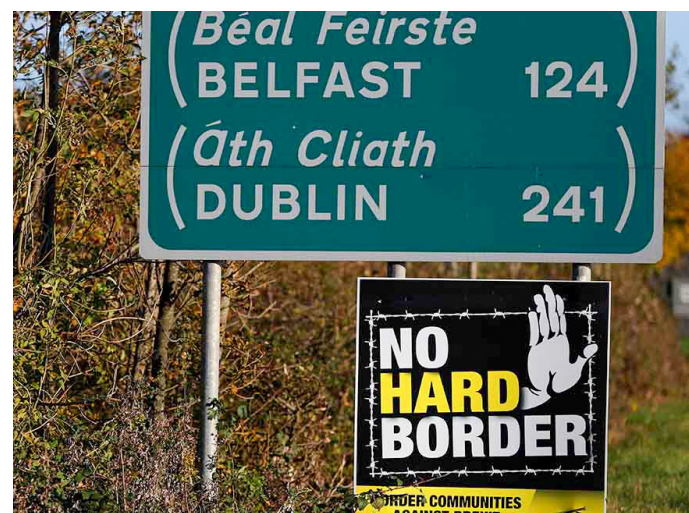
The *Morning Star* and the Communist Parties of Britain and Ireland attempt to square the circle by blaming the EU for the problem. “It is not Britain’s border, or Ireland’s border: it is the EU’s border. It is up to the EU to sort out this problem in the interest of its members, in other words Ireland, the only member affected by it” claimed the CPI in their paper *Socialist Voice* in 2019. As an Irish blogger (Sraid Marx) commented: “The idea that the border of the EU in Ireland affects only the Irish state and not the rest of the EU demonstrates such an ignorance of the issue at stake that it is hard to work out what this writer actually does understand.”

But this “line” has been repeated time and again in the *Morning Star* ever since, most recently in a bizarre editorial last Friday (15 Oct) commenting on the latest Johnson/Frost provocation. The piece starts out by trying to make out the blame is shared equally (“Neither the British state nor the European Union are above endangering the peace by engaging in a little brinkmanship”), before going on to blame Johnny Foreigner: “During the EU-UK withdrawal negotiations, prominent EU politicians and bureaucrats hinted that

any failure to agree arrangements that respected EU neoliberal capitalist rules by – in reality – keeping Northern Ireland within the European Single Market could force the EU to impose north-south border controls.”

This is a truly breathtaking re-writing of history: the truth is that it was always the EU that sought to avoid a hard border, while Johnson’s Brexiteers showed no such concern. Any EU warnings about “north-south border controls” were raised because Johnson is known to be unconcerned about honouring promises made about protecting the single market – thus forcing the EU to do so. In effect, the *Morning Star* is (once again) backing Johnson against the EU. Even bourgeois commentators have been astounded by Johnson and Frost’s new elevation of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) as an obstacle to reaching a settlement (the Irish Taoiseach Micheál Martin has stated that Johnson never once raised it in their discussions).

But the *Morning Star* once again takes Johnson’s side, denouncing the



ECJ as playing “a central role in enforcing the pro-big business, pro-market, anti-worker rules that govern the EU, bringing as they do job insecurity, lower pay, lower pensions and privatisation to the workers and peoples of Ireland and other EU countries.” Not a word, you note about Johnson’s government and its record on all those issues.

The *Morning Star* claims to be Britain’s socialist daily paper: when it comes to Brexit and Ireland (north and south), it has shown time and again, that its obsessive hatred of the EU means it objectively backs Johnson, Frost and the xenophobes and little-Englanders behind the entire Brexit fiasco. □



Thinking again on David Miller



Letter

I found the article by Chris Reynolds in *Solidarity* 608 on David Miller and Bristol University very strange.

I think choosing the case of Helmut Hasse as analogy is pretty strange, considering as this guy was a wannabe Nazi and certainly fellow-traveller of fascists.

Our line is typically that we do support the removal and blockading of fascists for their politics. The implicit defence of Miller that his antisemitism is unrelated to his academic project, or is of the calibre

of unthinking near-antisemitism seen on the left, is off the mark, too. PowerPoints from his lectures have been leaked, showing bizarre diagrams linking specifically Jewish organisations to political actors, alleging Labour and the Tories to be in Israel’s pocket in the most convoluted ways, as in some fever-dream deep-state Israeli conspiracy.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying he should’ve been sacked, that’s another argument for another day. But we cannot pretend his staying in post would’ve been positive for anyone other than left antisemites. □

Sacha Marten, Birmingham

Miller, Hasse, and academic freedom



Letter

In discussing the case of David Miller and Bristol University, I chose the example of Helmut Hasse, a celebrated mathematician sacked by the British occupation authorities in Germany in 1945 because of his right-wing nationalist views, as a comparison test case.

Partly because I knew about it, but partly because no reader is likely to find Hasse’s views other than vile. Hasse, to my mind, provides a test case for how Miller’s could be considered wrong even while denouncing his political views. And likewise we can criticise Sussex University professor Kathleen Stock’s noxious trans-sceptic campaigning without wanting the university to sack her (which, it seems, few people are demanding anyway).

Richard Courant, a Jewish mathematician (and left

Social Democrat) who fled Germany in 1933, had known Hasse well. In exile he became hostile to the accommodating Hasse. He wrote: “I found [Hasse’s] wild and quite open pan-German convictions quite sinister... To my knowledge he has not behaved nastily to anybody”.

Bristol University has said, without detail, that Miller’s sacking is on grounds of his “behaviour” conflicting with the university’s “duty of care” to students. We can’t judge because neither the university nor Miller has released details. We oppose sacking on “ideological” grounds; we would oppose sacking if the case on “behaviour” is inadequate; and yet we do not “defend David Miller” in any general way.

University professors are not ordinary workers. They have authority over junior academics, ancillary staff, and students. If they abuse those they have authority over, then we would want their union (if they’re members) to put their

case, explore adjustments and mitigations, etc., but in the end we see no absolute right for them to continue in post despite substantial abuse.

There’s an extra factor with university professors: academic freedom, autonomy for universities and research from political controls, freedom to theorise even if many (or we) find it offensive. Suppressing that autonomy in a capitalist society, even if in the short term it weeds out someone unpleasant, cannot but end up favouring ruling-class views over subversive and oppositional views, including our own.

To push for suppression in the hope of weeding out right-wing or fake-left mavericks is at best short-sighted. And, after a socialist revolution, we would not want university faculties purged, either. □

Chris Reynolds, London

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/dm-ks-hh

Moscow: The truth can't be hidden forever



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Last week, more than thirty masked young men broke into a public meeting at the human rights NGO "Memorial" in Moscow. They shouted "Scum!", "Fascists!" "Get out of Russia!", and "There's no room for foreign agents!" They ordered members of the audience to lie down on the floor. They were there to stop the showing of a film, "Mr. Jones".

The 2019 film tells the story of Gareth Jones, a Welsh journalist who stumbled upon the story of the 1932-33 Ukrainian famine in which millions died. At the time, the Soviet regime denied there was a famine and they were assisted in this by New York Times correspondent Walter Duranty. It was only many years later that the regime admitted that the famine had taken place, and indeed that it was man-made.

Stalin had wanted to crush the Ukrainian peasantry, who he considered to be deadly enemies of the Soviet state and his policy of collectivisation of agricul-

ture. It was one of the worst genocides of the twentieth century and the Ukrainians today call it the "Holodomor".

The advertising tag line for the film was "The truth can't be hidden forever."

So why today, ninety years later, do young Russian nationalists feel the need to suppress the showing of this film in Moscow? Why were they trying to hide the truth about Ukraine's "terror-famine"?

In Russia today, history has been weaponised by the Putin regime. It is now illegal to publish books that criticise the role of Stalin during the Second World War. There is a national mythology originally crafted by Stalin which Putin has fully embraced. In it, the peace-loving Soviet Union was brutally attacked by the Nazi barbarians and Stalin rallied the whole nation to rise up and defeat the aggressor.

There is no mention of the Great Purge in the late 1930s when Stalin decapitated the Red Army, leaving it leaderless just in time for the outbreak of the war. Nor is anyone encouraged to talk about the infamous Hitler-Stalin pact that divided Poland into German and Soviet zones, and handed over several other countries to Soviet hands. And of course the initial collapse of the

Red Army in 1941, and the surrender of literally millions of its soldiers in the opening weeks of the German invasion, is another taboo subject.

Today a film that exposes one of the greatest crimes of the Stalin regime is not welcome in Putin's Moscow. Nor, it turns out, is the organisation that hosted it – Memorial. Memorial has been doing outstanding work for decades to keep alive the memory of Stalin's victims. It preserves a history that the current rulers of Russia would prefer be forgotten.

I was in Memorial's offices early in 2020. We were doing a launch event for the Russian edition of my book on independent, democratic socialist Georgia. This too is a subject that the Russian leaders would rather not discuss. Fortunately when I was there, one could still hold such meetings in Moscow, and Memorial's offices were an island of sanity and intellectual freedom in an increasingly authoritarian country.

In the end, the thugs who broke up the film showing last week will not prevail. For more than thirty years, Russians have been able to read about the history of the Soviet Union and to learn about the crimes of the Stalinist regime. It will not be easy to put the genie back

in the bottle.

Or as the producers of "Mr. Jones" would put it, the truth can't be hidden forever. □

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



Activist Agenda

Coinciding with COP26, on 5 November the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign's monthly 6pm protest at the Chinese Embassy (Portland Place, London W1) will highlight issues of climate justice in the plight of the Uyghur people: the extraction of huge fossil fuel deposits from Uyghur land for Chinese state corporations' profits, and the use of forced labour in solar panel supply chains.

Free Our Unions has the next of its open organising meetings on Tue 2 November, [6:30pm on Zoom](#). □

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

Night Tube needs better staffing



Women's Fightback

By Janine Booth

The Night Tube in London will resume on two lines from 27 November, in a move promoted as ensuring safety for women. However, the reality is more complex, and women's safety requires increased Night Tube staffing.

Around 150,000 people signed an online petition for Night Tube to resume, calling it "the best transport option to ensure millions of women across London can get home safely in the evenings and at night this coming winter". There is certainly a strong case for this assertion, and it is understandable that women will feel safer travelling on the Tube rather than on night buses, waiting for taxis or walking. However, Night Tube is not the haven for women's safety that some want to believe. I worked on Night Tube before its lockdown suspension (though obviously I am



not writing this on behalf of the company!). Most nights, I dealt with at least one incident of a woman passenger being harassed, followed, intimidated or even assaulted. Workers faced similar, with every female respondent to an RMT survey of Night Tube staff stating that they had been sexually harassed or assaulted on duty at least once.

The petition describes Night Tube as "a well-lit and well-connected Tube network, with platform CCTV and appropriately trained security staff". Or perhaps it means that is its ideal Night Tube. For sure, lighting and CCTV are important, but they do not stop women being attacked. The presence of staff – London Underground staff rather than "security staff" – is even more important. But not every

Night Tube station has enough staff to ensure safety, and London Underground is currently in dispute with one of its drivers' unions about how Night Tube will be staffed. The petition rightly argues that more fundamental changes are required to cut the roots of violence against women, including "inducing cultural and behavioural change through education, policy and practice. Including reform to key public institutions such as the Met, private institutions such as Uber, greater investment in support services for women and the prioritization of a national strategy" (American spellings from the petition). And it is right to demand safe public transport at night. But for Night Tube to be that safe public transport, it needs improved staffing.

Finally, please note that women do not use Night Tube just to get home. Many use it to get to early-morning jobs, in health, social care, cleaning, hospitality and other sectors where low-paid, gendered work predominates. They too deserve to be safe. □

Ten out of ten if you're right wing?

By Simon Nelson

The Labour Party's "future candidates programme" released its latest results on 15 October. It was first introduced under the Miliband leadership. Starmer has modified the criteria to allow people who have only recently joined the party to apply, but, more to the point, those selected are broadly supportive of Starmer, and Momentum reports that all left-wing applicants have been unsuccessful.

The programme itself will consist of a mix of webinars and face-to-face learning with marking and graded outcomes!

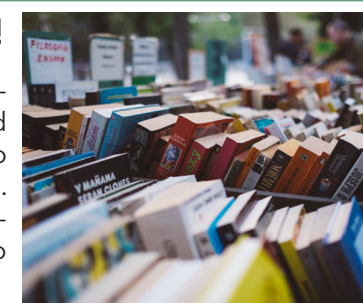
Left-wing Labour members should have no truck with this sort of candidates programme. It should be

the decision of local parties who appears on the long and short lists. Labour can provide skills training in speech-making, talking with media, and other practicalities to those that want it, but that should not be part of any vetting process. Starmer has said he wants candidates less focused on internal Labour party matters: short-hand for right wingers with no interest in policy debate or turning the Labour party outwards into an actual mass movement.

The programme is set to aid people seeking a "career" in politics, and bag carriers for the leadership of the time, rather than working-class candidates with a class-struggle and trade-union background. □

Second hand books!

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



Berlin votes to expropriate landlords

By Sacha Ismail

"I am angry that the working class movement built this, but now it's the corporations who profit off this." "I hope [housing companies] think 'Oh, the Germans are crazy. Your money is not safe in Germany'. This would be great." Two supporters of the Berlin housing referendum, quoted in [Vice](#)

Germany's 26 September general election was a mixed bag for the left. The conservative coalition was ejected from office for the first time since 2005, with the Social Democratic and Green votes rising substantially from 2017, the Christian Democratic vote plummeting and the far-right Alternative for Germany falling back. However the SPD and the Greens may form a coalition with the ultra-neo-liberal Free Democrats, and there is no question they will continue with neo-liberal policies. Meanwhile the Left Party lost almost half its vote, while continuing to move to the right...

On the same day as the election, however, the left and labour movement won a major victory.

In Berlin, a referendum voted for the city government to take into public ownership all housing owned by the twelve private real-estate organisations with 3,000 or more units in the city. This amounts to about 243,000 homes, out of 1.5 million rental properties in Berlin.

1,034,709 Berliners (56.4%) voted for the initiative, and 715,214 (39%) against. (The rest were invalid votes.)

This despite the fact that parties with a clear majority in Berlin elections, in-

cluding both the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, opposed the measure, in a de facto united front with the Berlin association of housing companies.

The expropriation demand was supported by the Left Party, the Greens and the SPD's youth section (and many SPD members), as well a range of tenants' organisations and trade unions.

The referendum's official title was "Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen" – "Expropriate Deutsch Wohnen & Co." Deutsche Wohnen owns 113,000 of the 240,000 housing units marked for public ownership.

In 2006 Deutsche Wohnen bought up 60,000 units of social housing, paying on average only €7,500 for each – from a city government led by the Social Democrats and including the Left Party. This was part of a wider trend of selling off public housing and strengthening the role of private developers and real-estate companies against local authorities.

Alexander Vasudevan summarised in the [Guardian](#) what this has meant:

"For ordinary tenants in Berlin, where at least 80% of the population are renters, the transformation of the housing market was accompanied by skyrocketing rents, widespread displacement and the dismantling of local communities and social bonds. Many neighbourhoods were rapidly gentrified while low-income residents struggled to find decent affordable housing."

There are a range of figures floating around about how much rents in Berlin have increased. Some estimate that in a decade they have increased by about



half overall and doubled for new tenants.

The expropriation campaign has been running since 2018. Ironically, it gained strength partly because a much less radical measure, to freeze rents on most homes in the city, was introduced in 2020 but shot down by Germany's constitutional court in April this year.

In July 2019, the campaign for expropriation had collected 58,000 signatures. By the end of June this year they had almost 350,000, with the number certified as legally valid easily passing the threshold of 170,000, 7% of eligible voters, needed to initiate the referendum.

Campaigners for a referendum on public ownership cited Article 15 of Germany's constitution, which says that "land, natural resources and means of production may, for the purpose of socialisation, be transferred to public ownership or other forms of public enterprise by a law that determines the nature and extent of compensation"... However Article 15 has never been used before.

In 2013 83.2% voted for a Berlin referendum to take the city's energy

system back into public ownership. However, turnout was only 29%, so the vote fell just short of the 25% necessary for a ballot measure to be legally passed. Turnout in this year's much harder-fought housing referendum was just under 75%.

The referendum is officially non-binding. The new Social Democratic mayor of Berlin, Franziska Giffey, opposed expropriation but says she will respect the result. However she seems to be working to delay (and block?) its implementation.

One argument will be over what the real-estate corporations are paid. Naturally they and their supporters argue that, if public ownership goes ahead at all, they should get the market rate – which would cost something like €40 billion, many times what they originally paid to grab hold of public housing. Expropriation campaigners argue to pay something like a quarter of that.

The fight is probably only just beginning.

Nonetheless, the referendum victory should give the left, labour movement and housing movements in other countries confidence to fight for radical solutions to the housing and other crises we face. Here we should discuss how to use the Berlin struggle to put the restoration and expansion of council housing back on the political agenda, and confront the Labour Party's love-in with landlords and developers.

More: an article in Jacobin magazine bit.ly/berlin-i by an activist in the campaign; an interview with campaign activists by Greater Manchester Housing Action bit.ly/dw-ent □

Half a million empties, 280,000 homeless

By Sarah Morgan

The Empty Homes Campaign held an online rally on Saturday 9 October to highlight the fact that half a million homes in Britain are without a permanent resident. A shocking statistic when homelessness stands at 280,000 in England alone according to the last official figure.

One of the big ideas of the rally was to push for retrofitting homes over knocking buildings down, as this is better for the environment than new builds.

Carla Denyer, Green Party co-leader, said: "Many of our big cities are becoming hollowed out." Because of the issue of empty homes, she believes that investors exacerbate the housing crisis.

John Bird of *The Big Issue*



said: "It's a crying shame that we still haven't addressed the issue of empty homes."

Jeremy Corbyn Labour MP asserted that housing is a human right, the right to buy should be stopped and that second homes lead to negative impacts on local communities.

Morag Gillie of the campaign Homes for All said: "It is ordinary people that are pay-

ing the price of free market catastrophes."

The issue of the ongoing tragedy of Grenfell was mentioned, as well as the empty blocks in the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, overseas owners in Hammersmith, the new development of the Millbank Tower and the positive efforts of the Southend-on-Sea council.

There were also international attendees from New York and Berlin, who were supportive, having to combat empty homes in their own cities. Campaigners in Berlin were celebrating a victory on that front.

Jon Glackin of [Streets Kitchen](#) reported that the number dying on the streets while homes lay empty has gone up since the Covid 19 crisis. And a refugee from Iran spoke anon-

ymously about his experiences of the appalling conditions at Napier Barracks, as refugees are poorly housed in the housing crisis context.

Morag Gillie ended on a positive note saying it had been a "brilliant day" that was meant to serve as a rallying call for further action. □

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Martin Luther King and the Memphis strike



Black history month

By Brian Jones

On February 1, 1968, two sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were riding on the back of a garbage truck when the compactor accidentally activated. Both men were chewed up, like garbage.

The deaths led to a strike by the city's 1,300 sanitation workers and the participation of Martin Luther King Jr., ending with his assassination.

Little did the striking workers know "that their decision would challenge generations of white supremacy in Memphis and have staggering consequences for the nation", as Michael K Honey put it in [Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign](#).

Sanitation was a "Black" job – conditions were terrible, pay was low, and workers had no rights and no union.

Workers could be fired for any reason, and their pay docked on a whim. "Before the union, it was whatever they decided they wanted to pay you", one worker, James Robinson, recalled.

In 1968, after 15 years on the job, he was making \$1.65 an hour – five cents more than the federal minimum wage. Sanitation workers could regularly put in 40 hours and still qualify for welfare.

It was difficult work. Fifty-gallon drums of garbage, covered or uncovered and filled with refuse of all kinds, had to be hauled from wherever they were left to the truck, and hoisted into the compactor.

"Not only white supervisors, but also white citizens", Honey wrote, "had disdainful attitudes toward Black sanitation workers." Homeowners were not required to even use the drums or garbage cans; workers were required to pick up everything. Piles of grass, branches, papers, boxes, even dead animals they found in the road – all had to be removed by the workers.

Outmoded trucks with faulty wiring – like the one Cole and Walker rode – were common, adding to the danger.

The 1968 strike didn't emerge from nowhere. Organisers had laid the groundwork for years, but were repeatedly frustrated.

Beginning in the early 1960s, sanitation workers who were military veterans and had some union experience began trying to organise their co-workers.

The most successful was T O Jones, leader of what became AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) Local 1733. Jones solicited support from civil rights activists, Black ministers and AFSCME's national office, but never recruited a

majority of sanitation workers to paying dues.

"Although he had no training", Honey noted, "Jones understood the first principle of union organizing: that the workers themselves had to take action. He talked to them constantly about their need for a union and their own ability to do something about it."

In 1966, Jones had organised 500 who were ready to strike, but he called off the walkout at the last minute in the face of a well-prepared scabbing operation and a court-ordered injunction.

After many years organising, Jones had only about 40 workers paying dues by 1968 – and the mayor refused to negotiate on principle.

The deaths of Echol Cole and Robert Walker created a new situation: the workers were now ready to act en masse. T O Jones had to run to catch up.

Jones organised a meeting at the Memphis Labor Temple on February 11. He hoped if 500 showed up, he might have leverage to get negotiations. Between 700 and 900 arrived, and, when they realised the city would not negotiate, workers shouted for a strike.

They had no leaflets, no treasury and no plan. Their demands were a living wage, improved safety and union recognition. The next day the strike began.

The sanitation workers reached out to civil rights activists and clergy for support. When the NAACP got involved, "alarm bells went off in white Memphis".

The workers avoided making the strike an explicit "racial" issue at first, but their treatment at the hands of the police and the mayor was blatantly racist. Other city employees had unions – why not the all-Black sanitation workers?

The mayor's intransigence galvanised the strikers to press on. Threats, intimidation, police violence and court injunctions no longer scared people back to work. Rather, they deepened workers' resolve and widened support.

Striking workers didn't sit at home. They kept up morale, momentum and pressure through mass action including daily midday union meetings of nearly 1,000, followed by marches into the downtown area and mass meetings with community members in Black churches.

The slogan they later carried on placards was "I Am a Man": Black sanitation workers were fighting for recognition as *human beings*.

For the mayor to enter negotiations required acknowledgement of their fundamental equality – that they were *social equals* deserving the same treatment already extended to other, white municipal workers.

Martin Luther King's staff begged him not to go to Memphis.

They feared he would get "bogged down", and they would have to postpone the planned Poor People's Campaign.

Through that campaign, King hoped to gather a multiracial coalition for mass, nonviolent civil disobedience in Washington, D.C. – to shut down the city to demand government action to end poverty, hunger and homelessness.

King believed the civil rights movement needed to move on from "phase one" to "phase two" (economic and human rights).

King's allies from the first phase – clergy, leaders of large unions, and Northern liberal politicians – weren't nearly as enthusiastic about the second. King failed to draw significant numbers to join in planning the Poor People's Campaign.

Memphis was different. There, the working poor had organised themselves to demand justice. Their determination and energy had drawn support from clergy, students and civil rights activists.

In Memphis, King could give confidence and a sense of purpose to a mass movement already in progress. The workers could benefit from the greater attention their cause would gain by King's presence, and King could get a chance to make "phase two" a reality.

On March 18, King spoke to the sanitation workers for the first time. 15,000 people came out.

King put Memphis in the context of a national struggle for economic justice and human rights. "You are reminding not only Memphis, but... the nation that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages", King said.

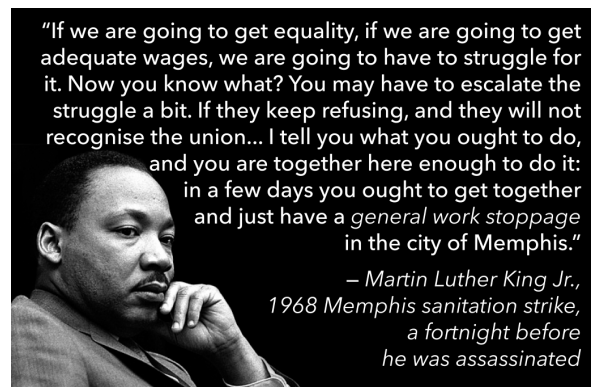
"If America does not use her vast resource of wealth to end poverty", he warned, to thunderous applause, "she... is going to hell".

As tension in the room grew, King proposed a major step forward for the struggle.

"You know what?" he asked the crowd. "You may have to escalate the struggle a bit." Then he dropped the bombshell: "I tell you what you ought to do and you are together here enough to do it: ... you ought to... have a general work stoppage in the city of Memphis!" This time, historian Taylor Branch wrote, "cheers rose into sustained, foot-stomping bedlam..."

Making that idea a reality proved more difficult. When the day of the stoppage came, a snowstorm kept everyone home, sucking momentum from the movement. King remained committed to trying again.

The rescheduled mass march turned into a riot – when a group of young people broke some storefront win-



"If we are going to get equality, if we are going to get adequate wages, we are going to have to struggle for it. Now you know what? You may have to escalate the struggle a bit. If they keep refusing, and they will not recognise the union... I tell you what you ought to do, and you are together here enough to do it: in a few days you ought to get together and just have a *general work stoppage* in the city of Memphis."

– Martin Luther King Jr.,
1968 Memphis sanitation strike,
a fortnight before
he was assassinated

Graphic from Free Our Unions, who for Black History Month 2021 republished an [article](#) on the Memphis strike by Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack. As Wrack notes: "It is ironic that the type of solidarity action King called for in Memphis in 1968 would be unlawful in Britain today."

dows, the police used it as a pretext to attack the march with tear gas. One 16-year-old was shot and killed at point-blank range by a police officer.

President Lyndon Johnson blamed the protesters for the "violence", and the national media tried to scapegoat King. King, his staff and the strikers eventually regrouped, and planned to try again in a few weeks.

But on 4 April as he leaned over the railing outside his second-floor motel room, joking with his companions, an assassin's bullet ripped through King's jaw and spine, killing him instantly.

Black people everywhere took to the streets in huge numbers, in some places looting and setting fires. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leader Julian Bond said: "Nonviolence was murdered in Memphis last night".

In four days, 125 American cities, including Memphis, saw uprisings. The president called out 73,000 Army and National Guardsmen, with 50,000 standing by – the largest domestic military deployment since the Civil War.

The mayor of Memphis had stood firm against unionisation, but after King's death, he began to get pressure from the business community. Tourism collapsed, and profits were suffering.

By April 16, the union had a deal – recognition and collective bargaining, automatic dues deduction, promotions on the basis of seniority, and a raise of 10 cents per hour.

We should never forget that King died in a struggle for public-sector unionisation – a pillar of economic stability and mobility for Black people in the US and today the strongest section of the union movement.

King saw this job action in Memphis as central to the fight for human rights. Of all the places we struggle today to make Black lives matter, the workplace is central. □

• Taken from an [article](#) in *Socialist Worker* (US), 2018. Brian Jones is a US socialist educator and activist

John McDonnell looks

John McDonnell, Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington and former Shadow Chancellor, spoke to Sacha Ismail

Part two: full interview at bit.ly/j-mcd-i

Looking back at your time in the leadership, what do you think you collectively or individually did well; what do you think you got wrong or should have done differently?

My role as shadow chancellor was to change completely the economic analysis of the Labour Party. What I inherited was a party completely permeated by neo-liberalism and supporting austerity. Not long before Jeremy got elected we had the Parliamentary Labour Party abstaining on the welfare bill and using the rhetoric about strivers and skivers, effectively endorsing attacks on some of the poorest people in society. We transformed the economic debate in Labour. Even now under Starmer, at the conference, they didn't really try to challenge that. Even some of the policies announced by Rachel Reeves reflected this, for instance the public investment to tackle climate change.

In terms of our failures... You do have to put it in the remarkable context. No one expected what happened. In normal circumstances you'd have a long time building up a movement, taking control of the party democratically, training activists to organise and take up positions, developing policy... Of course we'd done bits of that, that was a lot of what I was trying to do as a backbencher, but it all happened so suddenly. Jeremy won suddenly, we

had the overwhelming majority of the parliamentary party against us, and we didn't have a well-organised activist base.

We managed to increase the membership very rapidly, but we didn't put sufficient effort or energy, or sufficient thought really, into training and educating an activist base to become a real democratic socialist movement, in the party and in the wider community. We were under attack constantly, and a lot of our energy was put into survival.

You can't bring about or sustain a socialist government unless you have that kind of activist movement.

In regards to training a movement, what's your analysis of what happened in Momentum? There it wasn't just a failure, or a lack of effort, but a big effort which deliberately took things in the wrong direction.

It became bureaucratised. When we first envisioned Momentum, we wanted as horizontal a movement as possible, one which nourished debate among members about the nature of society and about the policies we need and how to campaign for them. That obviously requires proper mechanisms for people to be democratically involved. Instead you got a new mini-bureaucracy. Then as a result you then had the new initiative which won the last Momentum elections [the Forward Momentum slate].

There is always that danger – you can read Trotsky on bureaucracy, or you can read Max Weber. I've been in so many organisations on the left where you start off with good intentions but a

layer of people take control. You need to intervene as early as possible to try to prevent that kind of domination.

The last period of your time in the leadership was dominated by Brexit. What do you think looking back on it, and what should the left say now?

It really was a nightmare situation. The vast bulk of our membership was clearly anti-Brexit. And the bulk of our support was too, in fact. Many of our constituencies, including my own, were pro-Brexit. The only way we could have overcome that, I think, was greater clarity. You obviously had those on the left, and on the right actually, who argued that we should have come out for Brexit. Well, you were never going to get a stronger pro-Brexit position than coming from Farage and Johnson. That was not a viable left-wing position.

The problem was that the social issues we tried to raise, workers' rights, public services, got subordinated by the issue of Brexit. What we should have done, I think, is put forward an analysis which articulated the social issues more strongly while also criticising Brexit more sharply. As it was there was a failure to communicate a clear message or develop a clear narrative. Hence our loss and the scale of the Tory majority.

We should be straightforward with people. What I say to my constituents is I opposed Brexit; many of you voted for it, which I think was a mistake, but that decision took place; now we have to look at the reality of the deal the Tories have produced and all its consequences. We're seeing those

consequences starkly. We've got the undermining of the Good Friday Agreement, and now the failure of supply chains to even put food on the shelves, and these issues are connected to the Tories' deal and the whole nature of Brexit. We do need discussion about our relationship with Europe and the rest of the world. We can start with opposing what the Tories are doing with trade deals, undermining workers' rights and environmental protections, and of course their attacks on migrants.

You've talked a lot about being a socialist. What does socialism mean to you, and how do you see your role as a politician fitting into that?

Neil Kinnock, believe it or not, in the late 80s, asked Professor Bernard Crick to do an explanation of socialism. Crick, who I did my masters with by the way, produced a pamphlet which said socialism means the achievement of equality through democracy. I would say socialism is not just a state you arrive at, it's an ongoing series of relationships, and the society we want will always continue to evolve. The key elements shaping that evolution must be a commitment to equality and a commitment to democracy. If we consistently pursue those commitments we can have a society where we eliminate poverty, where everyone can have a decent life, and the economy is based not on profit but planning for need. On that basis we can create the rich and bounteous life I think we all aspire to.

Do you envision there being a rupture where the power of the capitalist class is overthrown and the working class takes power? In other words a point after which evolution continues, but faster and on a new basis?

I think you'll get different kinds of changes and surges at different times. I think you can get a series of different breaks within and from capitalism. Capitalism is crisis-ridden, and crises can create opportunities for rapid change, when paradigms can be set. There will also be periods when under pressure from the working class the system drives to adapt by making concessions, historically the welfare state and so on. There'll be periods in which you get an evolution of capitalism as a result of class struggle, and others in which crises speed things up and open opportunities for more radical change. The last 75 years in this country illustrate that.

Both depend on workers' organisations and the left seizing opportunities. Otherwise crises can lead to reactionary "solutions" and to regression, as in some ways we're seeing at the moment.



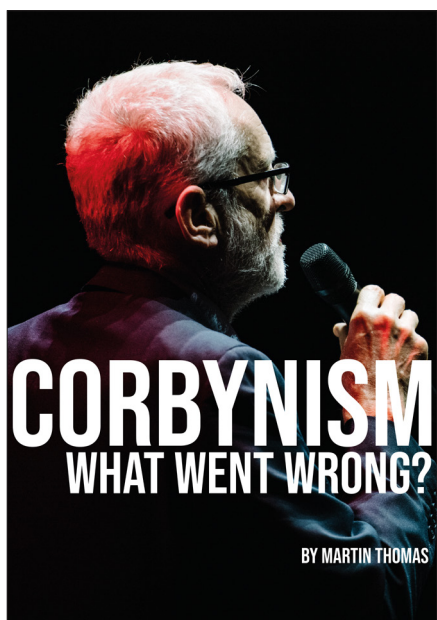
back at the Corbyn era

We think much of the left doesn't understand seriously the nature of antisemitism and why it must be fought. Much of it is obsessively anti-all-things-Israeli and thus not interested in solidarity with democratic and socialist forces resisting the right within Israel. For instance that was absent from the Palestine solidarity motion passed at Labour conference. What do you think?

I have done everything I can to support people in Israel courageously and heroically standing up for basic human rights, and standing in solidarity with the Palestinians. I have nothing but admiration for them – for instance the young people who have refused to serve in the army and been jailed. We have to support them. More broadly there have been a number of initiatives for peace and democracy that I've met with and supported.

On the issue of antisemitism, I've said it time and time again: one antisemite in the Labour Party is one too many. Jeremy has said that too. You have to recognise the horrendous impact of antisemitism on individual Jewish people and on the Jewish community overall. I've tried to take a really strong stance on this and actually faced some criticism on the left for that.

In terms of the disciplinary side, when we were in the leadership, we were undermined by the bureaucracy. I remember meeting after meeting where we were demanding to know why a string of things we'd agreed had not been done. Some things we thought had been done and then found out later they hadn't. It was extremely frustrating.



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

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I always pushed for extremely firm action against antisemites and antisemitic behaviour.

With the purges now, much of which is totally unconnected to that need for firm action, I do find it ironic and disturbing the large number of Jewish members who have been expelled.

On the educational side, I tried to draw parallels from the Irish issue in the past. You get people on the left using antisemitic language and concepts and not even thinking about it. In the 70s and 80s I was involved in campaigns against the way Irish people were treated. You had anti-Irish jokes and many people said, it's not serious. We published works explaining the thousand years history of trying to dehumanise the Irish. To subjugate people, you dehumanise them so you can treat them differently from others. That's what happens with Jewish people and that is why I've tried to make that comparison.

You've been vocal about workers in China and Hong Kong, and attacking Stalinist politics. It seems to us there's been a revival of Stalinist ideas, coming in part out of the Labour left. What's your analysis of that? How do we fight it?

I've spoken out on China for general socialist reasons, but also because of my trade union connections. There's a couple of union comrades in Hong Kong I've campaigned with over the years, for instance in disputes in BA [British Airways], who are now in prison – why? For standing up for basic trade union rights. It behoves all of us to stand in solidarity with them. We should stand up against all regimes which attack workers' rights, no matter what political language they use and what historical background they have.

There's always been this political trend in our movement. You have to argue against it, in part by looking at history, by helping people understand how there have been revolutions which became bureaucratised and actually turned their forces against the working class. What enabled that to happen? The breakdown of democracy within movements and within society, the dictatorial rule of an elite group.

We've had an expansion of the left and the Labour membership and maybe those ideas have expanded too. I'm not sure if it's actually got that much stronger. In any case it takes us back to the need for political education. If those deviations are there, and if there are new people attracted to them, that signals a weakness of political education and discussion.

I've been working on a new political



education initiative. Touring the country I've been struck by how often I've made a reference to something and people don't know what I'm talking about. As a result I've started a series of [podcasts](#) about the history of class struggle, starting in the medieval era. We did the Peasants' Revolt, the Civil War, the Chartists; there'll be more coming on the rise of the Labour Party, women's struggle for democratic rights, the Attlee government... I've also got a podcast series planned on key thinkers within the socialist tradition.

I'm trying to get out there, in an accessible form, material that encourages discussion of our movement's history. That seems to me a good way of taking up the issues you raise about Stalinism. If people have a better understanding of this problem in history they are also more likely to comprehend and tackle the question we discussed earlier about the bureaucratisation of movements and institutions today. They are more likely to create and sustain effective democracy in the movement.

One thing you raised after the 2008 crash, but not as shadow chancellor, was [public ownership of the banks](#) – not just separate public investment banks, but taking the big banks into public ownership and democratic control. The kind of policy the Fire Brigades Union has promoted. This seems to us more urgent than ever. What's your thinking?

I was involved in some of the early drafts of the FBU's [pamphlet](#). In 2008 I raised the [demand](#) to nationalise the banks in order to stabilise the economy. That's actually what happened. The issue was Brown nationalised but didn't take any control whatsoever.

As shadow chancellor I conceived it in stages – first setting up a strategic investment board through the Treasury and the Bank of England to direct the economy more effectively. We looked

at how we could lay down different rules and conditions on the operation of the financial sector, including the banks. Particularly if those conditions weren't met, we still had the option of bringing at least some of them into public ownership. But our more immediate focus, preparing for a first term, was setting up a national investment bank with regional arms. Wider public ownership was something for the future.

You'd have to find ways to convince people it's necessary. For instance, there is real resistance in the financial sector to serious action to tackle climate change. The urgency of climate change means that if you have a financial system that isn't willing to act, then a democratic government has to force them, either through regulation or ownership. If regulation doesn't work, then we have to use ownership. That's always got to be part of the toolkit for a left-wing government. □

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The coral atoll



Debate

By Stuart Jordan

"At every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign power like someone standing outside of nature – but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature and exist within its midst, and that all the mastery of nature consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly." Engels, Transition from Ape to Man

I think Matt Cooper, in his article on theories of "metabolic rift" (*Solidarity* 607: bit.ly/meta-r), takes a too narrow definition of "metabolism" as a rather dull process of material exchange that occurs within a cell. From my reading, as a non-specialist, Marx was using the term in a broader sense as the material and ultimately purposeless means by which complex order emerges from disordered matter. A "metabolic process", in this sense, describes not simply the movement of matter or "Stoff"; it is the movement and transformation of matter in a way that creates complex order and allows complexity to accumulate through time.

Organised complexity requires some explanation. We live in a universe that follows the second law of thermodynamics: entropy (disorder) increases with time. Yet the surface of the Earth is teeming with ordered complexity. Physicist Erwin Schrödinger explains "How does the living organism avoid decay? The obvious answer is: By eating, drinking, breathing and (in the case of plants) assimilating. The technical term is metabolism. The Greek word



means change or exchange. Exchange of what? Originally the underlying idea is, no doubt, exchange of material. (E.g. the German for metabolism is Stoffwechsel.)

"That the exchange of material should be the essential thing is absurd. Any atom of nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur, etc., is as good as any other of its kind; what could be gained by exchanging them?... What then is that precious something contained in our food which keeps us from death? That is easily answered. Every process, event, happening – call it what you will; in a word, everything that is going on in Nature means an increase of the entropy of the part of the world where it is going on.

"Thus a living organism continually increases its entropy – or, as you may say, produces positive entropy – and thus tends to approach the dangerous state of maximum entropy, which is death. It can only keep aloof from it,

i.e. alive, by continually drawing from its environment [free energy]. Or, to put it less paradoxically, the essential thing in metabolism is that the organism succeeds in freeing itself from all the entropy it cannot help producing while alive."

Carbon

All life on Earth is dependent on the carbon atom. The Earth's core is mostly composed of silicon but the crust is the domain of carbon. The carbon atom is capable of joining and combining with itself and many other elements to create all the complexity of pulsating life. Metabolism describes the basic biological process that allows the complexity of Carboniferous life to emerge in a universe of ever-increasing disorder.

There are some forms of complex matter that have no metabolism. Viruses, for instance, have no metabolism. They get their energy from directly from their environment. Viruses are basically large crystals but self-replicating crystals. Scientists are still debating the origins of life but it is known that both clay (silicon) and carbon-based molecules can achieve non-metabolic, self-replicating complexity. This in turn allowed the conditions for metabolic life to evolve in the form of the first simple prokaryotic cells.

Once there is a means to generate ordered complexity against the slow grind of entropy, ever greater complexity becomes possible: self-replicating crystals, prokaryotic cells, eukaryotic cells, multicellular plants, fungi and animals all evolving in a proliferation of

organised complexity. We see this complexity accumulate in a 4.5 billion year history that has involved periodic reversals in the form of mass extinctions. The geologic record tells us that the tree of life grows and then collapses in abrupt mass extinctions. For example, the Permian-Triassic extinction 250 million years ago came close to wiping out all multicellular life. Volcanic eruptions, meteors, course of the Earth's journey through the cosmos, the evolution of life itself, all destabilise the climate and reduce organised complexity to disorder. Then the metabolic process of accumulating complexity begins afresh from whatever remains.

Since the last mass extinction 66 million years ago, this "metabolic process" of ever-growing complexity has resulted in a form of life – us – capable of discovering and discussing these secrets of the deep past. Humans take this complexity generation beyond carbon to fashion complexity from all the elements we find on Earth. Our social relations, our art forms, our labour and all that entails in terms of our deep exploration of the nature may be considered further examples of organised complexity. The process of complexity accumulation does not stop at material forms but extends into the conscious life of human minds and our civilisation of nearly 8 billion individuals.

Human civilisation has been able to grow in complexity because we have enjoyed a relatively stable climate and a fixed coastline. The "natural" changes in the Earth's climate and by extension sea level are rapid and extreme. 22,000



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and the iPhone

years ago we were in the middle of an ice age and the sea was 120m below where it stands today. According to what we know about the Earth's journey through the cosmos, the Earth is overdue a new ice age. Some scientists now believe that human activity in the form of deforestation and tillage released a critical amount of atmospheric carbon to delay this ice age. But whatever the cause, without this happy accident none of this would be here.

Unplanned and unequal

Human activity since the dawn of capitalism has been set in motion a wild dynamic of innovation, an explosion of human culture and exploration. But the unplanned and unequal organisation of human work is destroying the ecological basis upon which our whole civilisation depends. Who now can seriously look into the future and see capitalist progress? Serious people now discuss the real possibility of human extinction. The "metabolic process" that has run since the last mass extinction event 66 million years ago now looks likely to unravel into disorder: a "metabolic rift".

It is possible to see this metabolic rift in the capitalist production process. The rule of profit means that all human labour is organised to minimise costs and maximise turnover. Any metabolic process produces waste energy and matter but capitalist production is structured to be especially wasteful. The wastefulness of capitalism can be seen not only to the production of a wide variety of pollutants including GHG emissions, but also built-in obsolescence, the lack of standardisation, a whole "industry" dedicated to creating new desires for commodities, the inefficiencies of global trade, exhaustion of renewable resources (soil depletion, the immiseration and exhaustion of workers etc.), species extinction and biodiversity loss. There are also more perverse market-driven dynamics of human culture that lay waste to our world. For example, competition for rare meat has created an "extinction vortex" where the price tag of soon-to-be extinct species sky-rockets as the rich compete to fill their bellies with the last ever live specimen. It is not difficult to see how the metabolism between humanity and nature, human work, could be organised so that it is less wasteful. Capitalism has the appearance of creating complexity, but take a step back and it is a force that accelerates decomposition and disorder.

Two examples of complexity might serve to illustrate this point. The smart-

phone is one of the most complex objects in the known universe. We can create smartphones by careful manipulation and placement of rare earth metals, plastics etc. But capitalism demands the raw materials for these phones are assembled in sweatshops, and are designed with built-in obsolescence. The rare earth metals are mined by child labour and extraction carried out with a carelessness and at a pace that drives species extinctions and poisons water supplies. The discarded obsolescent phones fill landfill leaching their poisons into the soil and generating cancers for the workers and poor who live near the dumps. Whole industries are geared towards creating desires for new phones to speed up and increase this waste.

“The unplanned and unequal organisation of human work is destroying the ecological basis upon which our whole civilisation depends.”

Compare this to the careful composition and decomposition we observe in the natural world. Charles Darwin marvelled at the astonishing diversity we see on coral reefs. Coral reefs exist in open ocean, the coral atoll grows towards sunlight on the decaying remains of inert submarine volcanoes. Coral reefs are believed to have the highest biodiversity of any ecosystem on the planet. Although they cover just 1% of the ocean floor, coral reefs support 25% of marine life. How is such life sustained in the watery desert of the open ocean? The answer is that each species has evolved to find an ecological niche so that the waste materials of one is utilised by another in complex cascades of recycling. This carefully balanced conservation of energy and complexity gives rise to ever greater diversity and complexity. It is perhaps no surprise then that the most complex and diverse ecosystem on Earth is likely to be the first major ecosystem to disappear from anthropogenic ocean acidification and similar causes. The capitalist mode of production lays waste to complexity. It is an entropy accelerator.

Under capitalism, the innate human capacity for collective work is placed under the direction of capital - our life's work is not our own, it belongs to

capital. The profit motive dictates what we do and how we do it. The capitalist mode of production precludes human planning. It prevents us from directing human work in towards rational human and ecological ends.

Knowledge

Unlike those early farmers who unwittingly stabilised the climate or the hunter-gatherers who drove the extinction of the Earth's megafauna, we now understand the processes that would allow complexity to thrive or be destroyed. We know in some detail how to accelerate the destabilisation of the biosphere and risk population collapse and war. Conversely, we know how to halt climate change, slow species extinction and create the conditions necessary for the "metabolic process" of complexity accumulation to continue. We know in some detail the human work that needs to be completed and those areas of work that need to be halted and phased out. We know this work has to start quickly and the longer we delay the more difficult it will become and the less resources there will be to address the escalating problems we face. We know that the technology exists to complete this work. What we lack is a form of social organisation capable of organising and directing this work.

Our scientific understanding suggests that essential human work should be organised according to a plan to restabilise the climate. The plan should

outline what work needs to be done, who is needed to do that work and how they are trained up and have the equipment they need to complete their tasks. A non-exhaustive list of the tasks include the building of sea defences, food production and distribution, fresh-water collection and distribution (flood defence), health and social care, education, the organised resettlement of climate refugees and planning to move our cities to respond to rising sea level, drawdown of atmospheric carbon, the transition to carbon-free energy sources, the creation of a zero-carbon public transport network, the building of climate resilient housing and infrastructure, the expansion of recycling processes, the redesign of current production processes to minimise waste, reforestation.

The capitalist mode of production has unleashed the potential of humanity's inquisitiveness and sociability whilst simultaneously precluding our capacity to plan. To allow the "metabolic process" of human civilisation to continue, to progress to ever greater heights of complexity requires that we realise the full potential of our innate capacity to plan. Rational democratic planning must replace the profit motive as the organising force of human work. It is only in this way that human society can behave like a coral atoll rather than an iPhone. □

• Version with footnotes: bit.ly/coral-ip



This Labour decision was not so left-wing

By Martin Thomas

The Israel-Palestine [composite](#) passed at Labour Party conference is widely considered a victory for the left, like other policy votes there. In fact it is not.

It includes no solidarity with democratic and socialist forces on the ground, such as the Jewish-Arab movement Standing Together in Israel and trade-union and other groups.

Instead it looks exclusively to big-power "sanctions" "against actions by the Israeli government that are illegal according to international law".

It is not for us to object to diplomatic leverage such as that from the USA which pushed Israel to withdraw from Sinai in 1957 and again in 1979-82, or to be unhappy if Joe Biden applies leverage against the Israel's [currently-mooted plans](#) for fresh settlements in the West Bank which would cut off the Palestinian village of Beit Safafa and block Palestinian traffic between north-

ern and southern parts of the West Bank.

But in the end a democratic settlement depends on forces on the ground. A policy relying entirely on the virtuous big powers applying pressure is naive. Also, Britain, unlike the USA, is in no position to exercise much leverage.

The resolution can be taken as tacitly accepting that the aim of the leverage is a two-states settlement, as is Labour Party policy. But it doesn't say so. It has blurred wording about "return of Palestinian people [amended from 'the Palestinian people'] to their homes". Blurred, so it means little. If it meant anything it would mean expulsion of Jews from houses built on the sites of villages and districts from which Palestinians fled in 1948, and the cramming of ten times as many Palestinian people, descendants from 1948, into reconstructions of the poor and cramped housing of peasants of 70-odd years ago. Not progress.

Many of the delegates who voted for

it will also have voted for a (failed) reference back on the National Policy Forum report which declared that "insisting [on] a two-state solution... demonstrates... arrogance".

Against that, the reference-back talked about self-determination in general, as if that general term somehow supersedes "two states", in other words self-determination for both nations, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab. Yet upholding self-determination for both is a precondition for, rather a contradiction of, a possible future free decision by the two nations to merge, or a free socialist federation in the wider region.

The reference-back alludes to "other political options.. to realise... aspirations". Yes: Israeli chauvinists realise their aspirations by suppressing Palestinian self-determination. Hamas seeks to realise its aspirations by overrunning Israel with an Islamic state in all the pre-1948 British Mandate territory. But socialists should stand against both.

As for "Christian Arabs and atheists"

- does the writer think no-one can be Palestinian unless they are Muslim? Are they unaware that atheism is historically common among ardently nationalist Israeli Jews?

The recital of Israel's misdeeds at the start of the motion is off-kilter.

No clear statement that the fundamental misdeed is the occupation of the West Bank and the denial of Palestinian self-determination. Instead, a run-through of the recent grievances of Hamas: the Israeli military action at the Al-Aqsa mosque, the assault on Gaza (without mention of the Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians which triggered it), and the "forced displacements from Sheikh Jarrah" (it may not "stick", but the [latest](#) Israeli Supreme Court decision offers the Palestinian residents of the disputed houses long-term protection from displacement in return for making a token payment).

Not all anti-capitalist denunciation is left-wing. Nor is all anti-Israel denunciation. □



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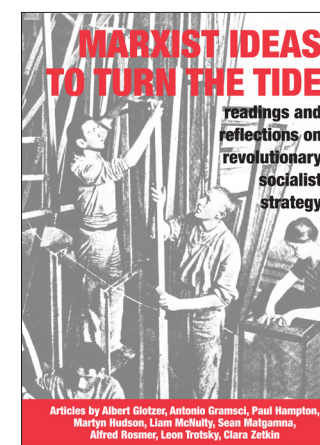
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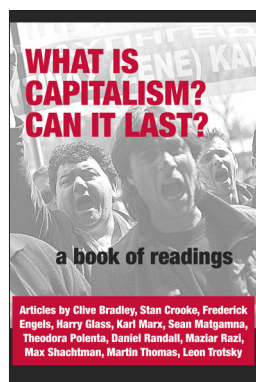
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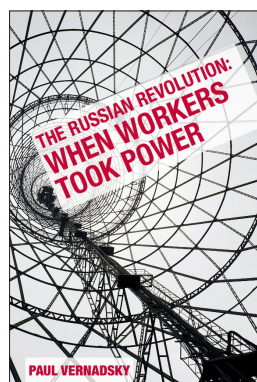
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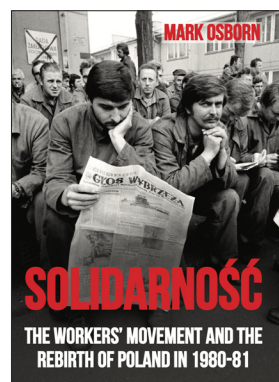
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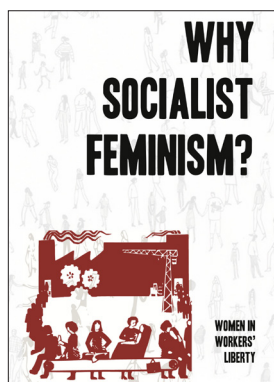
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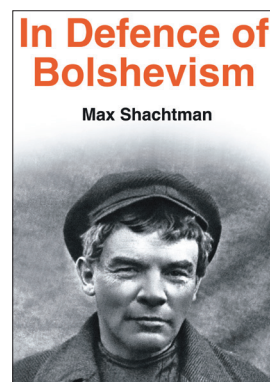
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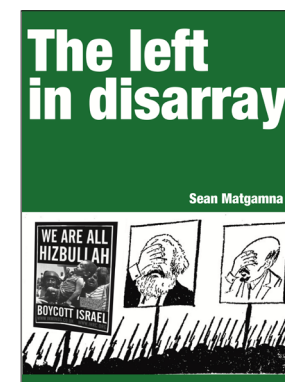
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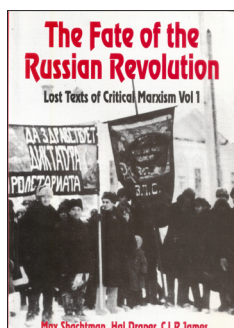
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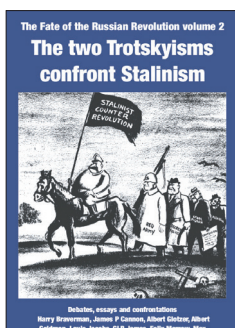
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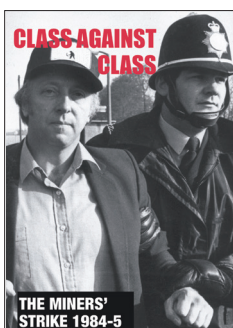
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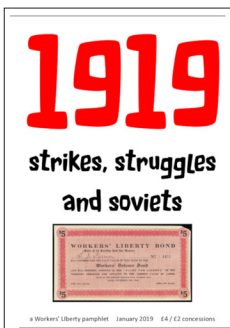
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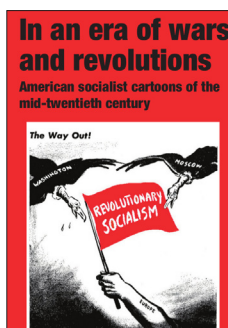
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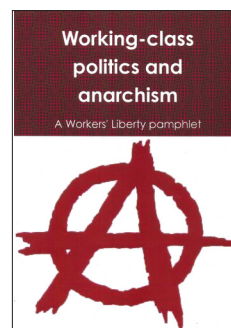
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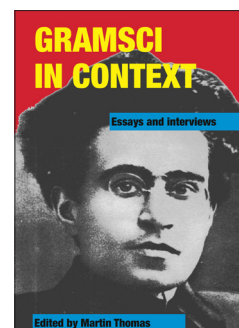
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Unison: fight for democracy to fight for pay!

By Katy Dollar

The victory of the left in the national executive council (NEC) elections of the public services union Unison in June was a major opportunity to transform the country's largest union. Unison has been politically and industrially timid with little fight against privatisation, losses of jobs and services or real-term pay cuts.

Democratising the union is essential so members can debate and decide a new strategy for the union. The union's largest service groups, Health and Local Government, have both rejected pay offers but there has been no forum to discuss how to win ballots under constraints of the anti-union laws and very little resources have been put into either pay campaign. Unison's unelected officials will not allow greater member democracy without a fight.

This month every Unison Branch Secretary received an email signed "Unison" saying the union will not carry out the policy voted at the NEC and claiming the policy contravened Unison rules.

"At today's NEC meeting (Wednesday 6 October), resolutions were tabled relating to the powers of the Vice Presidents and the NEC.

"Legal advice was given to the NEC, which stated that four out of the six resolutions contravened existing UNISON rules and were therefore rule amendments and could not be debated or voted on at any NEC meeting.

"Rule amendments can only be agreed by Unison's National Delegate Conference, as provided for in Rule N of Unison's rulebook.

"The legal advice states that the 'resolutions' are ultra vires (i.e. beyond their powers). The NEC considered them and voted on each in turn. All six were passed by simple majority and a

roll call was taken for five out of the six votes. As per the legal advice concerning the four resolutions containing rule breaches, staff cannot be instructed to comply with the four unlawful resolutions that were passed today by the NEC."

The motions were not shared with Branch Secretaries; but they do not contravene Unison rules and the NEC is seeking its own legal advice from John Hendy QC.

One motion calls for the NEC to meet monthly. The NEC are right to meet more regularly to exercise lay control over the union. This is clearly within the rules of the union, which state: "The National Executive Council shall meet at least four times in every calendar year".

The NEC resolved to establish a sub-committee of the NEC made of the President and Vice Presidents. This would formalise the role of the Presidential team and prevent the General Secretary from blocking NEC decisions as the General Secretary has the right act "on behalf" of the NEC between meetings. This is also within union rules "The National Executive Council shall have the right to appoint such Committees from amongst its membership as it shall see fit, and shall have the power to delegate to such Committees any of its functions as it considers appropriate."

The NEC voted to give the Presidential team right to get legal advice from union's lawyers or outside counsel. The primary mode of operation of the bureaucracy is to claim legal jeopardy in the face of any challenge or call for action, so ability to access legal advice will be sadly necessary for the new NEC.

The NEC voted to explicitly delegate all its disciplinary powers to the Development and Organising (D&O) Committee and for all suspensions to be reported to the NEC and reviewed regularly. The Unison bureaucracy have



a history of action against the left. They have suspended the current Unison President, Paul Holmes, from office without investigation, holding him in limbo.

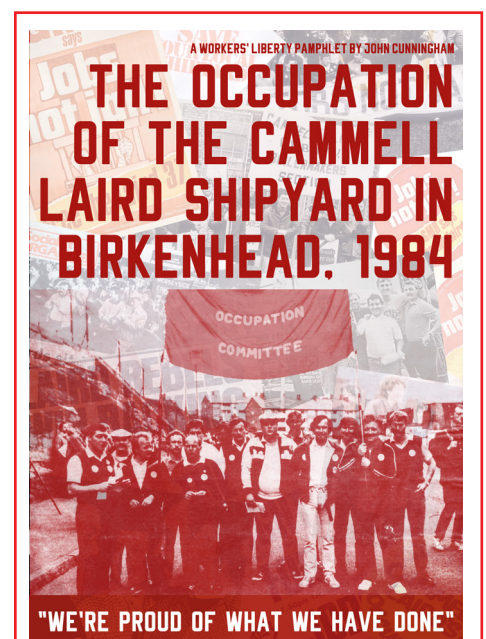
The most controversial motion was that all office holders dismissed by their employer shall continue to be a member of the union from the date of dismissal and whilst such a member shall be entitled to hold office in the union, at discretion of the union's executive. We know employers victimise effective reps, Unison should be vigorous in defence of reps being victimised and if they are dismissed should support them keeping full membership as campaigns are mounted for reinstatement. This motion was not a rule change, as NEC under rule have the right to determine who may be offered full membership outside of rulebook provisions.

This is a battle about who runs the union and in whose interests: highly paid officials acting to keep the union to timid partnership trade unionism, or public service workers and the rank and file activists they elect.

So far the officials have fought back hard. The new left leadership needs a strategy to weather the attacks and ensure their decisions are enacted. That means taking the argument into the membership and linking it with the current pay disputes.

It means striving to establish forums for open, democratic decision mak-

ing. We have no rank and file organisation with structures, democracy and accountability to members. Mobilising members to fight for lay democracy means the NEC has to fight on the issues that affect members, work for union democracy in relation to members controlling our own disputes to win pay rises, and democratic conferences which can develop strategy to beat back privatisation. The left must show that democratic changes can transform Unison to a union fights militantly for its members' interests. That defends every job and every condition. That does not sell its members short or sign deals with management that accept attacks on our pensions or increase in our workloads. □



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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Brighton bin workers win a deal

Brighton council refuse workers voted on [18 October](#) to accept a deal in their pay and conditions dispute. A GMB organiser spoke to us on 14 October about the issues.

This is about a very simple but actually very serious matter. It's about respect. The local management couldn't be bothered to follow the Council's policies and procedures, which are all written down, agreed by management and the GMB.

These rules set down what happens in particular circum-



stances, capability [i.e. whether and how an employee is able to do their job], disciplinary issues and so on. The local management thought they knew much better and applied their own "rules", which removed

people from rounds with no reason whatsoever or for very arbitrary reasons.

On Friday [8 Oct] we met with the council leader [a Green] and some councillors, and I thought at the end of a

long meeting there was an accord. They were going to put together an offer which was a real starting point for constructive negotiations. Unfortunately we went in on Monday [11 Oct] to hear those details, and it had been completely taken off the table.

A delegation went to the council policy and resources meeting yesterday [13 Oct], and again we thought we'd hear steps to get negotiations back on. [Tory] Councillor [Joe] Miller decided to use it as a platform for hate, likening our members – who of course are

council employees – to terrorists, not once but three or four times. He accused us of being mafia-like in the way we supposedly control the city.

The pay offer for local government, 1.75%, is ridiculous – particularly when you've got rising costs of living and National Insurance is going up. Now's a good time for workers to fight. Not just refuse workers, but workers anywhere in the public services or the private sector, now's the time to band together. □

• More: bit.ly/bri-bins

“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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Blockade week and the future



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

I speak to one of the Extinction Rebellion (XR) coordinators over the weekend to ask about potential anti-incinerator action at my workplace.

XR: "We've not planned anything in this city. XR Zero Waste are targeting Edmonton and other places in the south – I've not heard about anything here. To be honest our XR group is barely holding it together, and they're quite a tame lot."

Me: (laughing) "Well, my company are shitting themselves anyway."

We talk about the attitudes at the plant, and the confusion with the Insulate Britain action. XR activist tells me about the conflict over Insulate Britain, who are an XR splinter group. He's furious with them for doing such a dangerous, confusing direct action while the Police and Crime Bill is still being debated.

The following Monday the blockade is still discussed daily, with more posturing: "I'll run them over, tree-hugging idiots!" My main worry is that if activists do show up, one of the plant workers will attack them. Even the overworked and underpaid industrial cleaners are taking the idea of protest very personally.

Management are fixated on the school climate strike gathering. I overhear a comment:

D "These are the kids that wear de-

signer clothes, and have their parents drive them everywhere in SUVs? And get allergies because they're so coddled and sensitive? They care about the climate?"

My silence at the "jokes" has got some people's backs up; they realise I'm sympathetic. Two of the fitters stop talking to me, and others bring up the action then give me filthy looks as if expecting me to justify myself. I ignore this, but I try to think of ways we could get activists and workers talking:

Me: "If activists do show up, why not invite small groups in to talk to us? We think they don't know about district heating and what goes on here – so why not show them? Give them a plant tour?"

G: "We can't do that, because if we invited one or two people in, that gives the whole group permission to come on site – they can't be done for trespassing after that."

Me: "What about talking to them at the gates?"

G: "Company policy is not to engage in discussion of any kind. We can take their leaflets and recycle them, but no one is allowed to talk to them or distribute their literature."

I hand out radios to the security guards who have been hired for the week – young black men who look extremely bored. I tell them their instructions: if anyone enters the gates, to radio the control room, who will call the police; the guards themselves are a just a deterrent.

Me and other non-operators are instructed to work from home for two



days, but I do a quick check of the gates during my lunch break just in case – no XR blockade shows up, and the school strikers have their rally in town as planned. I'm impressed that just the threat of blockades in other cities has provoked a week's worth of anxiety for company management, and thousands of pounds of expense for security.

An activist from PCS Green New Deal contacts me and we have a serious chat about jobs and conditions in the waste sector, and the politics in my city. They tell me the action against Edmonton incinerator drew in activists from all over the community and led to a street closure.

"Let's keep talking," she assures me "we need to address the jobs issue and we need to keep talking to workers if we're going to get anywhere."

XR Zero Waste are protesting the construction of new energy from waste plants across the country; capacity is set to double. The full report is worth a read: bit.ly/xr-efw □

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

Eisenstein's unmade films about Haiti



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

A first for Kino Eye – films you can't see because they were never made! The Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein had always been fascinated with the slaves' revolt on Haiti. It was one of his lifetime ambitions to make a film about this subject but, unfortunately, none ever materialised.

The nearest he came was on an extended trip to the USA and Mexico in 1930. Arriving in Hollywood in May he read *Black Majesty: The life of Christophe, King of Haiti*, written by John W. Vandercook. Eisenstein wanted the black singer and actor Paul Robeson to play the leading role. However, Paramount Studios, who had the rights on any Eisenstein film proposals, rejected *Black Majesty* outright.



On returning to Moscow, Eisenstein discovered that Anatoli Vinogradov had written a novel about Toussaint L'Ouverture, *The Black Consul*, and another film adaptation was proposed. Eisenstein met Robeson in 1934 and discussed the project, for which Robeson was enthusiastic.

It was not to be. The cultural climate

in the Soviet Union was restricted by so-called "socialist realism" and Eisenstein can claim the distinction of having a film banned by Hollywood and one by Stalin. More on films about the Haiti revolt in next week's Kino Eye. □

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Green reps for PCS?



John Moloney

One of my briefs as Assistant General Secretary is to oversee the union's work on climate change. With the COP26 conference coming up, we're mobilising members to attend demonstrations and take part in actions around the country.

We also want to use COP as impetus to build up a network of "green reps" throughout the union, with at least one in every branch. Longer term, we want to push for employers to recognise these reps.

Climate change can't be treated as an issue "out there", it's something we have to organise around as an industrial issue in our own workplaces. I want to see green reps developing workers' plans for the decarbonisation of the civil service as a sector. This has to involve things like retrofitting buildings to minimise emissions, looking at where power is sourced from, and so on. The civil service also has a large fleet of vehicles, which should all be electric. If the civil service, which is a significant procurer of energy, were to switch to only using renewable energy, that could have an affect on the energy mix nationally.

Currently, civil service bosses have no plan whatsoever in terms of climate change. We've raised these issues in the past but have been stonewalled. So the pressure will need to come from below, in the form of workers' plans as well as pressure at the departmental and national level.

Another of my major briefs is overseeing the union's organising of outsourced workers. This is something I have made a major focus of my time in office, and I think we've made progress. As well as an overall fight for insourcing, I'm coordinating efforts to pressure the Scottish and Welsh governments particularly, where the administrations at least claim to be pro-trade-union, to write in clauses

into all their contracts banning "fire and rehire" practices and mandating the payment of full occupational sick pay for all outsourced workers.

A cluster of outsourced contracts in the civil service is up for renewal soon, and I'm involved in developing a claim, via the union's legal department, that to re-tender them rather than bringing them in house would represent a form of indirect racial discrimination, as it would perpetuate a situation in which a majority BAME and migrant workforce has significantly worse terms and conditions than the majority white directly employed workforce. This is similar to a claim the United Voices of the World union, with whom we've worked closely, is bringing on behalf of some of their members.

I am also supporting our reps and full-time colleagues in Mitie in an effort to get company-wide recognition, so we don't have to attempt to win recognition on a contract-by-contract basis. The overall framework for all of this is our policy that all work should be in house, but it's also important we take on the contractors as well as putting pressure on the civil service centrally.

In the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), strikes planned by driving examiners against the imposition of additional tests has been suspended. A members' meeting was held on Thursday 14 October, with 450 attending via Zoom. The offer from the employer at that time was to postpone the planned imposition of an eight-test workday until January. That was very firmly rejected by a majority of about 75%. A new offer was made the following day, showing the pressure the department is under, putting off the change for at least a year. We'll hold a ballot of all members on the employer's offer before it is formally accepted, so it's possible strikes could be reinstated. □

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



Rail strikes in Scotland



Off The Rails

From Off the Rails

RMT has called strikes on ScotRail from 1-12 November, and from 31 October-2 November and 11-13 November on the Caledonian Sleeper. Both strikes could potentially impact the COP26 international climate change conference, which is taking place in Glasgow from 31 October-12 November. Workers on ScotRail voted by an 84% majority for the strikes.

Workers at both companies are fighting for a decent pay deal. ScotRail is operated by Dutch firm Abellio, but the Scottish government is due to take over the running of the service by the end of March 2022. Caledonian Sleeper is operated by Serco, but already overseen by the Scottish government. This means the SNP, which claims to be a pro-trade-union, social-democratic party, could directly intervene to meet workers' demands and avert strikes. It has not done so.

An RMT statement said: "Both Scotrail and the Caledonian Sleeper have had adequate time to come up with a fair pay settlement for Scotland's rail workers in advance of COP26. Instead they have kicked the can down the road and left us with no option but to put this action on today.

"We know that these strikes will close rail services in Scotland but the blame for that lies with Abellio, Serco, and the political leadership at Holyrood."

Engineering workers on ScotRail, organised by Unite, will also strike during COP26, on 1-2, 10-11, and 12-13 November. 78% voted to strike on a 68.4%

turnout. 92% voted to take industrial action short of a strike. Somewhat worryingly, an initial strike planned for 18-19 October was called off "in a spirit of goodwill" following negotiations. □

Support striking couriers in Brazil!

Brazilian delivery riders in São Paulo state have been on strike demanding better pay and conditions from the apps they work for. They have made links with couriers' union IWGB here. Watch their message of solidarity: bit.ly/braz-ri ("Good morning, English!")

As the IWGB says: "The striking riders suffer from the same problems that we do in the UK, from unfair account terminations to low delivery fees and unpaid waiting times... Our unity must be as international as the apps and their investors." The IWGB is collecting funds to support the Brazilian comrades: bit.ly/sol-braz. A small donation of pounds goes a long way. □

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Sage care workers to strike 20-21 Oct

Workers at the Sage nursing home in North London, members of United Voices of the World (UVW), struck in January and February over pay, sick pay, leave, union recognition and other issues. They will strike again on 20-21 October, with the main part of the strike on 21 October.

Sage worker Julia Veros Gonzalez told us:

"We're striking again because we

are tired of being ignored by the Sage management and trustees. Rather than doing anything for us, they have actually increased the pressure. The last months have seen a shortage of staff, making us do double the work, risking our health and the lives of the residents.

"We are asking for better pay, better conditions and union recognition – and to be treated with respect, dignity

and equality. We do a very hard and very human job and we want to be valued for it!"

• Join the picket line: 21 October, 8-11am at Sage Nursing Home, 208 Golders Green Road, London NW11 9AL. More: bit.ly/uvw-sg and UVWunion [Twitter](https://twitter.com/UVWunion) and [Facebook](https://facebook.com/UVWunion). Interview with Julia Veros Gonzalez bit.ly/jvg-sg

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New evidence on Catholic Church and child abuse

By Micheál MacEoin

A new report has exposed the scale of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in France.

Written by an independent commission led by a former judge, the report estimated that at least 3,000 priests (around 3% of the country's total) had abused minors, with around 216,000 children thought to have been victimised.

France itself has been reckoning with the issue of abuse in the Catholic Church for over twenty years, since Bishop Pierre Pican of Bayeux was convicted in a civil court of covering up for an abusive.

Since then there has been a slow build-up of pressure as new cases came to light, abuse victims bravely spoke out, and more thorough-going examinations of abuse appeared in other Catholic countries.

Pressure came to a head in 2016 when the victims' association La Parole Libérée accused successive Lyon archbishops of covering up for Father Bernard Preynat, a serial abuser.

Preynat was defrocked and sentenced to five years in prison, forcing the resignation of Cardinal Philippe Barbarin and the appointment of the independent commission in 2018 by a bishops' conference.

The report is moderate in its recommendations, advocating an increased role for lay members of the Church, changes in the responsibilities of priests and bishops, such as a responsibility on priests who learn of abuse through confession to report predators to the police and the separation of religious and administrative roles, as well as reforms to the Church's own legal system.

It shies away, however, from far-reaching reforms demanded by some campaigners such as the ordination of women as priests or the abolition of clerical celibacy.

The 485-page report is sadly not a surprise. It comes after similar studies in Australia, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United States which found similar, or even worse, levels of abuse in the Church.

In Ireland in 2017, it was revealed that 796 babies and young children were "indecently buried in a defunct sewage system" in the Bon Secours



Marieval residential school, Saskatchewan, where hundreds of bodies were found

Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway, between 1925 and 1961.

The home, run by a Catholic religious order of nuns, received unmarried pregnant women to give birth. The women were forcibly separated from their children, and the children raised by nuns until they could be adopted.

In January 2021, a report commissioned by the Northern Ireland Assembly found that 10,500 women went through mother-and-baby homes in the North between 1922 and 1990, with 3,000 were imprisoned and forced to carry out unpaid labour in Magdalene laundries.

Last summer, the Cowessess First Nation, an indigenous nation in Canada, found 751 unmarked graves at the site of a former residential school in Saskatchewan. Weeks before, the remains of 215 children were found at a similar residential school in British Columbia.

The schools were two of more than 130 compulsory schools funded by the Canadian government and run by the Catholic Church as part of moves to forcibly assimilate indigenous youth in the 19th and 20th centuries.

According to former Truth and Reconciliation Commission chair Murray Sinclair, an estimated 6,000 children died while attending the Canadian residential schools, and children were often housed in poorly built, badly heated and unsanitary facilities.

The Church has long been a corrupt, authoritarian and unaccountable institution, operating with a presumption of divine sanction.

It is no wonder that abusive and violent practices and behaviour flourished in such an environment. □

Covid: action needed now for winter



By Martin Thomas

The rising Covid death and hospitalisation counts, only halfway through autumn, make a new case for urgency about isolation pay, improved pay and budgets in the NHS and care, upgrading ventilation, and workers' control of workplace safety.

And for renewing efforts to get jabs to vax-sceptics, and to restore something comparable to the mild Covid curbs, like mask mandates and limits on entry to large indoors public gatherings, in force in other West European countries.

The high case count now partly reflects high testing, but the UK's current death count is two and a half times Germany's, eight times France's, Italy's, or Spain's, 11 times Sweden's.

With wide vaccination the UK death count is one-tenth of what it was in early 2021 when case counts were comparable to now, but it's rising.

Surveys of blood donors suggest 98% of over-16s have Covid-19 antibodies. With the pre-Delta virus, counts would be falling. With Delta, and even more the new [AY.4.2 variant](#), they aren't. And we can't know how inaccurate that 98% figure is for the whole population, as against blood donors.

The Tories scrapped all curbs from 19 July, apparently in the hope that high levels of infection in late summer would generate protection against winter's greater indoors-crowding and the ill-understood seasonality of the virus.

Now they are trying boosters and jabs for 12-15 year olds as a dodge. Those may have some little Covid-curbing effect, but for now at the expense of slowing the spread of jabs to older and frail people at high risk in poorer countries.

The Tories also rely on people continuing voluntary curbs. Figures from the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#) show we still average only about four conversation-type contacts per day (vs 11 pre-Covid, two or three in lockdowns), and fewer than 50% of employed people are in the workplace each work day (vs 35% in early-2020 lockdown). Most people still wear masks. But observance is fading.



The parliamentary [report](#) on the government's record on Covid published 12 October was a missed opportunity to inform us for the next stage.

It seems to have been largely shaped by Jeremy Hunt, Tory health minister 2012-18. Since Hunt was defeated by Johnson for Tory leader, he has been a backbench committee chair looking for another chance for the top job when Johnson's bubble bursts.

Around 12 March 2020 Hunt started criticising the government for not moving faster to lockdown. On 9 March it had announced that it would move to restrictions, but slowly. The report is mostly an exercise in Hunt puffing himself for that foresight. (Johnson u-turned to rapid lockdown on 16 March, and introduced the legislation on 23 March).

With hindsight, we know the scientists advising the government had the facts wrong then. There were already thousands of Covid cases rather than the dozens they counted. The virus had been introduced to Britain in February and early March by [over a thousand](#) different "Patients Zero" travelling from Italy and other countries.

Even in March, an earlier lockdown would have been better. How much better, we don't know. The report gives only casual mention to the lack of isolation pay, the rundown of NHS and local public health and social care resources before 2020, the web of private sub-contractors that made quick NHS responses difficult and has now produced [43,000](#) faulty test results, and the broader social inequalities which made for a high toll. For all of those Hunt himself bears much responsibility. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

Open the door for Afghan refugees!

By Sacha Ismail

Imagine fleeing a blood-soaked, misogynistic, racist dictatorship, being promised a new life in a safe country – and then having those who promised it lock you up, deny you basic rights and refuse to tell you what happens next. That is what is happening to the Afghan refugees “welcomed” by the UK.

The name of the government’s resettlement programme, “Operation Warm Welcome”, is a sick joke.

The Guardian reports that conditions for the refugees are so bad that many have started saying they want to go back.

7,000 Afghan refugees are stuck in hotels, with Home Office officials saying they may be there until the new year. Reports say many are being treated like prisoners, with strict restrictions on their right to go out even after exaggerated quarantine restrictions expired. Some are not even allowed to open windows.

So much for Boris Johnson’s rhetoric about helping Afghans “rebuild their lives, find work, pursue education and integrate



into their local communities”.

The government also seems to be determined not to tell refugees what is happening, further damaging people’s already battered mental health.

They also appear reluctant to provide healthcare. Health human rights charity Medact called the situation “medically dangerous”.

Danny Thorpe, council leader in Greenwich (South East London), where 700 refugees arrived in August, summed up the government’s indifference as “one of the most shocking failures of government that I have ever encountered”.

“There was a huge mismatch between the rhetoric of senior government politicians and their actions to support those people.”

When Greenwich council told the government they were about to run out of baby milk, they were told some would be delivered “in a few days”.

Shocking as this is, it makes sense from a government that is so determined to persecute refugees more widely.

As Refugee Action put it: “What of the vast majority of Afghans who will not be lucky enough to be resettled? How will we treat the 20,001st Afghan refugee? Any Afghan who arrives in the UK today to claim asylum will be faced with a system riddled with injustice that all too often fails those it is meant to protect...”

“Worse still, this Government is seeking to double down on this injustice with their anti-refugee Bill...”

Pushing for a real welcome for Afghan refugees must be part of a fight to block the Nationality and Borders Bill and reverse decades of anti-refugee and anti-migrant laws. □