

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

COURIERS UNIVERSITIES LOCAL GOV'T



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Workers' battles can beat bosses

6699 Editorial

A number of countries, including the US and France, are seeing waves or flurries of strikes as workers try to gain or make up ground as economies revive after lockdowns.

Here, pay in the private sector is rising but inflation is rising faster, with the left-Blairite Resolution Foundation noting that "real wages are already falling and are likely to continue to do so for the next six months". In the public sector the government is seeking to impose even more real-terms cuts after more than a decade of huge cumulative losses.

There is a wave of attacks on pay, terms and conditions as bosses try to readjust after the lockdowns, with more than a million workers subjected to "fire and rehire" tactics.

Yet in many ways the conditions to fight are good. Many workers have had their sense of the importance of the work they do, and the size of the effort they put in, heightened during the depths of the Covid emergency. The government is in disarray and its popularity declining. There is a shortage of labour in many sectors. Workers in some areas, notably trucking, have won major pay increases through the combination of market forces and some very limited union activity. A surge of campaigning and strikes can win much more.

Through a determined all-out indefinite strike, Clarks workers in Somerset

defeated an attempt by one of China's most powerful capitalists to slash their pay by thousands of pounds a year and derecognise their union. These workers have no tradition of strikes and their union is the very right-wing Community – and yet they won.

Strikes are the most effective form of protest and direct action to pressure and push back employers and the government; and, perhaps equally important, the channel through which workers can mobilise, self-organise and start to feel themselves a power.

Power

The UK labour movement is a huge potential power, with close to seven million members in trade unions. Seven million is fewer than it used to be, but still a high figure in a broader historical overview.

Our movement suffered defeat in big battles in the 1980s. Its failures to exploit the comparatively favourable environment of the relative-boom years of the last Labour government, or to fight back seriously after the 2008 crash, were perhaps equally important for the difficulties we face now.

We may face a new turning point now, when what we do now will shape things for years to come.

Although the UK saw important workers' struggles during the lockdowns of 2020, usually short and local actions which won better Covid protections, the pandemic has increased the labour movement's difficulties. Many connections have weakened. Some workers have been working largely "from home" for almost two years.

But weakness can quickly change to strength. The 1-3 December strikes in universities has already changed the atmosphere. Socialists and trade union activists should rally round as many strikes and workers' struggles as we can, big and small, and be on the lookout for openings to launch more.

On 6 December Sheffield food couriers, delivering for JustEat, began a strike against a major pay cut by gig economy firm Stuart. Sheffield has become the epicentre of couriers' struggles, through a militant branch of the IWGB union, aided by Workers' Liberty and other socialists. Activists there hope to spread the dispute to other cities.

Recent strikes in London's Royal Parks and at Great Ormond Street Hospital (the latter continuing with security guards this week) have seen outsourced (usually precarious, often migrant) workers win important gains and in some cases challenge outsourcing itself. The Royal Park dispute has shown how small "independent" unions and larger established ones can cooperate fruitfully (in that case, UVW and PCS).

Workers at the Sage care home in north London recently won pay rises of up to 20% and more. The left and labour movement should support the efforts of rank-and-file care and support workers' organisation CaSWO.

Tesco drivers around the country may strike soon. Workers on London Underground and at Transport for London have started a fight-back against cuts designed to redress lockdown losses, with strikes against grade consolidation on Night Tube.

Ballots

400,000 Unison members and 60,000 Unite members in local government are voting on strikes on a 1.75% pay rise (i.e. a new real-terms pay cut after years of previous cuts). The unions are calling for a 10% increase.

In local government the third major union, GMB, is dragging things out and has not moved to a strike ballot over pay. In health, it's the other way round, with GMB's ballot closing on 15 December and Unite and Unison dragging things out.

It will be difficult to meet the turnout thresholds imposed by the Trade Union Act 2016 in the local government ballot. In health, the big unions are not moving even as far as a formal ballot. The best help to success will be strikes in other sectors strong enough to convince sceptical workers that changes can be won.

The Covid years have had big street demonstrations, like Black Lives Matter, the early Police Bill protests, and the Glasgow climate march on 6 November, but with unions only a small factor in them. The recent midwives' and birth workers' demonstrations show that workers can and will use the streets to mobilise on workplace issues too.



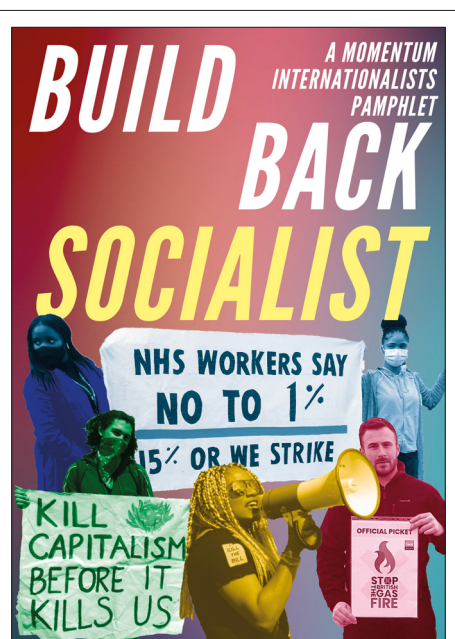
UCU pickets at Manchester University

A number of unions have passed decisions for a workers' rights demonstration in the New Year. Activists will press for that to happen, but also for unions to get onto the streets before then.

In the two biggest unions, Unison and Unite, there should be openings for change now. The left now has a majority on Unison's national executive for the first time ever. Sharon Graham's election in Unite reflects a ferment in that union and has opened it up further.

The current general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), Jo Grady, was elected to the job as a rank-and-file activist in 2019, on the back of attempts at rank-and-file organising growing out of previous UCU strikes. There are signs that the union machine has changed her more than she has changed the union, but rank-and-file networks still exist and can be developed.

To make the most of changes at the top, systematic rank-and-file organisation, in the workplace, throughout unions and across unions, is needed – a shift away from the drift of the left in the unions to focus almost solely on the building of blocs to win elections for union positions. □



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

23-24 April

Workers' Liberty's annual conference, where we debate our policies, plan our actions, and elect our committees for the coming year, will be on 23-24 April 2022 in London. (We're working on the assumption that Covid rates will be relatively low by then, at least for a while). More info? Email awl@workersliberty.org □

Solidarity 618 and 619

Solidarity 618 will be out on 15 December. Because of the holiday-period lull in labour-movement activity, and to give our staff scope for longer-term tasks, Solidarity will then skip three weeks. Solidarity 619 will be out on 12 January. □

Stop the expanded Police Bill!

By Sacha Ismail

Earlier this year, during sizeable demonstrations against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, there was talk of the law at least being stripped down, removing its most egregious aspects. In fact, after demonstrations died away, the Tories have gone in exactly the opposite direction. As the bill has moved through the House of Lords, the government has proposed a raft of amendments which dramatically expand its oppressive features.

Jun Pang of human rights organisation Liberty, which has been campaigning consistently against the Bill (though not mobilising people on the streets), has [explained](#) the new amendments.

The Bill previously contained a series of [restrictions](#) on demonstrations, new surveillance and stop-and-search powers and provisions further criminalising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Now, as Jun Pang explains, it could “criminalise almost any protester”:

- It could now become an offence for

someone to “to attach themselves to another person, an object, or land, attach someone else to another person, an object, or land or attach an object to another object or to land”, if the action causes or is capable of causing “serious disruption” to two or more people or an organisation in a public place and if offender intends this or is reckless. The penalty will be up to 51 weeks in prison, a fine or both.

- It could now become an offence for “going equipped” for locking-on if you are at a protest or near one. Unlimited fine.

- At present wilful obstruction of a highway carries a fine. This could be increased to up to 51 weeks in prison, a fine or both.

- It could become an offence to obstruct major transport works.

- Stop and search powers could be expanded to allow police to search a person or vehicle if they “reasonably suspect” they’ll find an item that could be “made, adapted, or intended for use in the course of or in connection with”

the above offences – and to seize any prohibited item.

- Stop-and-search could be allowed without the need for reasonable suspicion.

- It could become an offence to obstruct a search, subject to up to 51 weeks in prison (at present “wilful obstruction” carries the possibility of a month).

- Perhaps most shockingly of all, we could see “Serious Disruption Prevent Orders” imposed on people who have taken part in two or more protests in a five-year period, even without conviction for an offence. This will carry a set of conditions including not associating with certain people, going to certain places, carrying certain items or using the internet in certain ways. Breaches will lead to up to 51 weeks in prison.

The Police Bill and the amendments are part of a wider raft of authoritarian legislation – including the [Nationality and Borders Bill](#), the [Elections Bill](#), and now the [Judicial Review and Courts Bill](#), as well as plans to introduce yet more

[restrictions on strikes](#) and undercut the Human Rights Act. Yet the Labour leadership, on paper opposed to the Bill, has evidently decided to stay quiet. Despite the [specific threat](#) the Bill poses to trade unionists, unions have made a few statements but done very little.

These measures will have specific consequences for oppressed minorities, notably the changes to stop-and-search. They will pose a major threat to almost anyone that regularly takes part in demonstrations and direct action, starting with the climate protesters against whom the measures are quite obviously immediately aimed.

As the Institute of Employment Rights [explains](#), they pose severe threats to the right to strike and picket. On 8 December, we will be joining demonstrations outside the House of Lords.

We need more demonstrations and protest when the Bill returns to the Commons in January. With sufficient noise and uproar, this government can be forced into yet more u-turns, despite its big parliamentary majority. □

Hundreds demonstrate against immigration detention in North East

By Julie Ward

On 23 November, the day before 27 people drowned in the English Channel trying to reach the UK, Priti Patel announced the official opening of Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in County Durham, a new women-only facility intended to replace the notorious Yarl’s Wood detention centre near Bedford.

The new facility in Medomsley, near the town of Consett, was formerly Medomsley Detention Centre (for boys) and

was the site of historic abuse carried out over decades before closing in 1988. Five former officers have already been jailed for their part in the abuse with many more thought to have been involved in what was probably an organised paedophile ring. The authorities have ruled that anyone incarcerated in the centre during the period in question is eligible for compensation without the need to go through a long drawn-out, painful legal process.

In 1999 the centre re-opened as Hassockfield Secure Training Centre, but despite the name-change the facility failed to shake off its reputation as a place of inhumanity. Adam Rickwood, aged 14 from Burnley, took his own life there in 2004. The Training Centre, run by Serco, eventually closed in 2015.

In January 2021 the Home Office announced it would instead be repurposing the site as an IRC for women failed asylum seekers. This centre was to be called Hassockfield – hence the “No to Hassockfield” campaign – but was recently renamed “Derwentside IRC”.

The contract to run the Derwentside IRC has been given to Mitie, whose appalling record on workers’ rights in places such as Heathrow and



Sellafield has led to strong retaliatory actions by Unite the Union. Mitie job adverts for custodial posts at the IRC have been used as source material by the NE Feminist Theatre Lab, along with testimonies of former employees and those with lived experience of detention, to expose the culture of racism and bullying within the company.

Mitie

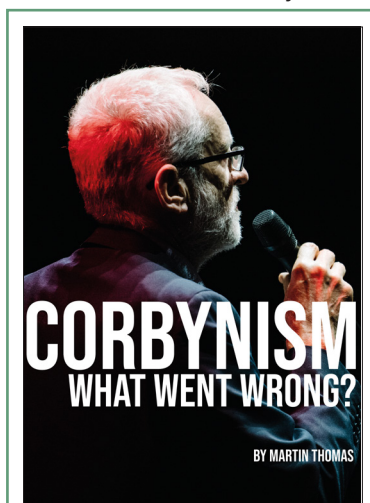
Mitie is one of the companies to profit from the pandemic, being given huge government contracts for Covid-testing sites and quarantine hotel security. One of its biggest contracts involves running immigration detention centres. In 2018, the firm won what was believed to be the biggest ever UK immigration detention contract after sealing a deal of more than £500m. This included the running of Colnbrook removal centre in Heathrow, where the most recent inspection reports said it ran dirty facilities with poor record-keeping.

Tory peer Philippa Roe, or Baroness Coultie, sits on Mitie’s board, and was given a seat in the House of Lords by David Cameron in 2017. Conservative peer Baroness McGregor-Smith, who is currently president of the British Chamber of Commerce and a non-executive board member of the Department for Education, was CEO of Mitie for almost a decade.

Since learning of the government plans local people have mounted a vigorous campaign against the new IRC. Monthly

demonstrations have been held at the site with a range of speakers including people with lived experience of detention. On 4 December campaigners organised a National Demonstration in Consett town centre, attracting several hundred people. □

- Longer report: bit.ly/d-irc. Julie Ward is a No to Hassockfield campaigner, and former Labour MEP for the North West of England. Find out more and support the campaign: notohassockfield.org.uk



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

workersliberty.org/publications

Upcoming meetings

Workers’ Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom or in person.

Thursday 9 December, 7pm: Free our Unions: How postal workers maintained a tradition of unofficial action.

Sunday 12 December, 2-5 pm: Socialist Film Club: Gramsci: Everything that Concerns People (New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS)

Wednesday 15 December, 7-9 pm: Socialist Film Club: 10,000 Black Men Named George (New Cross Learning)

Saturday 18 December, 6.30-9 pm: Socialist Film Club: Rocking the Foundations Xmas film showing (New Cross Learning)

Saturday 18 December, 4.30-6 pm: LLI/MI: NHS and social care – make Labour act!

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



Too shameful to be reported?



By Jim Denham

On Saturday 27 November there was a rally in London's Chinatown, supposedly against anti-Asian racism and, more specifically, anti-Chinese racism.

There is, indeed, strong evidence of an increase in racism against Chinese people and those of "Chinese" appearance in the UK. It's been fuelled at least in part by the Covid-19 pandemic and Trump's description of it as the "China virus".

All socialists would, as a matter of course, support a genuine campaign against anti-Chinese racism, but there can be no doubt that this rally was, in reality, a propaganda front for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), seeking to brand all criticism of their fascist state as "racist". It may be that some well-meaning people from the Chinese community in the UK have been drawn in, but it looks like the driving forces behind this initiative ("Stop Anti-Asian Racism and NO to a New Cold War")



are active supporters of the CCP and its regime. Branding all criticism of the CCP – for instance over Hong Kong, Tibet or the Uyghurs – as racism is a cynical but effective ploy by the regime and its apologists.

Among the rally's organisers, the Federation of UK Fujian Chinese and London China Town Association have published ads in newspapers to support the "patriots rule Hong Kong" principle whereby the CCP vets candidates to the Hong Kong legislature and bars those deemed insufficiently patriotic towards China.

An full-page article in the *Morning Star* of 22 November promoted the

London rally with an article that included the following, which rather gives the game away:

"[The US] has created all kinds of appalling lies and fabrications on human rights issues. These unjustified falsehoods have resulted in a witch hunt against China, from unwarranted charges concerning Xinjiang to provocative subversion in Hong Kong, along with encouraging Taiwan's independence in order to violently interfere in China's internal affairs... Exposing the anxiety of the United States, worrying that its incompetence will be seen through by the world, and fearing China will achieve a great national re-

juvenation."

A group of Hong Kong emigrants turned up at the rally, and intervened with slogans such as "stop genocide in Xinjiang." They made it clear they opposed anti-Chinese racism, but wanted to address racism and human rights abuses within China as well. Around 50 people, they were called "cockroaches" (a favourite CCP term) and physically attacked. The police intervened and at there was at least one arrest.

Strangely, after the MS had promoted the event so enthusiastically, and given that it turned out to be (shall we say) a lively event, the only further coverage or comment to appear in the paper was a letter (2 December) from one Phil Brand denouncing those who intervened as "separatists" and "Falun Gong members", and thanking "all who attended, especially Fiona Edwards of No Cold War and Kate Hudson of CND who both spoke exceptionally and inspirationally well."

The *Morning Star* carried no report of the rally and no editorial comment on what happened. Can it be that even this de facto mouthpiece of CCP propaganda found the reality of what happened in Chinatown on 27 November too embarrassing to say any more about? □

Regroupments among the "absolute anti-Zionists"

By Simon Nelson

Two organisations proscribed by the Labour Party, Labour Against the Witch-hunt (LAW) and Labour In Exile Network (LIEN), have voted to merge.

The merged group is making connections with Chris Williamson's Resist movement and the "Workers Party of Britain" launched by George Galloway and the older Stalinist grouplet CPGB-ML. Resist also has links with the Socialist Party's "TUSC" electoral vehicle. Four members of the LAW steering committee have resigned in protest at the merger.

Both LAW and LIEN subscribe to the idea that the entire issue of antisemitism in Labour was a fake and an invention (not just that charges were sometimes misused to target leftists, as they were). However, LAW was launched



and acted often as a proxy for the Weekly Worker group and Labour Party Marxists, whereas LIEN was a relative latecomer and more diverse. It was not advocating the building of a "Marxist party" as a leap from the current Labour Party.

From the outside, it has been hard to see the differences between the two. Now they are posed more starkly, as LAW (or at least the four who have resigned) being still wedded to work in the Labour Party, encouraging those not expelled to "stay and fight" (as is the Weekly Worker group's cur-

rent policy), while LIEN orients outside.

However, LIEN is unlikely to find itself influential in anti-cuts or austerity movements, or at the forefront in campaigning on the NHS or migrants' rights. Its big figures like Tony Greenstein are almost exclusively obsessed with denouncing Israel and "Zionism".

The dwindling contingent of absolute anti-Zionists, partisans of LAW or LIEN, is unlikely to worry the current electoral prospects of the Labour Party. That their poison is channelled elsewhere is also no disadvantage to the labour movement. Judging by the video footage from Chris Williamson's "Resist" conference and the recent Workers Party of Britain rally with Galloway himself in Birmingham, any youth wing of either movement would be extremely small. □

• Background: bit.ly/back-w-g

Rittenhouse and self-defence



Barrie Hardy (*Solidarity* 616) is correct in writing that we should oppose vigilante groups taking the law into their own hands. This is precisely why his opposition to Rittenhouse acquittal is so bizarre.

While offering first aid, Rittenhouse was attacked by a man hurling anti-black racial slurs and death threats at him. Rittenhouse ran away but was soon caught. A shot was fired by one of his attackers as they were attempting to take his rifle to kill him. Rittenhouse defended himself with deadly force.

Rittenhouse was then chased by a vigilante mob – exactly the sort that Bas claims to oppose – down the street. He was kicked to the ground and an illegally carried pistol was aimed in an attempt to execute him. Rittenhouse again defended

himself. A guilty verdict would have been a gift for the right: permission to gun down counter-protesters they believe to be armed. To follow the argument through, a perceived threat, even if they are fleeing, is a fair target. This makes Bas reporting on this trial alongside that of Arbery's murderer so perverse.

The left has made Rittenhouse the right's mascot through its support of the vigilante attack on him, and the fiction it has built of the case to justify its conclusions. Even Barrie Hardy repeats the falsehood that Rittenhouse carried a rifle across state lines and suggests that it's unusual to maintain the principle of innocent until proven guilty through banning the term "victim" in a self-defence trial.

Supporting working class self-defence and opposing vigilante mobs necessarily means supporting the Rittenhouse acquittal. □

Charlie George, Romford

Biggest threat yet to Roe v. Wade



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Mississippi's Republican governor confirmed on 5 December that his administration would enforce a law in the state banning abortions just after the beginning of the second trimester of a pregnancy if the law is upheld by the US Supreme Court. Gov Tate Reeves joined CNN's State of the Union:

"[I]f Roe v. Wade is overturned, [will you] enforce the almost total abortion ban in Mississippi?" host Jake Tapper asked Mr Reeves.

"Yeah, Jake, that is a yes," the governor responded.

The Supreme Court are currently considering this case, which represents the greatest threat to abortion rights in the US since the Planned Parenthood

v. Casey Supreme Court case in 1992 weakened Roe v. Wade. The justices will hear Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, a challenge to Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban that doubles as a direct attack on Roe v. Wade. The case will test whether Donald Trump's three justices will fulfil his campaign promise to overrule Roe v. Wade, and thus allow states to ban all abortions, right from conception.

By the close of oral arguments, most bourgeois media in the US agreed Roe v. Wade would be overturned.

It seemed likely that conservatives have the five votes they need for a majority that the constitution does not protect the right to end a pregnancy: Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett. Conservative Chief Justice John Roberts emphasised the foetal viability question in closing arguments, stating that it was rejected as a possible standard in the initial 1973

Roe decision and only adopted later. This would be a route to uphold the Mississippi ban whilst keeping Roe v. Wade as a technicality. This chipping away of abortion rights is now viewed as best-case scenario by many US liberals, but increasingly unlikely.

Overturning Roe v. Wade is a bold move by the Supreme Court. A majority of Americans oppose overturning Roe v. Wade, according to a new Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll [survey](#). Fifty-four percent of respondents polled said they opposed overturning Roe v. Wade if the court were to roll back the ruling and leave abortion laws to the states. Support is particularly strong amongst the young. A Pew [poll](#) found support for abortion highest among those ages 18-29 (67% believe it should be legal), compared with 61% of those 30-49, 53% of those aged 50-64 and 55% of those aged 65 and up.

Overturning Roe v. Wade could focus the ire of those who support the right

to choose on the legitimacy of the Supreme Court. The Constitution provides that justices "shall hold their offices during good behaviour" (unless appointed during a Senate recess). The term "good behaviour" is understood to mean justices may serve for the remainder of their entire lives, with the only recall being impeachment and conviction by Congress.

We will not know until next summer how significant a blow against reproductive freedom the Supreme Court will make. The movement against this right wing tide can be built now.

The Bernie Sanders campaign, the Women's March and Black Lives Matters were all politically underdeveloped. But they each represented a real, big mostly-young and active movement, the potential to build a fightback with working class self-activity at its core. The US right are well organised and militant; the left must become so also. □

The truth about 27 November

By Pete Radcliff

A 27 November rally in Chinatown, London, finished with a physical attack by some supporters of the Chinese state on Hong Kongers and others who had come to protest about repression of the Uyghurs and in HK.

Since then, messages have been circulated on the instant-messaging app WeChat putting a bounty on two exile Hong Kong activists, Simon Cheng and Nathan Law, offering £10,000 for their UK addresses, and forcing them to move house.

Over 50 Hong Konger and other groups have protested and call for support "to secure long-term protection and support for Hongkongers – and broader East and South East Asian communities – in the UK": bit.ly/27nov-hk

The Chinatown event, billed as a "Stop Anti-Asian Hate/ No to a New Cold War" rally, may have seemed a worthwhile initiative.

John McDonnell was initially listed as a speaker, and the organiser was Suresh Grover, an activist with a reputation for anti-racist work in earlier decades.

McDonnell withdrew because none of the organisers had been known to speak out against the Chinese state's treatment of Uyghurs and repression in Hong Kong. None of the many other ethnically Chinese activists who are on the left, who oppose war and racism, but who back Uyghur and HK rights, had been invited.

In fact, some of those organising the

27 November event had been involved in provocative intimidation of Hong Kong migrants outside a concert by pro-democracy Hong Kong artist Denise Ho in October 2019.

Rhetoric

The Chinese flag was waved, placards accused Hongkongers of being cockroaches or pests that need to be eradicated, and eggs were thrown. People going into the concert were photographed, though Hongkongers already feared persecution back in Hong Kong if identified as critical of Beijing.

Not surprisingly Tories and the right wing media like the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* have used the event to attack Labour's left, despite McDonnell withdrawing and the rally attracting only 50 supporters.

But the event showed how left-sounding talk of opposing "a new Cold War" can be made a cover for supporting the Chinese regime. As Brian Hioe has put it in the online magazine *New Bloom*, this pro-Beijing mobilisation "arose out of anxiety that global sympathy for Hong Kong's self-determination struggle could organise the Chinese diaspora in a manner critical of the Chinese state".

On 14 November last year Diane Abbott joined an online rally, only to [declare](#) afterwards that she "had no idea that there were people on the call who denied Chinese harassment and massacres of Muslims in [East Turkestan]".

Yanis Varoufakis's Progressive International has hosted "No Cold War" pro-CCP celebrities like Vijay Prashad

who [recently](#) proposed that it was right for Soviet tanks to be sent to Hungary in 1956 because the Hungarians were "more fascist than Nazi Germany".

Some left-wingers simplistically blame "the West" for "fake news", or even dismiss the protests of millions of Hongkongers and the coverage by human rights organisations of the persecution of Uyghurs as engineered by the CIA.

Banks

Actually, key centres in "the West" – banks and big capitalist corporations – support the Chinese state. For over 40 years they have made huge profits from China, where workers have no union rights.

For example, Ray Dalio, leader and founder of Bridgewater Associates, the world's biggest hedge fund, whose personal wealth is more than \$20 billion dollars, pushes for friendlier US attitudes to Beijing. BlackRock, Goldman Sachs, etc. are lobbying Biden to drop talk of restrictions on investment in China.

Chinese migrants in Britain have always been a target of state racism. Many have been compelled to gain entry to Britain through illegal routes and the Border Agency has conducted provocative and high-profile fishing raids into London's Chinatown to pursue illegal migrants, such as in 2013.

The labour movement has the responsibility to make support for migrants and refugees part of an internationalist battle for democratic rights across the world. □



Activist Agenda

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign has been on its busiest-ever week of action since 5 December.

On Wednesday 8th USC, Labour Movement Solidarity with HK (and of course Workers' Liberty too) will be on the protest against the Police Bill (5pm-7pm, Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster).

On Thursday 9th the independent Uyghur Tribunal, examining the evidence of genocide and crimes against humanity by the Chinese state, will return its verdict. USC and others will follow up by protesting at the Chinese Embassy from 6pm.

On Friday 10th, International Human Rights Day, USC will gather with Tibetans, Hongkongers and others at Piccadilly Circus (6pm).

And on Saturday 11th Nottingham Stand With HK and Labour Movement Solidarity with HK are hosting a meeting with Nottingham East Labour MP Nadia Whittome to discuss the challenges facing Hongkongers in the UK.

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

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. □

Why we “March with Midwives”

By Becky Talbot

Becky Talbot is a doula – an independent birth worker – in Cambridge who was central to initiating the [protests](#) by midwives and birth workers across the country on 21 November. She spoke to Sacha Ismail.

I’m very much part of a doula community where we train and develop and collaborate together. In early October one of our Cambridgeshire doulas, Paula Cleary, decided to have a march in the town of March, where she lives, to protest about lack of homebirth services and poor conditions for staff at the local hospital. We talked about it, and of course these problems exist all over the UK. Over the last three or four years things have got worse and worse and reached a point which is simply unacceptable.

Midwives, our colleagues we work alongside, are burnt out. They regularly

can’t leave work as there’ll be nobody to take over from them. Often they can’t go to the toilet, they can’t eat; and they feel unable to speak out about it because of the culture of silencing and bullying that exists. So they’re going off sick, they’re leaving in droves, and more generally they can’t provide the kind of service they want to. It has a massive impact on those who are going to give birth.

Action

A group of doulas saw Paula’s post and commented, yes, we need to do something radical, we need to demand real change. So we started a steering committee with those doulas and some midwives, from across the country; we had new people coming to us from all over. It’s people who are very interested in and concerned about maternity services, from the perspective of women’s rights. The steering committee decided to hold the vigils on the 21st.

Straight away afterwards everyone was saying let’s do it again, so absolutely we will be soon.

Facebook

We set up a [Facebook page](#) – which now has over 20,000 people on it – and asked people to tell us their stories. We had lots of stories from midwives and doulas and lots of stories from women and families who had had children. At first there was tension between midwives and families. There were midwives who didn’t want to hear the families’ stories and families who felt they had been treated terribly by midwives. I don’t know how we did it, but we were able to develop understanding between these groups, that yes the situation is terrible, yes people are having horrible experiences – but it’s not at all midwives’ fault.

The situation a decade ago was not brilliant but things have got much worse for midwives, in terms of their

conditions and the way they are routinely silenced if they try to speak out, and for women giving birth in terms of lack of choice and degree of coercion that goes on. Speaking from my own experience it’s the same all over Cambridgeshire and nearby. There’s a partial exception with the homebirth team in Norwich. That’s probably the situation all over – there are little pockets that are better but the wider situation is dire.

It’s good to finally feel we have a channel to try to do something about it. The scapegoating and silencing of those who raise issues is a terrible problem. When employers warn midwives against taking part in protests that is yet another way of silencing them. The whole of maternity care is built on a patriarchal structure of oppression – they tell you and you tell them, right down to the bottom. Our protests are about breaking the silence. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/becky-t

Reading on environment emergencies



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

In his thought-provoking book on the pandemic, *The Revenge of the Real*, Benjamin Bratton argues that human society has a “sensing layer”: an infrastructure of technology and a knowledge base that allows us to know what is going on with increasing accuracy

Effective socialist organisations and the workers movement in general also need a “sensing layer”. Our efficacy is based in part on our ability to describe reality squarely. With this in mind, and with the prospect of long winter nights ahead and Christmas stockings that need to be filled, I want to suggest a few books of popular science writing that should be on every socialist’s bookshelf.

Elizabeth Kolbert’s work *The Sixth Extinction* describes how in recent decades scientists began to realise that we are living through one of planet Earth’s great mass extinctions: times when the evolutionary tree is collapses in on itself, whole boughs are lopped off.

There have been five mass extinctions in the past caused by climate change, meteors and similar. The cause of the current mass extinction is us, humans, and although this process has accelerated in the last few centuries our tendency for wiping out species is as old as homo sapiens. Kolbert’s interesting conclusion is that the extinctions have been driven by humanity’s innate sociability and curiosity: qualities that we prize most highly. Moreover, this is a cause for hope. It is these very same qualities that have given us the knowl-

edge that we need to halt this process.

Kolbert’s work draws on the astonishing insights of modern geology and two of the foremost geologists, Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, have written an extremely accessible account of the history of planet Earth: *The Human Planet: How we created the Anthropocene*. Lewis and Maslin are at the forefront of the debate to get our current epoch reclassified as the Anthropocene.

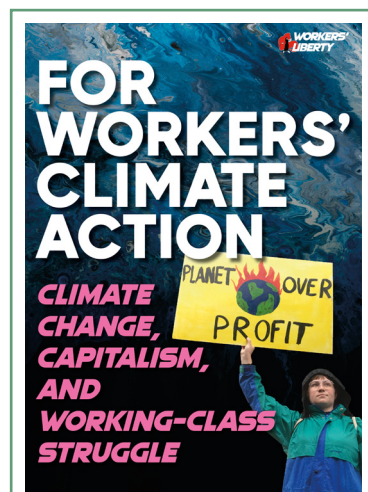
Whilst firmly based in the science, Lewis and Maslin draw heavily on the work of classical political economists, including Marx, adding an ecological element by quantifying how different forms of human society are able to extract different quantities of energy from their environment. The book is full of ideas that challenge naïve mother Earth type environmentalism. For example, they argue that the climatic stability of the Holocene is an unintended consequence of settled agriculture. Their work is extremely helpful to our efforts to describe a class struggle environmentalism.

Beyond these sweeping histories of planet Earth there are a few books that are excellent primers on specific ecological crises that we face in the near

future. David Archer’s *The Long Thaw* is a comprehensive guide to sea level rise and the dramatic impacts of climate change on the polar ice caps. In *Ocean of Life*, oceanographer Callum Roberts gives a comprehensive guide to the impacts of capitalist society on the world’s oceans. It contains one of the only popular accounts of ocean acidification, the other CO2 problem that is little known about or discussed on the environmental left. Holly Jean Buck’s *After Geoengineering* helps us to imagine how different geoengineering and carbon draw-down technologies may shape

the future.

Workers’ Liberty is organising a monthly reading group to focus on environmental issues. The quality of these discussions, and the quality of our political activism that will flow from these discussions, depends on developing a broad understanding of the latest science. A working-class response to our time of ecological breakdown will come from developing a collective understanding of our current reality, a “sensing layer” for the workers’ movement that is up to task. □



Workers Liberty have published a new edition of our climate pamphlet, updated with new articles, reviews, and debates.

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Against Modi's repression, stand with Kashmir

By Mohan Sen

In 2002, when India and Pakistan seemed on the edge of armed conflict in the Kashmir region, *Solidarity described* India's rule in its Jammu and Kashmir state as "unbridled state terrorism against the Kashmiri people". Since then things have worsened considerably.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir, in 1947, 1965 and 1999. We support the internationalists opposing conflict and fighting the militarists and chauvinists on both sides. Since 2002, however, the international conflict has faded into the background as India asserts ever more unbridled power over the Kashmiri population

Modi

In 2016-17, the relatively new Hindu-nationalist government of Narendra Modi provoked and repressed a wave of protests by the Muslim majority in the state, killing over a hundred protesters, injuring 15,000 and arresting 8,000 (the population then was 12.3 million, just over two-thirds Muslim).

In 2019, after the BJP and its "National Democratic Alliance" won re-election, the regime accelerated its shift to the right. Police and Hindu-nationalist vigilante violence against Muslims and other minorities has become more common. At a legislative level, there were two major attacks on Muslim-background Indians.

Changes to naturalisation law through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and plans to roll out a National Register of Citizens (NRC) looked designed to render large numbers of Muslims stateless while creating more Hindu citizens. In December 2019 these changes sparked huge protests across the country, in what was then the biggest challenge yet to Modi and the BJP – unfortunately shortcircuited by the emergence of the pandemic. Struggles against the implementation of the CAA and NRC continue.

The regime fulfilled another long-standing Hindu-nationalist demand by launching a frontal attack on the rights of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only-Muslim majority state. Articles 370 and 35a of the Indian constitution, in place since the 1940s, were revoked, stripping the state's special autonomy and removing restrictions on settlement in order to shift its demographic balance. Jammu and Kashmir was split into two centrally-controlled territories, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. To enforce this subordination the Indian state has launched a new wave of repression.

Since the [victory](#) of the farmers' struggle, activists in India have stepped up calls for repeal of the CAA and restoration of Kashmiri autonomy, along with other changes to blunt the regime's repressive capacity.

The immediate struggle in Kashmir is one for basic human rights. This was already one of the world's most militarised zones: the Indian government refuses to reveal troop numbers, but many estimates suggest more than half a million.

Long before Modi came to power, international human rights organisations, UN bodies and even the US State Department had long documented large-scale massacres (mainly in the 1990s), extrajudicial executions, mass graves, disappearances, torture and sexual violence by the Indian state.

Out of reams of shocking statistics, a few may illustrate the reality. A 2011 report by the now disbanded state Human Rights Commission confirmed thousands of bullet-ridden bodies buried in unmarked graves. The Indian government insisted these were all foreign Islamists; but the commission was able to identify 574 as missing locals.

Torture

681 of the 1,296 Kashmiri detainees interviewed by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 2010 said they had been tortured.

In 2012, human rights lawyer Parvez Imroz undertook the first statewide study of torture. In his study sample of 50 villages, he identified and documented more than 2,000 extreme cases of torture. The report suggested one in six Kashmiris had faced torture.

Wikileaks revealed that over 150 senior Indian officers had personally participated in torture and sexual violence.

There was a significant infrastructure of human rights activists documenting and challenging abuses in Kashmir. It is now being demolished. On 22 November one of Parvez Imroz's colleagues in the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition for Civil Society (JKCCS), Khurram Parvez, was arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), accused of collaboration with Islamist terrorists.

The World Organisation Against Torture says it is "deeply concerned about the high risk of torture while in custody". The international labour movement must demand Parvez is released immediately.

The attempt to associate Parvez with jihadism is ludicrous. A longstanding and much-respected campaigner with extensive links among human rights activists and NGOs internationally, including in Pakistan, he lost a leg in a landmine blast in 2004 and was central to a campaign that pressured Islamist militants to renounce landmines (the army gave no such commitment).

Unfortunately the Indian government doesn't need evidence. In 2008, following the Islamist massacres in Mumbai, the Congress government amended



A soldier guards a checkpoint in Kashmir

the already repressive 1960s UAPA and created a National Investigation Agency – widening the definition of a terrorist organisation, allowing 180-day detention without trial, limiting access to bail and facilitating warrantless searches, seizures and arrests, alongside various other violations of civil rights. In 2019 the BJP government amended the UAPA to allow it to designate as terrorist not only organisations but *individuals*, without trial.

Victimisation

Across the country hundreds of people, mostly left-wing activists, are languishing in prison after arrest under the UAPA, bail denied and their pre-trial period extended by various mechanisms.

After revoking Jammu and Kashmir's autonomy, the government deployed yet more troops, arrested thousands including hundreds of politicians, and imposed a curfew and communications and media blackout, elements of which lasted 18 months. It hoped to avoid the level of violence unleashed in earlier crises, and with some success.

Nonetheless, major bloodshed continues. One favoured army tactic is "fake encounters", where civilians are killed and the army invents an account and evidence to depict a conflict with "militants". A string of high-profile fake encounters have been exposed since 2019. Shortly before Khurram Parvez's arrest the [JKCCS highlighted the killing](#) of three civilians in Kashmir's biggest city, Srinagar. Since 2019 the organisation has, like many others, found it difficult to function under the communications blackout. In October 2020, as some elements of the blackout lifted, the JKCCS and other groups were raided by the National Investigation Agency. Many activists say it will now be hard for such campaigns to continue at all.

The wider issue is one of self-determination, a right Kashmir has always been denied. After Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Hindu ruler of the princely state of Kashmir and Jammu decided it should accede to India. When Kashmiri leaders tried to exercise some degree of self-determination in the 1950s and 60s, under leftish Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, they were subjected

to repression – and so on, ever since.

Self-determination is not straightforward. Kashmir, the most populous part of the former state, is over 95% Muslim (heavily Sunni), but Jammu over 60% Hindu. Ladakh has a Muslim plurality (heavily Shia) and a very large minority of Buddhists. The Indian government has banked on Buddhists and to some extent Shias as more

supportive than the Sunni Muslims in Kashmir, though since 2019 that seems to be changing. There is also the issue of the parts of historic Kashmir that since 1947 have been in Pakistan, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan (some minimally populated areas are now part of China).

Perhaps some sort of federal system with confederal ties to both India and Pakistan would make sense. In any case, no meaningful self-determination is possible while India is occupying Kashmir, dealing out repression and now maybe becoming a settler-colonial power too.

The other complication is the role of Islamist-jihadist organisations, growing since the 1980s. Many have ties to Pakistan and target not just the Indian state but Hindus and other minorities. In October an Islamist group killed two teachers, a Hindu and a Sikh, after telling all the Muslim staff to leave. Contrast the Muslim women leading the 2019 citizenship protests in Delhi, who organised actions in solidarity with displaced Hindus in Kashmir.

The left must denounce India's repression and demand self-determination. □

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Referendum win for change in the UAW

By Angela Paton

After two years hard campaigning across the United Auto Workers union in the USA (UAW), the Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) grassroots campaign has won a historic victory with 63% of union members across all sectors voting for direct election of International Executive Board officers.

Currently, election is indirect, by delegates, and UAWD says that leads to little contest and scope for cronyism and corruption.

The results must be certified by a federal court, but it is expected that will be a formality.

UAWD chair Scott Houldieson described the new voting process as a "huge step in the right direction" but said "it's just a first step in overhauling the union", which is expected to remain under federal moderation for several years yet.

The "Administration Caucus" has held power in the UAW for over 70 years. It



originated from the "Reuther Caucus", considered relatively left-wing and militant, but now two of the previous four Presidents have been jailed for embezzlement and corruption, and the union has been put under a court-appointed "monitor".

Consent Decree

A "consent decree" (a deal without admission of guilt and liability) agreed by UAW and US government after a corruption probe opened the way for the direct-election referendum. The UAWD has been organising, seeing the experience of the Teamsters "consent decree"

in 1989 as indicating that the union would be forced into such a referendum.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union, whose slate Teamsters United swept into office in their union in November, were cited as a huge help and inspiration for the rank and file campaign.

Rank-and-file

The common theme is the power of the working class to organise on a rank and file basis, building links across a vast country and across sectors. The UAW reform movement has also signalled a step forward for the labour movement as a whole in the US, with organisations such as Democratic Socialists of America and Labor Notes providing support the reformers, many workers providing funding, and a nationwide show of solidarity for striking UAW members at John Deere. Bernie Sanders joined the efforts for the strike fund.

John Deere workers in Iowa have been working with legal workers in

New York, auto workers in Illinois organising with researchers and tutors at the University of California who are [UAW members](#), and UAWD activists travelling thousands of miles to support striking workers at Volvo in Virginia this past summer.

The UAWD are now ready to push forward with demands for a democratic union, discussing priorities with their members, and mobilising for the UAW Constitutional Convention in 2022, which could see a raft of rule changes and potentially a new leadership.

UAWD is currently raising awareness and donations for UAW student-worker members [on strike](#) at Columbia University: bit.ly/cu-ons □



Asylum rights for Uyghur refugees

By Pete Boggs

The vast majority of Uyghurs live in China, mainly in East Turkestan. Nearly a million Uyghurs live outside of China, mainly elsewhere in Central Asia, e.g. in Kazakhstan, or in Middle Eastern countries like Turkey.

There is also a small community of about 2,000 to 3,000 Uyghurs in Afghanistan. All communities in Afghanistan face horrors with a collapse of food supplies, health care, and economic life since the Taliban took power. Many of the Uyghurs are especially afraid of how they will be treated by the Taliban because of its growing relationship with the Chinese government.

The Uyghur diaspora faces constant surveillance and harassment from the Chinese state. The 2021 report *No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs* from the Uyghur Human Rights Project notes "1,151 cases of Uyghurs being detained in their host country and 395 cases of Uyghurs being deported, extradited, or rendered back to China".

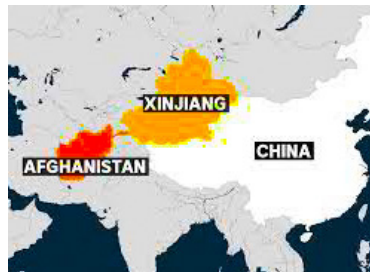
There have been specific efforts targeting Afghanistan: a

Uyghur named Yusupjan Amet was recruited to spy on Uyghur exiles in Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan from 2012 onwards. Additionally, in 2020 ten Chinese agents were arrested by the Afghan government for trying to build a fake Uyghur Islamist cell in order to ensnare Uyghurs in Afghanistan.

Militants

There are Uyghur Islamist militants in Afghanistan fighting with the Turkistan Islamic Party, formally allied to the Taliban. The Taliban outsources much of its security to local groups, and in border areas often to foreign Islamist groups. They relocated Uyghur fighters from Badakhshan (which borders Xinjiang) to eastern Afghanistan, and announced that they have told Uyghur fighters they cannot use Afghanistan to stage attacks on China. The Chinese state is also worried about the example Afghanistan might set: the 1990 Baren Township uprising in Xinjiang was led by a Uyghur Islamist militant, Zahideen Yusuf, who claimed the anti-Soviet mujahideen as his main inspiration.

The Chinese government has blurred the distinction



between Uyghurs who have joined violent Islamist groups and Uyghurs who are critical of the Chinese colonial rule over Xinjiang, or even those who have just tried to escape persecution. This means that ordinary Uyghurs in Afghanistan who are not Islamist fighters are also in danger.

Taliban

During the first Taliban government of 1996-2001, Mullah Omar, the first supreme leader of the Taliban, promised China that he would not allow groups in Afghanistan to interfere with China, and in 2000 thirteen Uyghur militants were handed over to the Chinese government. When demanding repatriation elsewhere the Chinese state has not limited itself to cases against proven Islamist militants, but more indiscriminately targeted the Uyghur diaspora.

The Taliban has relied heav-

ily on Chinese aid since its rise to power this summer. In September China pledged \$31 million of aid, including much-needed food and three million Covid-19 vaccine doses. A Taliban spokesman said that "China is our pass to markets all over the world." Additionally, China has acted as a kind of guarantor for the Taliban on the world stage.

Complications

A further complication is the strategy of Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), an anti-Taliban Islamist militant group in Afghanistan affiliated to ISIS. IS-K attacks the Taliban for having abandoned the Uyghurs and for its close relationship with China, and hopes to win Uyghur jihadists away from the Taliban-affiliated Turkistan Islamic Party. In October an IS-K suicide bomber killed more than 70 people in a Hazara Shia mosque. When claiming responsibility IS-K identified the bomber as "Muhammad al-Uyghuri", and said the attack was on Shiites and on the Taliban government because of rumours that it might begin deporting Uyghurs.

The common theme in accounts from Uyghurs in Af-

ghanistan over recent months is one of abject terror of what the Taliban takeover will mean for them. Despite many Afghan Uyghurs being long-time residents or even having been born in Afghanistan, their identity cards still denote them as "Uyghur", or "Chinese refugee", which could be a practical death sentence if the Taliban decides to deport them to China.

Abdul Aziz Naseri, an Afghanistan-born Uyghur activist, has compiled a list of approximately 500 Afghan Uyghurs who want to flee. According to *The New York Times*, at least 73 of those people seem younger than five years old.

The British government must give asylum to refugees from Afghanistan, and Uyghur refugees from all around the world. In September the Minister of State for Asia Amanda Milling refused to give blanket asylum to Uyghur refugees, instead relying on the UN resettlement scheme to determine which refugees the UK takes. At a minimum, the government must follow Sweden's example and give all Uyghurs automatic refugee status. □

The Zapatistas are not a model for climate action



Environment

By Pablo Velasco

Some climate campaigners are promoting the Zapatistas in Mexico as an inspiration and model for building the climate movement. This is a snare, misunderstanding Zapatista politics. An honest account of the Zapatistas' evolution shows their aims and methods are a long way from what is needed to mobilise millions of workers to prevent dangerous climate change.

The spark

On 1 January 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), consisting of 3,000 poorly armed, mostly Mayan guerrilla soldiers, emerged from the Lacandón jungle in Chiapas, southern Mexico, seizing towns and the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

The EZLN rose on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an international treaty between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, came into force. The EZLN, fronted by subcomandante Marcos, called for the cancellation of NAFTA, the overthrow of the Mexican government and a constituent assembly to write a new Mexican constitution.

President Ernesto Zedillo, barely a month into his six-year term leading the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) into its eighth successive decade in power in Mexico, sent the Mexican army and air force to suppress the rebellion. Throughout Mexico tens of thousands of people responded by protesting in public squares, demanding that Zedillo stop the military assault. Within twelve days Zedillo halted the attack and the EZLN agreed to a truce.

Within months, the Zapatistas held a consulta, asking what role they should place in Mexican society. Hundreds of thousands responded, the majority voting that the EZLN should lay down its arms and participate in Mexican political life. Most rejected armed violence on all sides. The Zapatistas declined to lay down their arms, but have not used them since the uprising.

Origins

The Zapatistas were founded in November 1983 by activists in northern Mexico. They were inspired by a long tradition of armed rebellion in Mexico, as well as the Chinese and Cuban Stalinist revolutions, following ideas articulated by Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and Régis Debray.

Originally called the National Liberation Forces, by the late 1980s the group moved its operations to Chiapas. They added "Zapatista" to their name in honour of Emiliano Zapata, leader of the revolutionary peasant movement dur-

ing the Mexican Revolution (1910-20).

Zapatista politics

The Zapatistas believed a spark in southern Mexico could unleash rebellion across the entire country. They thought a small group of dedicated revolutionaries could detonate a revolution through a bold armed intervention. They assumed that the people, exploited and oppressed, were simply waiting for an heroic example of revolutionary struggle to show them the way.

In August 1994, the Zapatistas called a convention in San Cristóbal, inviting a few thousand Mexican academics and activists, as well as a handful of foreign delegates. Marcos spoke in front of an enormous Mexican flag, as Zapatista soldiers marched carrying wooden rifles, not real firearms. The EZLN presented themselves as radical nationalists and supporters of indigenous rights. They called for a constituent assembly and a new constitution, but not socialism.

Surrounded by the Mexican army, the Zapatistas continued to organise a "liberated zone" where their indigenous and mestizo supporters lived and worked in their own autonomous communities, schools and local governments. They advocated "mandar obedeciendo" – to lead by following.

Indigenous women drove armed soldiers out of their villages. The EZLN convened the National Indigenous Congress. On 16 February 1996, the Zapatistas and Zedillo's government signed the San Andrés Accords, a treaty granting autonomy, recognition and rights to the indigenous people in Chiapas. The Mexican Congress failed to adopt the accords.

Zapatista domination

In 1997, the EZLN launched a national organisation, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN). The Zapatistas had no interest in a real coalition of social movements, trade unions and left political parties, which proliferated in Mexico. EZLN leaders insisted on dominating the FZLN. As a result, it never grew or had an impact on wider Mexican society.

According to Dan La Botz, the US socialist and leading authority on the Mexican left, the EZLN also attempted to form a Zapatista workers' organisation. Trade union activists told La Botz that the Zapatistas opposed participation in the existing trade unions, not only because they were bureaucratic, but also because the unions held elections and the EZLN opposed voting. Unwilling to relate to existing unions structures and spurning longstanding rank-and-file union organisations, the Zapatista labour front was failed. The Zapatistas withdrew again to Chiapas.

During the 2000 elections, the EZLN announced that it would not support ei-

ther of the two right wing parties – the ruling PRI or the conservative National Action Party (PAN). They also opposed the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Sadly Cárdenas, who had been a presidential candidate in 1988 and 1994, had divided the left and effectively split the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), which had established a solid base. The EZLN rejected elections in general and denounced Mexico's political parties as compromised and corrupt.

Vicente Fox of the PAN won the election, ending the PRI's hold on the Mexican government. The Zapatistas took advantage of the political opening, travelled to Mexico City and sent representatives to address the Mexican Congress. They asked it implement the San Andrés Accords, without success.

In 2006 presidential elections, the EZLN took a different approach. It did not support Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the PRD. Instead the EZLN continued to reject elections and the existing parties, but organised la Otra Campaña (the Other Campaign). The EZLN did not put forward its own candidates and did not support the candidates of other parties, but instead travelled around the country speaking out against the Mexican government and against capitalism.

The EZLN's Other Campaign was joined by several other left groups, from the PRT to the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML). The EZLN's Other Campaign held moderately successful meetings and rallies, sometimes speaking to thousands against the evils of capitalism. Everywhere they went, the CPML's giant portraits of Stalin hung in the background, casting doubt on their liberatory politics. And the EZLN abstained from the ferment around electoral fraud, which mobilised many millions of Mexicans during the elections (eventually won by the PRI). Zapatista sectarianism damaged their moral authority on the Mexican left.

Land ownership

Climate activists have looked favourably on the Zapatistas because they have held up a model of social land ownership, known as the ejidos, which they posit as an alternative to capitalist agriculture. There is no doubt that capitalist agriculture can be enormously damaging. Marx recognised that damage wrought to the soil, which capitalist farmers sought to mitigate with guano and later fertilisers.

After the Mexican revolution, notably under the Lázaro Cárdenas government (1934-40), land was given to male members of peasant or indigenous communities in the form of ejidos, state-leased land to be held in perpetuity by them and their descendants. This was inspired by Zapata's slogan: "land

to those who work it" and earlier forms of land ownership. While sometimes collectively owned, ejido land was often held in the form of individual parcels belonging to the patriarchal heads of families.

Non-capitalist forms are not necessarily more progressive than capitalism. Mexican history had seen other collectivist forms that went hand-in-hand with oppressive states. Many Mexican civilisations had fallen after ecological disasters, which these forms of land tenure failed to prevent.

Holloway

In the late 1990s, the political writer John Holloway popularised Zapatista ideas in a series of best-selling books. Holloway argued that under the influence of indigenous ideas, the EZLN had rejected the old Marxist paradigm of the working class struggling for state power. Instead, anyone could make the revolution by asserting their dignity and forming a liberated community where they were. The Zapatistas seemed to be building a communitarian alternative to capitalism in the remote communities of Chiapas. They rejected taking state power or the working class making socialism. Holloway cheerfully told activists to follow the Zapatistas: "change the world without taking power".

Holloway merely generalised the confusion inherent in Zapatista ideas from the start. The Zapatistas did not start from the political economy of global capitalism and try to locate the classes that could genuinely challenge capitalist power. They cut themselves off from the militant struggles of Mexican workers, preferring to base themselves on indigenous peasants. They did not lead masses of exploited and oppressed peoples into struggle, but relied on the actions of an elite minority. The Zapatistas failed to build united fronts with other left forces, including in the unions, to build a counterpower. They failed to use the limited openings of bourgeois politics as a platform to mobilise workers to struggle.

The Zapatistas offer no model for building a climate movement, other than to demonstrate the mistakes that follow from incoherent political ideas. If climate activists want examples from the past, they should start with the labour movement. Despite many failings and multiple defeats, the working class movement remains the only force with interest and power to prevent climate catastrophe. □

• Further reading: Dan La Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: Peasant Rebellion and Political Reform* (1999); Dan La Botz, *Twenty Years Since the Chiapas Rebellion: The Zapatistas, Their Politics, and Their Impact, Against the Current and New Politics*, (January 2014)

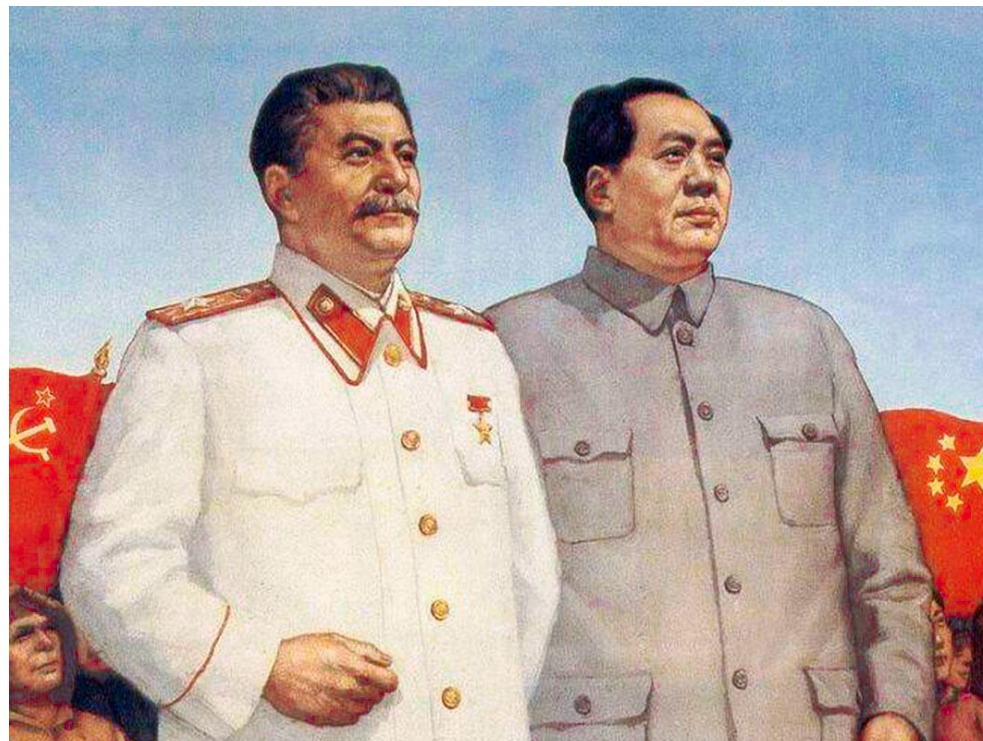
The Stalinist his

By Paul Hampton

"The predominating type among the present 'Communist' bureaucrats is the political careerist, and in consequence the polar opposite of the revolutionist. Their ideal is to attain in their own country the same position that the Kremlin oligarchy gained in the USSR. They are not the revolutionary leaders of the proletariat but aspirants to totalitarian rule. They dream of gaining success with the aid of this same Soviet bureaucracy and its GPU. They view with admiration and envy the invasion of Poland, Finland, the Baltic states, Bessarabia by the Red Army because these invasions immediately bring about the transfer of power into the hands of the local Stalinist candidates for totalitarian rule." – Leon Trotsky (August 1940) The Comintern and the GPU, Fourth International, I, 6, November 1940: 149

The Chinese Communist Party was founded in July 1921. Its first general secretary Chen Duxiu led the May Fourth democracy movement, then Chinese communism and later Chinese Trotskyism. Another key leader was Li Dazhao, the first in China to draw attention not only to Marxism, but also to the global significance of the Bolshevik experience. Both had been influenced by Japanese politics and anarchism.

In early 1920, Grigorii Voitinsky arrived with a group of Communist International (Comintern) representatives to assist Chen and Li with the organisa-



tion of Chinese communism. On 23-31 July 1921, 15 delegates, including the new Comintern representative Henk Sneevliet (Maring), founded the Chinese Communist Party. Mao Zedong served as a secretary at the gathering. The party had 53 members.

Guomindang

Sneevliet had previously built a socialist party in the Dutch East Indies (later Indonesia). He did so by working inside the nationalist Sarekat Islam. Sneevliet argued that the CCP should commit its small forces to working inside the nationalist Guomindang party in China led by Sun Yat-sen. The CCP adopted this new line at its second congress, held in Shanghai 16-23 July 1922. The CCP had just 195 members, while the Guomindang had 10,000, along with a government base in Guangzhou.

Although Chen and other CCP leaders were unhappy with the tactic of entry into the Guomindang, the communists grew their organisation. In 1925 they had around a thousand members. A year later, on the back of a wave of workers' militancy, they had grown to nearly 58,000 members.

Almost 60% of members were industrial workers. The CCP at this time was clearly a Marxist workers' party, part of the Communist International and beginning to lead the labour movement into struggle.

In Russia, the October 1917 workers' revolution had established the beginnings of authentic workers' democracy. However after the bitter civil war, the Russian workers' state remained isolated internationally. The Stalinist

bureaucracy consolidated and would by 1928 strangle the Bolshevik party and the Russian workers' state. Stalin pushed the CCP to integrate into and subordinate itself to Chiang Kai-Shek's Guomindang.

Massacre

In April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek orchestrated a massacre of the CCP in Shanghai. In July, the "left" Guomindang unleashed their own reign of terror in Wuhan. Thousands of communists and worker militants were killed, arrested or sacked from their jobs. In August 1927, an Extraordinary Conference of the Central Committee of the CCP, held in the apartment of one of the Russian advisers, Mikhail Razumov, scapegoated Chen and began replacing the authentic CCP leadership with Stalin's stooges. Mao Zedong was among those who opposed Chen and remained with Stalin.

The so-called "rural strategy", to organise and arm the peasantry – often attributed to Mao – in fact originated in Moscow. In late 1926, Stalin urged the CCP to radicalise the peasant movement. In summer 1927, Stalin instructed the CCP to organise armed uprisings and to create "Soviets". The first revolts took place in Nanchang. The "autumn harvest uprisings" followed in rural areas of Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, and Guangdong provinces and in Changsha. In December 1927 the Stalinists ordered an armed revolt in Guangzhou. All these putsches failed.

Two defeated contingents from the Nanchang uprising led by Zhu De and the Hunan autumn harvest uprising led

by Mao made their way to Jinggang Mountain. These troops funded their armies by coercion, taxation or expropriation of local tyrants. Crucially, they severed their links with the cities and the urban proletariat and based themselves on militarised peasants.

Mao's rise

By the end of 1927, the CCP had lost about four-fifths of its membership. In *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (1938), Harold Isaacs quotes official CCP figures, estimating that workers in the party comprised only 10% in 1928, 3% in 1929, 2.5% in March 1930, 1.6% in September 1930 and virtually zero by the end of the year. At the end of 1933 the complaint was heard that in Shanghai, greatest industrial centre of the country, that the CCP had "not one real industrial nucleus".

After 1927 the CCP underwent a qualitative transformation. It was no longer a workers' party in its composition, let alone in its political character, orientation and direction.

For the next decade, the CCP in China fought for its survival, as Chiang Kai-shek launched his encirclement campaigns. The CCP's strategy was for guerrilla armies to establish rural bases, which it dubbed "Soviets", in places like Jiangxi. At the same time, the CCP received substantial financial backing from Stalin's Russia, as Pantsov and Levine document in *Mao: The Real Story* (2012). This was the period of Mao's rise to the pinnacle of the CCP.

In summer 1930, the Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai supported the decision of the Politburo of the CCP to appoint Mao as political commissar of the First Army Group, the most powerful one, and then as general political commissar of the First Front Army. In October 1930, Moscow actively supported Mao's co-optation into the Central Committee Bureau for the Soviet areas, a new party structure that was intended to centralise all party work in rural districts under the control of the CCP. Next, the Russian Stalinists proposed that Mao was appointed to the Central Revolutionary Military Council, effectively the provisional government of all of the Soviet areas. On 10 November 1930, the Far Eastern Bureau wrote to the CCP Politburo:

"We need to arrange things so that Mao Zedong has responsibility not only for the condition and operations of the army, but also participates in the government and has partial responsibility for the work of the latter. He must be appointed a member of the govern-



Women's Fightback Issue 26 out now. Includes articles on protecting women beyond the police, sex positive feminism, solidarity with Afghan women, and more. □

workersliberty.org/publications

tory of Maoism

ment (chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council). There is no need to discuss the advantages of such an arrangement; it is obvious."

Throughout the early 1930s, the CCP's rural armies suffered successive defeats at the hands of Chiang's armies. In the "Long March", starting in October 1934, the CCP's military forces regrouped in the north of China. The location was deliberate: the CCP wanted to base itself close to the territory of the USSR, in order to receive political and military support. Pantsov and Levine show that large sums of Russian state money continued to flow to the Central Committee of the CCP.

Moscow began to propagate a heroic image of Mao. At the CCP's Ruijin plenum, Mao was transferred from candidate to full member of the Politburo on Moscow's insistence. The Seventh Comintern Congress pronounced him one of the "standard-bearers" of the world communist movement, along with Bulgarian Stalinist Georgii Dimitrov, and after that a full-blown campaign to exalt Mao commenced in the USSR. In December 1935, *Communist International* magazine published a long panegyric sketch entitled "Mao Zedong – leader of the Chinese working people". On 13 December 1935, the article was published in Pravda. This biographical sketch, along with others, was published in a brochure titled "Leaders and Heroes of the Chinese People", issued by the State Social-Economic Publishers.

At the end of the Long March, the Maoist army established itself in Yanan. By July 1936 a radio link with Moscow had been re-established and in his very first telegram, Mao asked Stalin to increase financial aid and send airplanes, heavy artillery, missiles, infantry weapons, anti-aircraft artillery and pontoons.

At the end of 1936, Chiang Kai-shek

was arrested by a warlord ally. Stalin's principal concern at this juncture was with the threat of Japanese invasion. Japan had already occupied Manchuria and Stalin feared the Japanese occupation of China would be the springboard for an attack on the USSR.

At Stalin's urging, on January 1937 Dimitrov sent Mao a letter on the need to change the direction of work in China. Dimitrov asked Mao to consider "switch[ing] from the soviet system to a system of people's revolutionary rule on democratic foundations", while preserving "soviets only in urban centres and not as organs of power but as mass organisations".

Japan

Although Mao and other leaders initially wanted to take advantage of Chiang's arrest to pursue the civil war, the CCP bowed to Stalin's wishes and entered into a second "united front" with the Guomindang to fight Japan.

There was a consistent flow of emissaries to and from Moscow throughout the 1930s. On 11 November 1937, the loyal Stalinist functionary Wang Ming received direct instructions from Stalin to "take measures" to eradicate "manifestations of Trotskyism in the actions of the CCP leadership". "Using all available means, intensify the struggle against Trotskyites," he suggested to Wang. "Trotskyites must be hunted down, shot, destroyed. These are international provocateurs, fascism's most vicious agents."

The CCP emerged from the war with Japan enormously strengthened. At the Seventh Congress of the CCP, which took place in Yanan from 23 April to 11 June 1945, the 754 delegates represented 1.2 million party members and a similar-sized army. Near the end of the Second World War, the Russian army entered the fight against Japan by occupying Manchuria, as agreed

with the US and Britain at Yalta. Stalin signed an agreement with the Guomindang, but played a game of deception.

In October 1945, the Russian authorities in Manchuria pledged that all weapons of the 700,000 Japanese Guangdong Army would be turned over to the CCP. At the same time, the military leadership confirmed its intention to transfer all of Manchuria to the CCP despite its treaty obligations. It encouraged the CCP to move the main body of its armed forces – at least 500,000 troops – to Manchuria, as "industry in Manchuria is developed; the borders to the east, west, and north are secure; Manchuria can function completely independently; and if one holds Manchuria, one can conquer all of China."

After the Russian army withdrew from Manchuria in May 1946, Russian material support to the CCP was delivered through the city of Dalian and North Korea, both of which were under direct Russian control.

Mao's headquarters in Yanan took advice from Russian military intelligence liaisons. The number of CCP students in Moscow increased sharply and from 1947 onwards, hundreds of Russian doctors, technical advisers, military and communications experts served behind the People's Liberation Army (PLA) lines in Manchuria.

Propaganda

The CCP devoted space to propagandising the Stalinist example in its publications. The CCP's internal study materials included translations of Stalin's writings and speeches. In military affairs, Chinese commanders kept in close touch with the Russian advisers in Manchuria and with Russian Communist Party and Russian army personnel on the other side of the border. Much of what the PLA learned about logistics, battle formations and armoured warfare during the Northeastern campaigns seems to have come from Russian sources.

In October 1949, advancing from its established bases, the CCP finally defeated the Guomindang and took power across China. Mao Zedong visited Moscow between 16 December 1949 and 17 February 1950. By 1950, hundreds of Russian experts, advisers, teachers and technical specialists in China. The new Chinese state was built under the tutelage of Russian Stalinism.

China would prove a loyal ally to Russia and its satellites. On 19 October 1950, in accordance with Stalin's wishes, Mao sent the Chinese army

to assist the North Korean communists, who several months earlier had invaded South Korea, an ally of the United States. Mao's decision had great significance for Stalin, and Mao certainly knew this.

Mao would often say later that only after the PRC entered the Korean War on the side of the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung did Stalin remove the label from him of "suspected Titoist" (Josip Broz Tito, also a long-time Stalin loyalist, had nevertheless, after winning autonomous power in Yugoslavia, distanced himself from Moscow). China's foreign minister Chen Yi said that Stalin shed tears on hearing of Mao's decision to send troops. "The Chinese comrades are so good!" the aged dictator said twice. Mao's entry into the Korean War appears at least in part to have been a conscious demonstration of the Chinese leaders' devotion to the Kremlin boss.

Stalin's death

When Stalin died on 5 March 1953, the CCP Central Committee selected Zhou Enlai to head the Chinese delegation to Stalin's funeral. He conveyed Mao's condolences to the new leadership of the CPSU. "Everyone knows that Comrade Stalin greatly loved the Chinese people and believed that the forces of the Chinese revolution were amazing," Mao Zedong wrote. "He displayed the greatest wisdom on questions relating to the Chinese revolution... We have lost a great teacher and a most sincere friend... This is a great sorrow. It is impossible to express our grief in words."

Even when Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956, Mao remained privately supportive of Stalin. Only after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 did Mao and the rest of the CCP leadership develop their differences with Russian Stalinism. Stalin's Russia was the model for Maoist Stalinism from its inception in 1949 and remained so for decades afterwards.

The Chinese state established after 1949 had the same structural features as the USSR: a bureaucratic ruling class exploiting and oppressing the workers and peasants; totalitarian rule that smashed the old landlord and capitalist classes; bureaucratic planning; forced industrialisation and collectivisation; workplace and household registration to atomise and control the population; and the active repression of dissent.

To understand the Chinese revolution in 1949, it is necessary to comprehend the centrality of Stalinism to the entire Maoist project. □

• Much abridged. More: bit.ly/stal-mao

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Using the coming weeks to study

By Martin Thomas

The coming weeks, as labour movement activity dwindles in the second half of December and in early January, are a good time to catch up on reading.

Workers' Liberty is running a half-price offer on all our older books, aiming to redress the backlog in circulation caused by the lack of in-person political meetings over the last two years. We also offer special deals if you buy a few books – for example, both *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1, and *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*, for £10 post free.

It's an especially good time to read the longer books, more difficult to work through alongside day-to-day activism.

Their scope and relevance is explained by Sean Matgamna in the Introduction to *The Two Trotskyisms*.

In *The Fate of the Russian Revolution, volume 1*, I assembled key texts of a strand of Trotskyist thinking which had been confined to the archives for many

decades, the "Heterodox Trotskyism" of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, C L R James, Al Glotzer, and others. [Volume 2] continues that work of rediscovery. It documents the fact that the characteristic ideas of later "Orthodox Trotskyism" – "objectively revolutionary" Stalinism; socialist revolution by "bureaucratic impulse" or by Stalinists being "compelled" by circumstances; the supposed self-sufficiency of a "party" apparatus with an allegedly "finished" program; the fetishisations of some formulas of Trotsky's, such as that the USSR was a "degenerated workers' state" – had developed within a year or so of Trotsky's death in 1940, though it took another decade for them to develop into a locked-down system.

It makes the case that revolutionary socialists today who want to find clean political ground on which to rebuild, in labour movements where seepage from many decades of Stalinism still poisons the ground, must go back to re-examine

the old debates and the flaws and lacunae in the political legacy which Trotsky left at his death – back to 1940...

In history, revolutionary movements suffer defeat and again defeat. That is in the nature of things for movements confronting the entrenched might and power of ruling classes. There are no words of explanation and consolation that can make that historical reality less bitter. But the movement continues, because the bourgeois oppression to which revolutionary socialism is the opposite and the antidote continues. The defeated bear their defeat honourably, and work to prepare the future. Brave young people pick up the fallen banners. They try to learn from the past.

To learn from the past we must know the past. To renew and build on the history of the Trotskyist movement it is necessary to know that history. It is necessary to know the whole heritage; to know that, important as the Orthodox organisations are, theirs has not been

the only strand of Trotskyism, or the best. The Heterodox are pivotal in the history of Trotskyism, and in its future. Don't mourn: study, think, and organise! Or, as James Connolly used to put it: hope, and fight!

The largest of our other books, *The Left in Disarray*, takes up the same thread by tracing the differentiations of the would-be Trotskyist left through later decades, from the 1950s through to the new century. £6 half-price: all three books for £13.

We encourage readers also to use the coming weeks to study Marxist classics. We have run Zoom study groups since early 2020 on Marx's *Capital* and *Grundrisse*, Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* and *Revolution Betrayed*, and Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* Notes from all those courses, as well as from many other courses on classic texts which we have run over the years, are available on our website at workersliberty.org/study. □



Half price offer!

Special Christmas and New Year offer: all older books (all except *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?*) half-price and post free for the next few weeks! Pay at workersliberty.org/payment and email your order, with delivery address, to awl@workersliberty.org.

Regular orders at workersliberty.org/publications. □



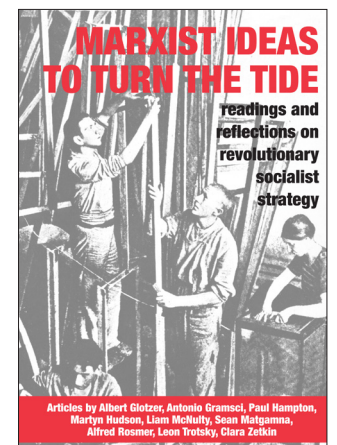
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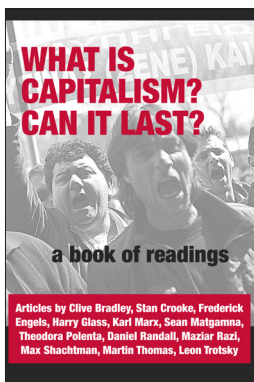
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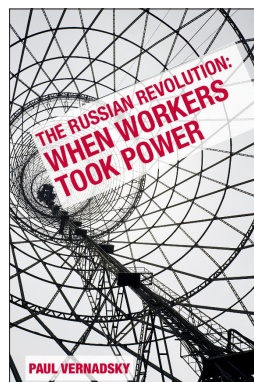
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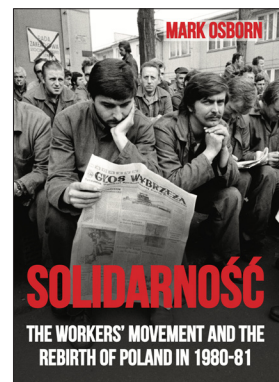
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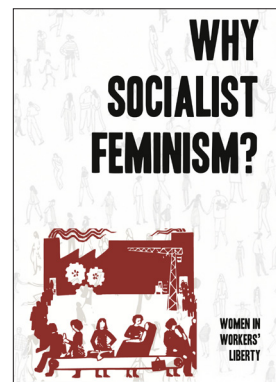
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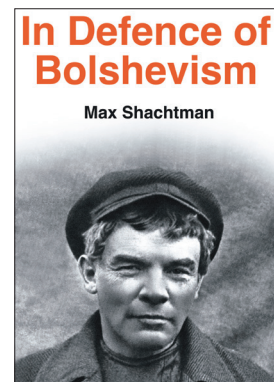
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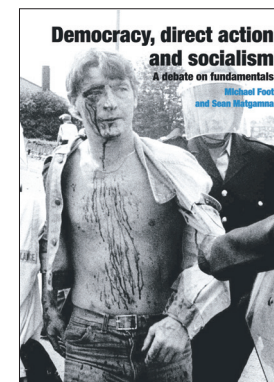
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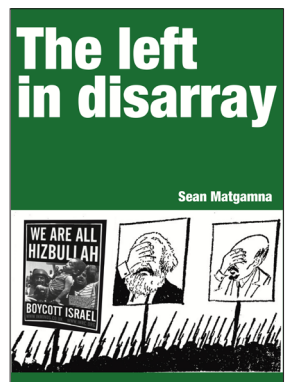
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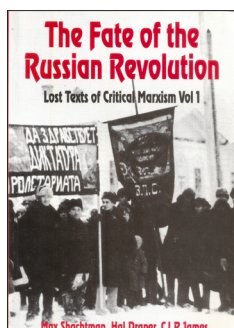
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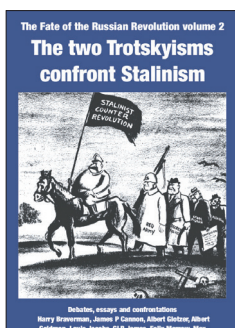
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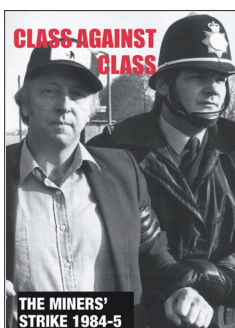
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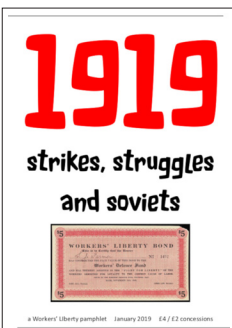
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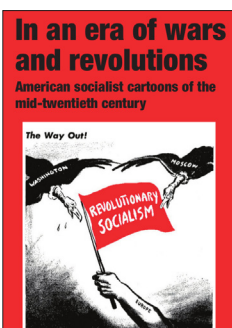
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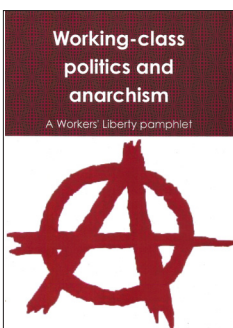
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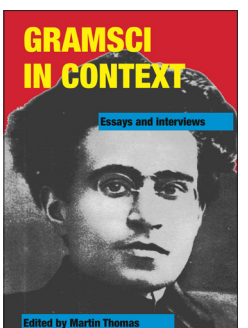
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Night Tube strikes first step in larger dispute

From Tubeworker

Talks have produced nothing and the strikes remain strong: London Underground bosses continue to face disruption over their forced regrading of workers in the reintroduction of Night Tube on the Central and Victoria lines.

Solidarity is needed from across the labour movement in the run up to the next action (strikes on the Central and Victoria lines, nights of 10-11 and 11-12 Dec, and 17-18 and 18-19 Dec) and another strike across all existing Night Tube lines (Central, Jubilee, Northern, Piccadilly, Victoria) on 18 December.

Underground bosses will be keen to stop action on 18 December, the last Saturday before Christmas. Another show of strength, as on 26 November, is important to maintain momentum.

A rebalot is under way (22 Nov to 20 Dec) on the Night Tube dispute. 10,000 RMT members across the Tube and Transport for London (TfL) are now preparing for a ballot (13 Dec to 10 Jan) on action to defend pension arrangements, staffing levels, and terms and conditions. This follows an announcement that up to 600 jobs on stations are at risk.

The attack on work-life balance in the grade consolidation fight on Night Tube is now the first in a series of attacks on both workers' terms and conditions and the future of public transport in London. Drivers and all other workers should vote yes for action in both ballots.

The ballot starting 13 Dec will call for a determined campaign to get the yes vote and the turnout needed to secure

a legal strike and a successful plan of action that can push the bosses back. At a rally in Westminster on 1 December representatives from the major unions across TfL all made promises about balloting, or using existing ballots, to take action and to defeat the government's plans to slash services and introduced more privateers.

The rank and file in RMT and the other unions (Aslef, TSSA and Unite) will need to hold their reps and leaderships to account to get them to deliver on those promises.

Missing from the speakers was the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who, despite decrying the Tories' cut in government funding for TfL, has attacked the RMT action and continues to doom-monger about the possibility of closing lines rather than actually

fighting for the restoration of the government grant. The Mayor has a simple choice: either back workers across the network, or cower as the government ramp up the cuts

As well as building the picket lines in the upcoming strikes, RMT drivers should continue to call for support from Aslef members, the majority of whom are doing the right thing and refusing to cross pickets.

Those drivers who are still on only Night Tube shifts are making a big financial sacrifice, losing almost their entire wage for the month. □

• Dispute fund: Terence O'Neill. Sort code: 60-83-71. Account number: 89481380. Or send cheques to RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton St, London NW1 1JD.

Louise Lewis victimised again

By Patrick Murphy

The National Education Union (NEU) workplace rep at North Huddersfield Trust, Louise Lewis, has been dismissed in an act of blatant anti-union victimisation. Louise was at the centre of a major dispute earlier this year when she was subjected to disciplinary allegations and suspended.

Her union insisted that the allegations were an attack on her legitimate work as the school rep, especially her determination to ensure that Covid safety measures were properly followed. NEU members were balloted and voted to take sustained strike action to defend her. After several days on strike and a hearing the attempt to dismiss her failed, and her suspension was lifted.

The school, however, delayed her return to work, claiming a need to work



on a reintegration plan. Several months after the disciplinary hearing Louise was still not back in school. In fact the employer used the intervening period to regroup and plan a new attack.

Further investigation

In November a so-called "reintegration meeting" was used to report on a further investigation which claimed a break down of trust between some of the senior leadership team and Louise. The investigation was nothing more than a survey of the small Senior Leadership Team (SLT) group. At that meeting the chair of governors alone made the decision to dismiss on "some other substantial reason", a notorious get-out clause for employers who can find no other way of sacking a worker.

Louise is appealing the decision. If it is not overturned, there is likely to be a strong claim for unfair dismissal. In the meantime work is underway with members in the school to build a collective response to defend their rep, including through a new strike ballot.

Louise is president of the local Kirklees NEU branch as well as the school rep. During the course of the previous campaign to defend her, she was also elected to the union's National Executive. This outrageous attack on her is an attack on the union. It is absolutely critical that everything possible is done to build a collective response and win her reinstatement. □



Clarks workers push back pay cuts

By Sacha Ismail

Clarks Shoes warehouse workers in Somerset have ended an all-out two month-long strike after defeating the company's attempt to impose dramatically worse pay and conditions and effectively derecognise their union.

Management wanted to reduce the standard rate of pay from £11.16 an hour to the minimum wage of £8.92. After the workers launched their dispute, they shifted to £9.50 – but of course the minimum wage will rise to £9.50 next April.

Now the £11.16 rate will remain unchanged. In addition the small minority of workers already on a lower rate of £9.50 will get a 5.4% increase to £10.03.

Clarks has withdrawn the "fire and rehire" plan and accepted that in the future collective bargaining with the union, Community, over all terms and conditions will be the norm.

It's not a 100% victory, even defensively. Community has not released the details but we understand that it has accepted some concessions on other terms and conditions. From a distance it's hard to judge whether a better outcome was possible. In any

case, this outcome is much better than some centrally involved thought was likely a few weeks ago.

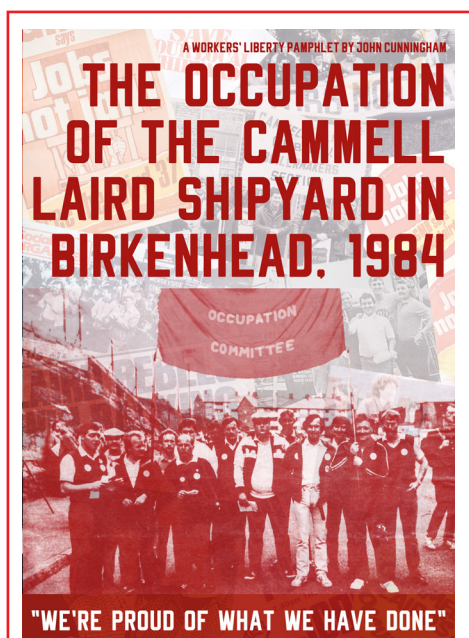
It should provide a great boost to the wider fight against "fire and rehire", as well as maybe future struggles at Clarks.

This outcome is a tribute to the remarkable determination of the Clarks strikers and the outpouring of solidarity they received.

This was the first all-out strike in Somerset for 35 years and it caused quite a stir. There was great support for the strikers from the community as well as the local labour movement. On 13 November about 500 people marched through the tiny town of Street, where Clarks is based. Workers' Liberty supporters from Bristol and London were proud to join them.

Donations and messages of solidarity poured in from across the UK – and beyond. International solidarity included [support from Hong Kong](#) activists who learned that Clarks has been bought up by a Hong Kong private equity firm owned by a billionaire Chinese capitalist. □

• Photo gallery from the strike: bit.ly/clarks



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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6699 What we stand for

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

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

Food first and foremost



Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

One of the officers, B, strides into the watch room. The tell-tale bing-bong of the PA system sounds as he commands: "All hands to the mess in five minutes". He's a friendly bloke but not one you want to get on the wrong side of, and he is not happy. Four minutes later, we're around the mess table.

"The way we've been working has been driving me up the wall, and I know it has for some of you too. We get everything essential like inventories, tests and visits done because they're non-negotiables, but it's all over the place, it's not organised, and it takes forever.

"And where we're not following through is on our training and our gym time. Sometimes we're still doing visits at 6 and not eating until well gone 7. Shit's getting kicked into the long grass because everything else is taking so long and it's not working."

D's back is up as he thinks B is calling us lazy.

"The problem is the brigade crams the diary so bloody full it's not humanly possible to get it all done. It's like the diary, the training schedule, the number of visits, it's all there to fill the days at some poxy station out in the sticks.

"But we regularly get over 10 shouts a day, we're out all the time, we work like dogs and just about manage to get

it all done. We only ever have the minimum riders, we're constantly getting sent on out-duties, and the brigade is on its knees. It's a joke."

B agrees and assures us he's not having a go at us or our work ethic, and he just wants to rationalise the schedule a bit so we aren't trying to do five things at once and we can hopefully get everything done in good time to chill out and go to the gym before dinner.

We're happy to give it a crack. It's a busy station and shouts obviously take precedence, so naturally routine duties often take longer than would be ideal and push other things back, or off the agenda entirely. There's nothing to be done about that. But it couldn't hurt to be a bit more structured about it – anything that might help us fit a bit more drilling in is good with me as the last thing you want is to make a prat of yourself on the fireground.

After some discussion, we set about devising a new daily diary. Silence descends briefly as we mull it over before the priority is made clear by a firefighter's suggestion.

"Why don't we set our mealtimes and work backwards from them", he says. "If we know when we will be eating and when we need to start prep, we can fit everything around that. It's like a car isn't it, if you don't put fuel in, it won't go. And I'm one big fucking car."

With that indisputable argument made, we planned out the rest of the day, cutting out the traditional tea ready for change of watch: that's something from a bygone era and we were the

only watch on station and probably one of the last few in the city still to adhere to it. We also decided, very ambitiously, to try and smash out both days' worth of visits during the afternoon on day 1, ideally leaving second afternoon clear for practical training and drills.

We decide to review it in a few tours. It's good B brought it to the watch and we decided on it collectively, rather than him and the officers making the decisions without the watch. But the experienced hands are sceptical. I turn to O as we walk back to the watch room.

"Do you reckon this will help?"

He looks at me. "With the best will in the world – not a fucking chance."

Sure enough, in the following tour the plan on both days is ripped to shreds by shouts. Maybe next tour. □

Yang freed. Now free Lee!

By Mohan Sen

After 84 days in jail, Korean Confederation of Trade Unions president Yang Kyeong-soo has [hailed](#) the "spirit of international solidarity" which sustained him and helped win his release, and demanded "immediate release of brother Lee Cheuk-yan... and imprisoned workers around the world".

Lee Cheuk-yan was general secretary of the now-dissolved Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. He is serving 18 months in prison for his role in a Tiananmen Square memorial demonstration and other pro-democracy protests, and faces new charges under the National Security Law.

Yang was arrested on 2 September in a police raid on the KCTU offices and on the charge that a mass KCTU rally for workers' rights in July violated Covid regulations. In the end, following a major campaign in South Korea and internationally, he was given a suspended sentence.

Evidently not deterred by the arrest of and prosecution of Yang, the KCTU held a general strike on 20 October, mobilising hundreds of thousands of workers for demands including major [nationalisations](#).

On 25-27 November truck drivers affiliated to the KCTU struck over their pay and conditions, and on the 27th thousands of them rallied outside the national assembly in Seoul.

The federation has just launched a campaign for migrant workers' rights, with Yang describing "migrant worker comrades [as] the key driving force of the KCTU and our main hope for bringing about change in Korean society". □

Hungarian classic films

By John Cunningham



Kino Eye

Slightly different Kino Eye this week. Wondering what seasonal gift to buy your film-loving friend? Try this new box set from Second Run, three rarely seen Hungarian classics: *Merry-Go-Round* (Zoltán Fábri, 1956), *Current* (István Gaál, 1963) and *Angus Dei* (Miklós Jancsó, 1970). All three were important films when released and have stood the test of time. *Merry-Go-Round* captured the spirit of a people about to rise against their oppressors in 1956 with its effervescent, optimistic tale of a Romeo-and-Juliet love reaching across the barriers between collective farmers



A poster for Merry-Go-Round

and private holders; István Gaál's film is one of a number ushering in the Hungarian New Wave, partly inspired by films from France by François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard; and Miklós Jancsó's *Agnus Dei* is his idiosyncratic take on the failed 1919 Hungarian Revolution and its aftermath in a small Hungarian village. All three films are beautifully restored with new sub-titles and highly informative booklets

giving background information to the films (here I must confess I wrote the booklet for *Merry-Go-Round*). Both the Gaál and Fábri films were voted among the ten best Hungarian films of all time by a panel of Hungarian film journalists. Well worth the £39 cost: secondrundvd.com □



PCS plans to move on pay and cost of living



John Moloney

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of our union, PCS, on 9 December will discuss a proposal for a consultative ballot of the entire civil service membership for industrial action as part of a national campaign around the cost of living.

Whilst the union has been running a campaign on this for some time, we now have to move things up and test the mood of members. There's undoubtedly a huge amount of work to do but the ballot will give us a focus to our work.

In addition to this, I will be arguing for parallel campaigns for our culture sector, Metropolitan Police, and privatised members.

In my view it's essential the ballot is not just a passive opinion poll. We need to use it to organise. That means not only conducting a yes-no poll on whether people are prepared to take action, but using the whole period of the ballot to launch discussions about strategy, the exact demands we should raise, what kinds of action we should take if and when we're in a position to do that.

The timetable proposed in the proposal that'll come before the NEC suggests a ballot running from mid-February to mid-March, so we have around two months of campaigning from now to build towards that, plus the period of the ballot itself.

It will be a test of union organisation. The campaign needs to be both "top down", in terms of the union's national leadership actually leading and taking initiative, and "bottom up", in terms of the rank-and-file membership being fully engaged and the rep and activist layer in workplaces driving the campaign.

We hope other unions will also be taking action over pay and related cost-of-living issues in 2022. If so, we will look to coordinate activity. □

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

Goldsmiths sets plans for January

By Cathy Nugent

With one week remaining of the three weeks of strike at Goldsmiths University of London (23 November to 13 December), the local branch of the University and College Union (UCU) is planning an escalation of its dispute against management's threatened 52 job cuts, part of an extensive "fire and rehire" plan, alongside radical restructuring at the college which will see further cuts.

Already the branch has requested the national union apply an academic boycott on Goldsmiths. The national union will back up the local dispute by asking for a range of actions which might include asking external academics to avoid contact with the university such as speaking opportunities and visiting positions.

On 6 December the branch passed a motion setting out a framework for second term action:

"If a resolution can not be reached through negotiation: to be prepared to take the following measures as a form of escalation – strike action consisting of 21 consecutive days of strike action starting from a date to be decided by members at a branch meeting early in January 2022; to prepare to extend our mandate for a summer marking and assessment boycott by means of a strategically timed rebalot if necessary; to continue to take action short of strike for the length of the dispute..."

In the meantime Goldsmiths Unison



is organising an indicative ballot of its members affected by the cuts, and students at the college have launched a fee strike, just one of very many student solidarity actions alongside teach-outs over the weeks.

The UCU branch needs to raise a lot of money for the hardship fund, especially to help the most precariously employed and low-paid staff. Please help by donating to the strike fund, or send to "UCU Goldsmiths College Hardship Fund", Account number 20392303, Sort: 60-83-01, UCU, Office 4, 18 Laurie Grove, London, SE14 6NH. Live updates on Twitter @GoldsmithsUCU □

Unison local government: vote yes for action

By Katy Dollar

Unison members in schools and local government will be receiving their ballot papers in the week starting 5 December. The union has started balloting 370,000 council and school staff for strike action over the "inadequate" pay offer. It is calling on its members to vote for strike action.

Unison, GMB, and Unite have called for a 10% pay rise for council workers. Members in all three unions have voted to reject the offer. Unite are due to ballot soon, and the GMB has gone back to members for further consultation.

Unison head of local government Mike Short said: "This inadequate pay offer shows [workers] are undervalued, particularly with the cost of living being ramped up. They should be given the credit they're due and rewarded properly".

The anti-union laws mean Unison requires a 50% turnout, 185,000 ballots returned by post, in order to go ahead with strikes. This will be difficult to achieve, especially with many local

government workers working from home.

All members should vote yes for action and get organised in their branch to maximise turnout.

Unison's consultation of members in NHS England about action on their pay closed on 5 December. Detailed results are not out yet, but on 7 Dec members were messaged to say "we have not heard from enough members to be confident we could progress to a formal ballot which would meet the legal threshold". (Officials gave 45% as their minimum target turnout).

With a sprawling workforce, spread across many grades and sectors and shift patterns, it would always be difficult to get high turnout without officials deploying the union's full resources for an intense campaign, and they hadn't done that.

The RCN, the biggest union among nurses, reported on 2 December about its consultation. In England, 23% voted, with 89% for action short of strike. 54% for strike. In Wales, 29% voted, 91% for action short of strike, 56% for strikes. □

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



Strong student backing for uni strikes

By a UCU activist

University staff walked out for three days on 1-3 December as national disputes kicked off over pensions, pay and conditions.

Fifty-eight universities are taking action: some over proposed cuts to the USS pension scheme, some over the national claim on pay, workload, equalities and casualisation, and some in both disputes. The cuts to pensions would see a typical member facing a thirty-six per cent cut to guaranteed pension provision, while pay has fallen by 20% in real terms over the past twelve years thanks to below-inflation pay rises.

Precarity

Many casualised staff shared stories of precarious employment on social media during strike days, including workers who slept in libraries, cars and on friends' floors in order to make ends meet. Across the country there were lively picket lines and protests, with local marches in London and Manchester attracting hundreds of participants.

Student backing for the strike has been impressive, with university buildings occupied in Manchester and Sheffield. In Sheffield University and College Union (UCU) members have also voted for action in a separate local dispute over the threatened closure of the archaeology department and broader restructuring.

With the initial strikes over, the dispute now turns to a period of Action Short of a Strike (ASOS). This begins with a "work to contract", in which staff will refuse to work more than contracted hours, or, in the case of academic staff with no fixed working hours, log and via the union publicise the quantity of extra hours managers re-

quire them to do. The union has so far not called on members to refuse to reschedule teaching missed during the strikes, relying instead on the fact it will be very hard in practice to timetable extra sessions at this late stage in term.

The key now for branches with active strike or ASOS mandates is sustaining an effective ASOS campaign through December and January, a period which in many universities is focused on assessment, with teaching restarting in late January or early February for the second semester. This will be a chance to escalate the action with a refusal to mark essays and exams.

A marking boycott escalating to strike action once teaching resumes would put management on the spot, but it's important for branches to organise regular contact and meetings to ensure members aren't left feeling isolated in a period when many people will work from home.

Alongside this action, many branches that did not make the 50% threshold in the first ballot – some by just a handful of votes – will be rebalancing. Organisation in those branches is equally vital to ensure the national dispute has maximum strength.

Student support for both ballots and ongoing action is also essential. Management will try and play off students against staff. But after the experience of the Covid pandemic when many students were first locked down (and in some cases literally locked up) in halls then refused refunds for accommodation they couldn't use, there's a much sharper awareness among students that university managers don't have their best interests at heart. Students should get involved in their local strike solidarity group – or if it doesn't exist, set one up. □

The future of Covid-curbing



By Martin Thomas

We know less about the future of the Omicron variant of the virus behind Covid than do the scientists who insist that it will be weeks before a clear picture.

But from what the scientists are reasonably sure of, already some political conclusions follow.

The months for which governments have stalled demands to requisition Big Pharma assets – at least the patents and the technical know-how which would allow ultra-fast worldwide expansion of vaccine production and distribution – will now take a toll in Africa.

The world job rate has been more or less static, around 0.4 doses per 100 people per day, since May. Big Pharma's profit drive has ruled supreme. When richer countries have dispatched vaccines to poorer countries, it has often been as an afterthought – at short notice, and of doses near expiry date, so it is difficult to use them efficiently.

Now, probably thanks to Omicron, Covid is spreading rapidly in South Africa and in the neighbouring countries (except, inexplicably, Botswana, where Omicron was first detected). South Africa has only 25% fully vaccinated, and the neighbouring countries many fewer.

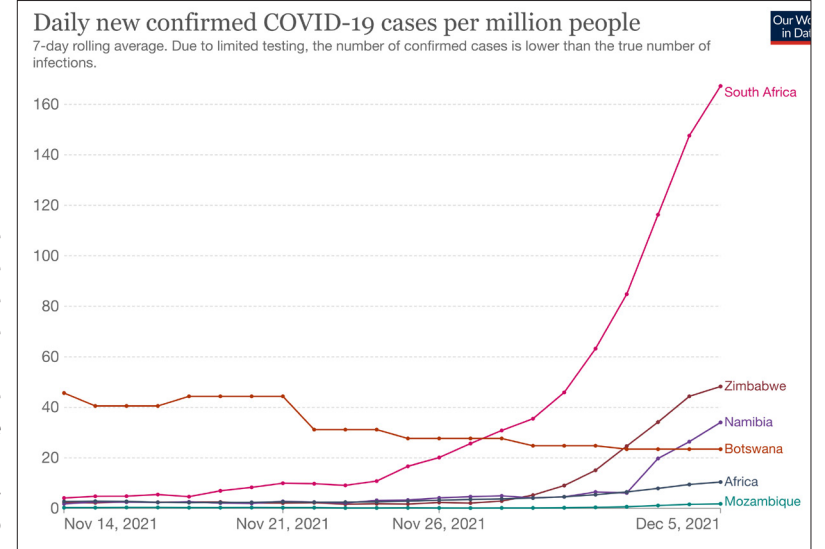
Africa's official (though surely underestimated) Covid death count so far is 16 per 100,000 population, much lower than Europe's 192. Even a more comparable estimate of excess deaths (by the *Economist* magazine) shows Africa at 65-190 per 100,000, while Europe is 320-340.

A younger population helps. Yet Omicron will hit harder in unvaccinated populations than vaccinated. Even a late effort for vaccine justice will give at least some protection against Omicron.

Scientists say that Omicron evades vaccine and previous-infection immunity sizeably, but those immunities will probably reduce severe infection. They don't know whether Omicron brings fiercer (or milder) symptoms than other variants.

Omicron has already spread to dozens of countries, and it will spread in Britain.

In Britain and other European countries, vax rates are already high. So the Covid death rate in Britain is one-tenth what it was when case



counts were similar in early 2021. But Israel, in August-September, and Chile, in early summer, have shown that even relatively high-vax countries can have Covid surges big enough to bring high death counts.

Britain's Covid count has been increasing and, even without Omicron, would be likely to increase faster as winter proper sets in (December-February), with more indoors crowding. And NHS hospitals are already overstretched, even before winter gets going.

Europe

Countries across Europe have responded to the recent new Delta surges, and the probability of bigger Omicron surges, with tighter mask and covid-distancing rules, with drives to get vax rates up from levels like Germany's 68% (the same as the UK) to Portugal's 88%, and with booster jabs. The Tories in Britain differ, relying almost exclusively on booster jabs.

Masks have limited effect; covid-distancing rules are clumsy and have many downsides, and they only delay the virus; but they do delay it, and delay can make a big difference here.

The labour movement can make a difference too. Many bosses are still pushing to get workers back into offices, though risk assessments made with earlier variants of the virus were already out of date with Delta, probably more so with Omicron. Unions should push the other way.

Demand workers' control of workplace safety, and full isolation pay for all! Demand the reintroduction of furlough payments to facilitate a quick shutdown of high-risk workplaces if Covid rates soar. And demand immediate requisitioning of extra resources for the NHS and social care! □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

SHEFFIELD JUSTEAT STRIKE: SUPPORT THE PICKETS AND THE STRIKE FUND!

By Michael Elms

On Monday 6 December, Stuart Delivery, which does deliveries for online takeaway retailer JustEat, implemented a 24% cut in the per-delivery base rate of pay for couriers in Sheffield. The pay cut had already been postponed for over a month, following a militant display from Sheffield drivers.

The 6 December strike was solid. Drivers maintained picket lines at seven of the nine McDonald's restaurants across the city. As a result of strong picketing but also sympathy among McDonald's staff, all but two of the strike-hit McDonald's branches turned off their JustEat tablets. This effectively ended trading on that platform for the night.

The strike is open-ended. Every day in the week of 6 December, from 5pm-10pm, all McDonald's orders in Sheffield will be declined by drivers. After one week of action the strike's target list will be expanded to take in an additional large client of JustEat.

This is one of the most ambitious programmes of industrial action, if not the most ambitious, undertaken by gig economy delivery workers in UK history. The Sheffield couriers' branch of the IWGB union numbers over 80 members and has been growing daily in the run-up to the strike. This level of organisation and militancy is



the fruit of two years of organising work to which Workers' Liberty has been central, after our activists initiated the organising drive at a public meeting in summer 2019.

Cost

Drivers estimate that the first night of the strike cost between £10,000 and £15,000 in lost delivery sales. The workforce in Sheffield understands the strike and has chosen to support it, in part because the pay cut is so drastic.

Drivers have been motivated by stories from drivers in other cities where the pay cut has been rolled out without organised resistance. The company Stuart argues that the lower base rate is compensated by mileage-based pay and discretionary "multiplier" bonuses. One driver from Plymouth exposed this fiction in a widely-circulated voice note. He said, "I'm probably about £150 down a week. I do more hours for less. We don't do a lot of long trips, it's mostly short trips. The multipliers are getting less, on top of [the base pay cut]. They are also stopping multipli-

ers at 8pm. You do not earn the money that you used to previously: if you can stop this, stop this: because it's disgusting, what they're doing."

Sheffield drivers have received support from across the left and labour movement. As well as the Sheffield branch of Workers' Liberty, pickets on the first night were joined by volunteers from the Labour Party, ACORN, the student-based Sheffield Solidarity Group, the Greens, Socialist Alternative, and the Socialist Party. Addressing the drivers, Sheffield Heeley's Labour MP Louise Haigh said in a statement, "You have served us all through the pandemic; whilst others were working from home, you were working harder than ever, and you should be rewarded with proper pay and conditions [...] I will continue to do everything in my power to highlight your campaign and fight for your fair treatment."

It is vital that this mostly-migrant workforce be supported by a large strike fund. The labour movement must rally round to raise funds for this dispute. Success in this strike could open the floodgates to organising a currently unorganised sector.

To help: Sheffield residents should contact awl@workersliberty.org with the subject line "Stuart Strike" to volunteer for picket duty; donate at bit.ly/StuStrike □