

# Solidarity

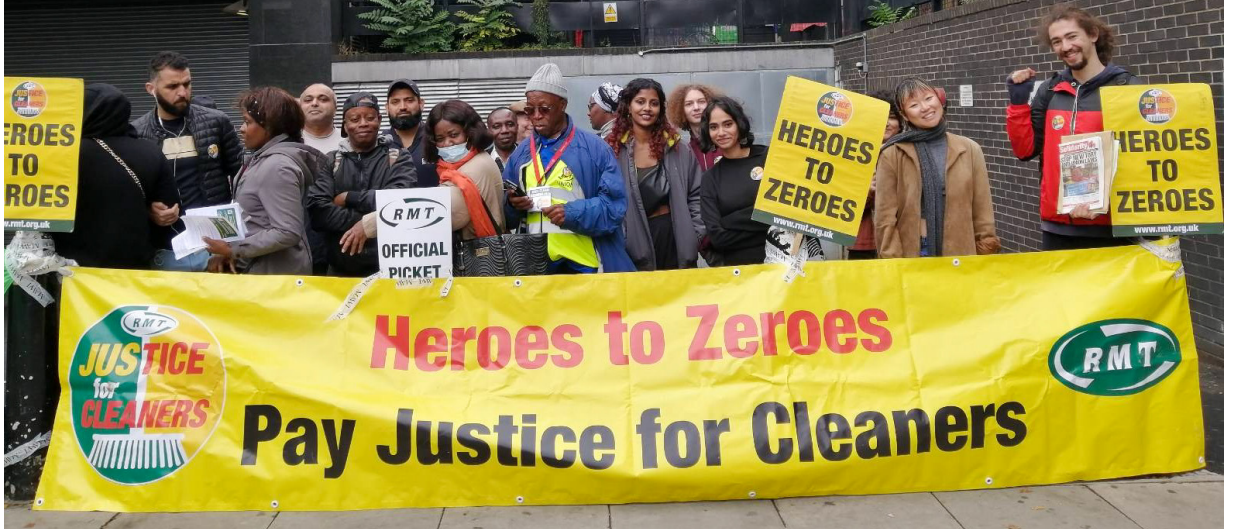
& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

# ACCELERATE, SPREAD AND UNITE STRIKES

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# Strikes pick up the pace



The nineteen (albeit scattered) days of strikes planned by postal workers; outsourced healthcare workers in Lancashire striking for 13 days from 27 September; the indefinite strike planned by housing repair workers in Barnet from 17 October; and other sustained strikes show a good way forward for the continuing strike wave.

The pace of action maintained by the rail unions in their national dispute, consisting of 24 or 48 hours of action at a time, with gaps of weeks between rounds of action, is becoming more an exception than the norm.

In all disputes, the question from which all determinations of strategy should proceed is: what will it take to win? Almost all employers will be able to endure occasional rounds of one or two-day strikes which, whilst impactful on the day, can invariably be absorbed. For strikes to win, employers must calculate that they will lose more – either through lost revenue, service disruption, or reputational damage – by facing down the union than it will cost them to concede at least some of the workers' demands. Employers faced with indefinite or sustained action are significantly more likely to make that calculation than those faced with only sporadic strikes.

The significant coordination of different unions' strikes seen on 1 October must also be repeated and extended.

That day saw rail workers in RMT, TSSA, Aslef, and Unite striking alongside postal workers in CWU and dock workers in Unite at Felixstowe and Liverpool, with joint strike rallies in many cities, mostly organised via the Enough is Enough campaign. That coordination, which *Solidarity* and others have advocated through our call to "unite the strikes", represents the best way to generalise action, turning a collection of industrial disputes happening in parallel towards becoming a class-wide fight-back against falling living standards.

## Pressure

Building local pressure for extensive coordination, through union branches, Trades Councils and ad hoc cross-union strike committees, offers a better path to a general strike than seeing a general strike as an instrument which we plead for some body – the TUC, or a collection of unions – to announce.

Developing rank-and-file confidence and independence remains the key task for socialist workplace activists involved in the current wave. Loyalty to the union is necessary to hold organisation together, especially during protracted disputes, and it is inevitable that this will sometimes be expressed as loyalty to union leaders.

A rank-and-file strategy does not require seeing union leaders as traitors-in-waiting, cooking up devious plans to sabotage strikes. It is instead a matter of encouraging workers to assert their right to determine the direction of their own disputes, rather than waiting for orders from above.

Those orders may be good or bad, and it is not automatic that greater rank-and-file self-assertion and democracy leads immediately to greater militancy. There may be instances in which union leaders are more radical than the membership in terms of the action they are prepared to propose. But maximising democracy is a good thing in and of itself; the socialist project starts from the development of class consciousness and confidence, convincing workers of the idea that we can determine our own destinies.

If workers understand our role as simply being to follow union orders, that can brake action and impede building up that class confidence. If workers don't see our own unions as something we directly and democratically control, then the idea that we could directly and democratically control the running of society will always seem like an impossible horizon.

As the strike wave continues against the backdrop of Tory government chaos and Labour surging in the polls, questions of politics will be increasingly and unavoidably posed. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said in a recent interview that socialism, which he defined as "the elimination of poverty", will be achieved "through pragmatic reforms to our system", rather than via an "ideology-based party".

For union leaders to even talk explicitly about socialism as a political horizon is a step forward, even if their definition and method of achieving it are limited or wrongheaded. Asserting that socialism, however defined, can be



achieved via "pragmatic" reforms is, of course, a profoundly ideological claim.

## Comments

Lynch's comments give some insight into the thinking of at least a section of the trade union bureaucracy: that social transformation can be achieved via industrial disputes over economic issues, which win "pragmatic reforms". The union leaders accept campaign coordinations (Lynch is a leading spokesperson for Enough is Enough), but not an "ideology-based party", which attempts to organise workers across all fronts of class struggle – industrial, political, and ideological.

The working class movement in Britain has confronted these questions before. Part of what held back, limited, and ultimately defeated the immense upsurges of the 1970s was the failure to develop a programme for a workers' government, effectively abandoning the political terrain to a right-wing Labour leadership.

Winning the movement to that perspective – a perspective for workers' government, which must, by necessity, concern itself with "ideological" questions – is some way off, and the current wave may well recede before that is won. Even much greater numbers of organised socialists than currently exist in Britain could not guarantee the success of a strike wave, or extend it at will into a movement for working-class power.

But if we commit ourselves to being educators, agitators, and organisers for working-class power, for socialism, within our own workplaces, then we work for the best results from the current battles, the best ongoing organisation to come out of them, the best lessons to be learned. □

## Strikes

**Since 5 Sep:** Criminal barristers on indefinite strike (at the time of writing, barristers were voting on whether to accept a proposed settlement, involving additional funding for fee increases)

**Various days from 20 Sep-11 Oct:** Non-academic staff at many universities (Unison) strike. Details: [bit.ly/uni-unison](http://bit.ly/uni-unison)

**27 Sep-9 Oct:** OCS healthcare workers in Lancashire (Unison) strike

**27 Sep-5 Oct:** Dock workers at Felixstowe (Unite) strike

**4-6, 11-13, 18-20 Oct and 1-3 Nov:** Teachers at Calverton school in Newham (NEU) strike

**5 Oct:** Train drivers at 12 TOCs (Aslef), rail workers at Cross Country (TSSA) and Network Rail workers (Unite) strike

**6, 10, 20, and 24 Oct:** BT workers (CWU) strike

**6 Oct:** Rail workers at GWR (TSSA) strike

**6-7 Oct:** FE workers (UCU) strike

**6-7 and 10-11 Oct:** Arriva bus drivers

in Kent (Unite) strike

**8 Oct:** Rail workers (RMT) strike

**10-11 Oct:** FE workers (UCU) strike

**From 11 Oct:** Dock workers in Liverpool strike again (after having returned on 3 Oct from a 2-week strike) unless they have got a settlement in talks starting 4 Oct, and will strike again, week on week off, until they get a settlement

**13, 20, 25 Oct and 28 Nov:** all Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike. There will be other partial CWU strikes in Royal Mail in Nov-December (see below)

**From 15 Oct:** West Midlands Metro workers (Unite) launch 52 days of strikes, up to start of January

**From 17 Oct:** Housing repair workers in Barnet, north London (Unison) launch an indefinite strike, the first ever sanctioned by Unison's Industrial Action Committee

**18-20 Oct:** FE workers (UCU) strike

**2, 8, 14, 23, 30 Nov:** Department-specific strikes of Royal Mail workers (CWU)

**3, 9, 15, 24 Nov and 1 Dec:** Depart-

ment-specific strikes of Royal Mail workers (CWU)

**4, 10, 16, 25 Nov and 2 Dec:** Department-specific strikes of Royal Mail workers (CWU)

## Ballots

**Until 21 Oct:** University workers (UCU) ballot for action over pay, working conditions, and pensions

**Until 14 Oct:** School support staff (NEU) indicative ballot for action over pay and conditions

**Until 19 Oct:** Amazon workers in Coventry (GMB) ballot for action over pay

**Until 14 Oct:** Teachers (NEU) indicative ballot for action over pay

**Until 27 Oct:** Midwives in Scotland (RCM) ballot for action over pay

**6 Oct-2 Nov:** Nurses (RCN) ballot for strikes over pay

**Until 7 Nov:** Civil servants (PCS) ballot for action over pay, job cuts, and other cost-of-living issues

**27 Oct-25 Nov:** NHS staff (Unison) ballot for action over pay □



## Corrections

The image captioned "Karl Korsch" in *Solidarity* 646 was actually György Lukács. □

# Free Our Unions protest on 10 October

By Ollie Moore

The Free Our Unions campaign, along with Earth Strike UK's Empower the Unions initiative, has called a protest at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in central London, at 5:30pm on 10 October. BEIS will likely be one of the departments involved in drawing up new anti-union legislation, and is also a key department in terms of climate and energy policy. Earth Strike's Empower the Unions initiative focuses on the ways in which anti-union laws constrain workers from taking action over the climate.

Free Our Unions also held a fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference (26 September). The platform speakers were Labour MP Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Fire Brigades Union National Officer Riccardo la Torre, and Unite Executive Committee member Jane Stewart. Tony Byrne, a striking train driver, RMT branch chair, and, until he was summar-

ily excluded a few days before, Newark Labour Party's delegate to conference, chaired the meeting.

Opening the meeting, la Torre emphasised how anti-strike laws constrain unions across a number of fronts, leaving them fighting with one hand tied behind their backs. He argued for workplace activists to make agitation against the anti-union laws part of their day-to-day organising activity

## 2 November

Attendees discussed the urgent need to press unions into action against proposed anti-union laws, as part of an effort to build up the confidence to defy them. The TUC has called a lobby of Parliament on 2 November over a number of demands, including defence of the right to strike. It will be frankly negligent if this is the only official action taken around the issue.

Union leaders including the RMT's Mick Lynch and the CWU's Dave Ward

have spoken vaguely about the need for mass militant action in response to the imposition of new anti-union laws. But why wait until the laws are imposed? A visible, assertive campaign against them in advance will put the movement in a much stronger position to resist them once they are implemented.

RMT's 2021 AGM passed a policy committing the union to "non-complicity" in setting minimum service levels during transport strikes. Lynch and other RMT officials never mention this, presumably out of reluctance to be seen to advocate breaking the proposed law in advance. But the policy was adopted unanimously, and now, against the backdrop of a rising strike wave and an unpopular and chaotic Tory government, is surely a time for attempting to push the envelope.

Multiple unions have AGM policies committing them to call demonstration against anti-union laws. Demos and



others protests won't stop the laws by themselves, but will contribute to laying the foundations for defiance. Union leaders would do better to enact those policies, and organise immediate campaigning, than make vague noises about radical action at some indeterminate point in the future.

Free Our Unions has also produced a new briefing for activists on Truss's proposed anti-union laws: [freeourunions.org](https://freeourunions.org) □

# Strikes are spreading

Workers at offshore energy firm Orsted struck over pay from 23-24 September and 30 September-1 October. Although the workers are in RMT, which organises offshore energy workers, the company has done a sweetheart deal with the Prospect union.

Outsourced cleaners on Avanti West Coast returned to the picket line on 23 September, in their dispute for

increased pay. Teachers at Calverton school in Newham, east London, struck over changes to terms and conditions on 20, 21, 27, 28 and 29 September, with further strikes planned through October and November.

Cleaners at University of the Arts London struck from 26-30 September, and cleaners at the Royal Opera House, members of CAIWU, struck on 30

September. Security guards at New Covent Garden market and at the HSBC building in Canary Wharf, both in Unite, struck from 25-27 September and 28-30 September respectively.

Workers on London's Woolwich Ferry have voted to strike, as have CWU members working as cleaners and maintenance engineers for Royal Mail Property and Facilities, and

outsourced security guards in the IWGB union at University College London.

The Fire Brigades Union is preparing to ballot its members for strikes, following a pay offer of just two percent.

Members of the Scottish teachers' union EIS voted by a 94 percent majority to reject a five percent pay offer, with 91 percent indicating their willingness to strike, on a 78 percent turnout. The union will now move to a statutory strike ballot.

The Junior Doctors' Committee of the British Medical Association, which organised strikes in 2016, says it will begin a ballot of its members for industrial action "around 9 January". The BMA has "made £2 million available from its reserves to help meet the financial requirements for ballot preparations and other steps towards industrial action by doctors", and says "steps are also being taken [...] to create a strike hardship fund." □

# Battles win concessions

Some disputes where sustained action was taken, or threatened, have led to significant concessions. The first one was Scottish local government workers, who by selective action forced four successive increases in the offer, from 2% to over 10% for the lowest-paid. Now Arriva bus drivers in north and east London have called off an indefinite strike planned from 4 October and accepted an 11 percent pay increase.

Arriva drivers in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Hertfordshire also called off strikes and accepted a deal

worth between 10 and 11 percent. Although the pay increases remain below inflation, they are a significant uplift on Arriva's initial offers of 4-6 percent.

The strike in north and east London was suspended on 28 September, with nearly a week still to go until the strike. Unite officials described the suspension as a "gesture of goodwill." It would surely have been possible for Unite to organise an electronic vote of members on whether to accept the offer in that week, and suspend action only if and when the offer

was accepted. Nevertheless, the significant increase shows the power that even a threat of indefinite or sustained strikes can have.

Unite bus drivers at London United/ RATP, which operates routes in west and southwest London, have also settled their dispute, accepting a 10 percent increase. Workers struck four times to improve an initial offer of 3.6 percent.

Arriva drivers in Kent remain in dispute, striking on 30 September and planning further strikes on 6-7 and 10-11 October. □

## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, and unless otherwise stated those below are online over zoom. We have many local (in-person) meetings, see [online](https://workersliberty.org).

**Sunday 9 October, 11am:** Ecosocialist reading group – *ReGenesis* by George Monbiot

**Sunday 9 October 1.30pm:** Rebel Footprints – a radical history walk in New Cross

**Sunday 23 October, 6.30pm:** The ideological roots of the Truss government

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



# A right royal cop-out



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In an extraordinary editorial ("Funerals, bank holidays and collectivism: for a socialist approach") that appeared online dated 18 September, the *Morning Star* warned against "confus[ing] public displays of affection for Elizabeth II with intrinsically reactionary political outlooks", advising that we "should recognise the instinct for community and belonging which can be channelled along these lines."

The editorial then went to describe objections to shops being closed on the day of the funeral (were there many such objections?) as "choruses of individualist outrage at decisions by retailers like McDonald's or Greggs to close on the grounds that we might fancy a Big Mac or a vegan sausage roll."

Shamefully and bizarrely, the political conclusion of all this was that "while the motives – and, given arrests, the courage – of many sporting the placards saying Not My King should be applauded, it is not a socialist slogan. Like

'Not My President' in the United States, it expresses a refusal to endorse something but can also imply a rejection of the legitimacy of majority opinion itself. Socialists know majority opinion is not necessarily correct, but our task is to win it to support for socialism – not set ourselves up as self-righteously independent."

Like the paper's craven appeal to the supposed "majority of workers" to justify its support for Brexit, this was giving up on any concept of independent working class politics: a right royal cop-out.

The immediate reaction of the *Morning Star* to the death of Elizabeth Windsor had been different. An editorial on 9 September (the day after the royal demise) was headed "Calls for 'national unity' must not be allowed to disarm the working class" and contained the following:

"The death of Queen Elizabeth II will place huge pressure on workers and trade unions to park their industrial struggles in the name of national unity... Nobody will say that the Queen's death means company bosses should drop their vicious attacks on workers' rights as a mark of respect..."

"Propaganda about the nation coming together is just that. The Conserv-

atives are not concerned with the 'national interest' but only the interests of their class: when we doff our caps we abandon the interests of our own".

This would have to have been written before several unions, including the RMT, announced they were calling off planned action.

The very next day, in the weekend edition (10-11 September), the *Morning Star* front page quoted Communist Party of Britain general secretary Robert Griffiths thus:

"Millions of people face enormous challenges in the weeks and months ahead and the role of the Communist Party is to prepare for the battles ahead, not to indulge in infantile posturing or to attack trade unions in struggle for their tactical decisions".

By then, presumably, Alex Gordon (Communist Party of Britain Central Committee member and RMT president) had let it be known that he didn't want the *Morning Star* slagging off the RMT's decision.

Most people on the left would accept that the royal death posed some real difficulties for unions in industrial dispute: should they risk losing momentum by postponing action, or risk alienating public support (and the support of some of their own members) by



The future King meets another un-elected head of state, Cuban President, Miguel Diaz-Canel

continuing regardless? It was a genuine dilemma and there was nothing wrong with union leaders taking it seriously. The rather grovelling tributes to the Queen from the RMT and others were another matter.

All the more reason, you'd have thought, for a socialist publication to challenge the idea that workers have anything in common with the royals and other billionaires and millionaires: an idea that the first Labour leader Keir Hardie said "blinds the eyes of the people". All the more reason to champion those who bravely protested against the monarchy – and in some cases were met with police repression and even arrest. But no. □

# The Russian people are winning



Eric Lee

To the surprise of Russia and everyone, the Ukraine war has taken a remarkable turn in the last few weeks. Initially, the Ukrainians did well by just surviving. Then, they began a slow, systematic counter-offensive in the southern part of the country. Everyone expected that to drag on for a long time. Russia deployed units from its much-depleted army to counter the Ukrainians -- thereby creating vulnerabilities in other parts of the front. The Ukrainians speedily exploited these and seized thousands of square kilometres of previously-occupied territory.

Putin's response has been one of panic. Hastily-called referenda took place in Russian-occupied regions where up to 99% of voters -- with guns held to their heads -- chose to

join the Russian Federation. A botched mobilisation, ostensibly of reservists who already have combat training, has resulted in physical attacks on military recruitment centres across the country and pitched battles between draftees and police in some regions.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of young Russians have fled the country, some grabbing flights out at exorbitant prices, others driving to the borders with Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The long queues of cars at the Georgian border show how unpopular the war has suddenly become.

All this reminds me of something we saw before in Russia more than a century ago.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, leading thinkers in the Second International were focused on Russia. Karl Kautsky and Alexander Helphand (Parvus) concluded that the autocratic regime was in a precarious position. The

tsar, they believed, could be toppled if Russia were to be defeated in a war.

The tsarist regime was foolishly confident that it could easily defeat Japan, which they considered to be a backward country. The Japanese victory in the war, which began in February 1904, provided an opportunity to test Kautsky and Helphand's hypothesis. It turned out that they were right. In early 1905, a revolution broke out across the empire.

As Lenin wrote after the fall of Port Arthur to the Japanese, "the Russian autocracy, not the Russian people, started this colonial war ... The autocratic regime, not the Russian people, has suffered ignoble defeat. The Russian people have gained from the defeat of the autocracy."

Lenin's words ring true today as one village after another, one city after another, are liberated by the victorious Ukrainian armed forces. The Ukrainians living in those

towns and villages are regaining their freedom. But the Russian people are gaining something too. They are being liberated from the role of colonial occupier -- a role they did not seek.

Russia is not a democracy. The last time Russians had a chance to vote in a truly free election in which all parties could participate was in 1917. The governments that have ruled ever since do so without a genuine popular mandate.

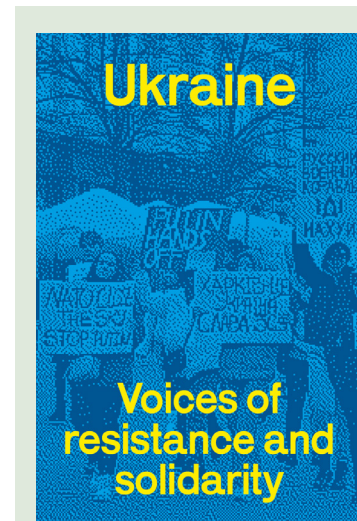
When trying to judge the responsibility of the Russian people for the war in Ukraine, that must be remembered. We must also not forget that state censorship has never really gone away in Russia. The population is informed primarily by state-controlled media, such as broadcast television.

This is Putin's war and his defeat. Until he ordered the mobilisation of his army last week, most young Russians seemed not to care. Thousands were arrested protesting the war,

but most were indifferent. Not anymore.

Putin's army is losing the war in Ukraine. The Ukrainians are winning. And when they win, the Russian people win too. □

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



New book from the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. £10: buy at [bit.ly/usc-book](https://bit.ly/usc-book) □

# Transphobes lose it over storytelling alien



**Women's  
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Transphobic twitter is ablaze with news that a home counties library service has introduced a new mascot: Tala the Storyteller, a brightly coloured alien.

Hertfordshire Council (Tory-controlled) confirmed that Tala the Storyteller is a "bright, vibrant creature" and "the star of Hertfordshire libraries" for a series aimed at catching the attention and imagination of toddlers and babies. Tala's creators, Emma Phillips and Eva Povey, said they were inspired by the children's artwork at library workshops.

"They helped us to understand what children liked best in a creature," they said in a statement.

The Bookstart Bear is being withdrawn nationally and "gender critical" activists including Maya Forstater are pretty sure the replacement is part of the library world's trans agenda.

Forstater tweeted "A mother w her baby daughter @HitchinLibrary @HertsLibraries Rhyme time (aimed at 0-5 year olds) messaged me: 'Book Start Bear has been retired and replaced with Talia, a 'trans' bear, with they/them pronouns.' 'I cannot express how upset I feel. Why do children need this?'"

Hitchin Library, one of the county's libraries, hit back with a response. "Just to confirm – Tala isn't trans, they are an alien."

The Council later released a statement:

"In the absence of a gender for this alien creature, we simply use gender neutral language when talking about them to the public," they added.

The Internet mob reject Tala the Storyteller and want the Bookstart Bear back to protect children from the horror of not knowing their storyteller's gender.

Bookstart is BookTrust's early years programme. Every child in England and Wales gets a free Bookstart pack before they are 12 months old and again aged 3-4 years. There are also black-and-white booklets for newborns and dual language books. The programme includes Bookshine for children who are deaf, Booktouch for children who are blind or partially sighted and Bookstart Star for children with conditions affecting their fine motor skills.

The pilot for the programme was initiated in Birmingham in 1992 and involved 300 babies. The project built on

previous research which identified the significance of reading with very young children. The research found that Bookstart children began school with significant advantages. With increased funding for early years under Blair the programme grew. By 1999, many local authorities were eager to participate in the Bookstart programme and by March 2000, 92% of local authorities had joined the programme.

On Friday 17 December 2010 it was announced that the government would cut its entire £13 million annual grant to BookTrust's English bookgifting schemes. After a public campaign the government announced it would negotiate with BookTrust on renewal of the funding. BookTrust continues to be supported using public funding by Arts Council England but with significantly reduced funding.

Cuts to bookgifting, library and children's centres closing seems a far better reason to be angry than a library service not gendering its alien storyteller. Since the last Labour government the UK has lost thousands of librarians, hundreds of libraries and 30% of library funding.

Oddly the gender warriors appear not to have noticed that the Bookstart Bear wasn't gendered either. In some authorities kids or librarians named and gendered their local bear but nationally the bear was not referred to by any pronouns, merely referred to as Bear. The Bookstart Bear is in fact two bears, the child bear from *Bear's Reading Adventure* and their adult carer also called Bookstart Bear. Neither were gendered in the many books and games about the family. Trans bear representation was not the initial point of the genderless bear, though is an additional advantage.

The bears were intended as cyphers for all children and all carers. The message of the gender neutral mascot was reading is not only for boys or only for girls, mums and dads should do bedtime stories. Whatever your gender, reading can help you be cleverer, happier and more empathetic.

So why did Tala upset transphobes in a way the Bookstart Bears didn't? One possibility is that in their brightly coloured dungarees and woolly hat Tala sort of dresses like a queer university student, which may have ruffled some feathers. Another is that the moral panic paranoia is so great that transphobes see every new thing as an attack by the trans agenda. In particular from libraries, which have been central to the culture wars.

The anti-universalist and anti-expert and anti-stance of populist movements



implies an antipathy toward institutions conveying knowledge. Add to this that your librarian might be offering your children knowledge you do not want them to have.

In the US, local book banning is so widespread the library community created Banned Book Week, an annual event around the freedom to read. According to the American Library Association, the most challenged book of 2021 was Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer*, a memoir about what it means to be nonbinary. Other books on the most-challenged list include Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

In the UK the focus has been Drag Queen Storytime and Black History Month events. Thanks to Hertfordshire Libraries the library fightback against the right's attacks has a mascot. □



## Activist Agenda

After a Labour Party conference fringe meeting of 150 or so (held as part of The World Transformed), the Labour Campaign for Free Movement is planning activity, including further distribution of its freesheet produced for the conference.

The [Labour Campaign for Council Housing](#) did best of all the left campaigns in the party in motions for conference, but then got none of them debated because the right won the ballot on priorities for debate.

It insists: "Housing as 'a fundamental human right' cannot be provided without ending... 'Right to Buy' nor without funding a large scale council house building programme of at least 100,000 a year". □

• Links for campaigns and motions at [workersliberty.org/agenda](http://workersliberty.org/agenda)



## 280 million years too late



### Letter

Stuart Jordan's article "The case against fracking" ([Solidarity 646](#)) outlines the many downsides of fracking. In particular, he reports geologists' opinions that the amount of gas available would supply less than 5% of Britain's domestic supply in five years' time.

It may be worse than that. Results from exploratory drilling before the moratorium were disappointing, with rock samples found to contain only small quantities of extractable gas or oil. Unlike American deposits, these were at low pressure, making it even more difficult to extract usable quantities.

This low pressure is a result of Britain's complex geological history, where the strata have been lifted and buried more than once by plate tectonic movements, with faults and fractures allowing most of the methane, produced 280 million years ago, to leak away into the atmosphere. This contrasts with the much simpler geology of North America, as Stuart Haszeldine, Professor of Geology at Edinburgh University, [points out](#).

This reality has been recognised by Chris Cornelius, founder of Cuadrilla Resources, who dug the first exploratory wells in Britain. He [says](#) that "no sensible investor" would put money into UK fracking and the announcement of the end of the moratorium was merely a "political gesture".

It's difficult to see how fracking could take off without a generous handout (sorry, energy price guarantee) from the government and even more difficult to see it having an effect on energy supplies in Britain. We're 280 million years too late! □

Les Hearn, London

# Iran rises up for women's rights

By Mohan Sen

Dozens have been killed, hundreds injured and thousands arrested in the mass protests sweeping Iran since 17 September, following the killing of 22 year old Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini by the "morality police".

One underground socialist workers' group described developments as the "biggest protest event in the history of four decades of the Islamic Republic's repression". It may well be the most powerful of many challenges to the Islamist regime since it confiscated and destroyed the Iranian revolution in 1978-79.

On 13 September Mahsa Amini, visiting Tehran with her family, was arrested for "bad hijab", i.e. wearing her headscarf too loosely, and for her trousers being too tight.

Iranian socialists point out that the Gasht-e Ershad morality police operate mainly in poorer areas, seeking to monitor and impose compliance with (recently strengthened) dress codes on mainly working-class and middle-class women. Rich and ruling-class Iranians are much less likely to be targeted and can get out of trouble much more easily.

## Arrest

Two days after Amini's arrest, the police issued a statement claiming she "suddenly suffered from a heart problem" and was "immediately taken to hospital". A string of evidence quickly emerged that she had been badly beaten. Hospital officials issued a statement saying that "upon admission at the centre the patient was already brain-dead".

Amini died on 16 September. Demonstrations in Tehran and cities in Iranian Kurdistan quickly spread around the country, including to con-

servative areas not known for protests.

Slogans reportedly raised on demonstrations include "Killed for a hijab – how much more humiliation?"; "You are our ISIS"; "Death to the oppressor, whether shah or 'leader'" (i.e. Islamic Republic "Supreme Leader" Ayatollah Khamenei). Demonstrators are demanding an end to compulsory veiling and abolition of the morality police.

Many women, particularly students, have publicly removed and in some cases burnt their hijabs, with some cutting their hair or shaving their heads. Significantly, though, there are also reports of hijab-wearing women joining the protests. And men are protesting too.

## Access

While the regime shut off internet access and the police and other state forces attacked, beat and shot demonstrators, the Iranian majlis (parliament) met not to discuss why the Iranian people are so angry but how the protests are supposedly the work of foreign governments.

There do seem to be divisions in Iran's elite as a result of the protests, but the dominant factions of the regime are working to suppress them.

Ayatollah Khamenei – who vocally condemned American police over the murder of George Floyd – has claimed the protests are organised by the US and "the Zionist regime" and given strong backing to the repression.

The remarkable force of the protests surely stems from the connection of the immediate issues to sharp oppression of women in Iranian society more broadly; and to the regime's wider denial of basic freedoms. The even wider background is the growth of economic insecurity and inequality as Iran's ruling class has deepened its neoliberal policies over decades. Since 2018 there

has been an upsurge of strikes. The protests have developed, students have come to the forefront, with big rallies at universities and regime symbols torn down. (Despite the misogynistic nature of the Islamist regime, a majority of university students are now women.) University and school workers have joined student protests.

On 2 October security forces shot student protesters in Tehran; student mobilisations have since escalated.

There are reports of workers recently involved in struggles organising in support.

Workers from the Haft Tappeh sugarcane factory, since 2014 one of the centres of working-class struggle in Iran, have visited Amini's grave and met her family to express solidarity.

Workers in Iran's pivotal oil industry are threatening strike action in support of the protests, with groups of contracted and then directly employed workers issuing remarkable [statements](#) at the end of September.

Big solidarity demonstrations in London have attracted relatively few non-Iranians. We will be trying to change that. □

## Brazil election still in doubt

Brazil's presidential election will go to a second round on 30 October, after Lula of the Workers' Party (running in coalition with a bourgeois centrist candidate) beat outgoing far-right president Jair Bolsonaro by 48.4% to 43.3% in the first round on 2 October. Background: [bit.ly/lx-braz](https://bit.ly/lx-braz) □



"Almost two million [in the UK] report Covid-19 symptoms persisting for more than four weeks; 807,000 for more than a year; and 403,000 for more than two years... For a substantial minority, 'recovery' currently means developing the ability to manage limited energy, continuing pain, cognitive limitations, and ongoing flare ups in what has become a long-term condition".

That summary, quoted from the [British Medical Journal](#), also notes that little is known about managing these conditions, let alone curing them, though research is under way and techniques have been "copied over" from other conditions.

Meanwhile, by 26 Sep the rate of hospitalisations with Covid in England had more than doubled from its low on 10 September. A further Covid surge, smaller or larger, is almost certain in the winter, and may be coupled with high rates of flu, since flu immunity has declined with low rates in the last two winters.

Covid rates are also rising in Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, and Taiwan, though on current counts not yet in other Northern Hemisphere countries. We call for:

- a sustained public-health testing-and-surveillance system
- good sick pay for all
- restore NHS funding and repeal privatisation
- requisition private hospitals to augment NHS resources
- bringing social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for staff
- specialist public clinics for post-Covid conditions, more research, and recognition of the conditions as a "disability"
- workers' control of workplace safety (especially ventilation)
- requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how, to speed vaccine production and delivery world-wide. □

# Russia's "no" to military call-up

By Michael Baker

The Russian government's "partial mobilisation" is the latest of an array of misguided and dangerous steps that have defined the invasion of Ukraine. Announced by Vladimir Putin and Minister for Defence Sergey Shoigu on the 21st of September, the supposed plan was to mobilise only the army "reserves" – those with recent military experience, of roughly fighting age. But in a country where military service is mandatory for all men, the pool of "reserve" is potentially very large.

The original speech announced 300,000 new soldiers. A whisper from the government suggested that the real number of required recruits may have been 1.2 million. It was not clear

which number was more realistic, or how successful any mobilisation drive would be at reaching either number, given the obvious failure of Russia's war to this point, and the successful ongoing Ukrainian counter-offensive.

Some experts correctly predicted that the mobilisation would not be happening equally across Russia's landmass. The Russian army has always depended on its ability to over-recruit among repressed ethnic minorities, who largely live in poorer regions a long way from the major cities, and are often tempted by the above-average military wage. Moscow and St. Petersburg are full of affluent white Russian liberals, with more access to higher education and foreign-language news sources, more access with contacts outside of Russia,

and more of a propensity to protest.

Reports came in quickly of mass mobilisation in regions such as Dagestan, Buryatia and Yakutia. There is no hard data, but video reports and personal testimonies suggest thousands of men from these regions are being recruited with little regard for how long ago they served, or how old they are. There are many recorded examples of men over 50 being sent draft papers. These regions, unsurprisingly, have also seen protests against the mobilisation. A video of an enrolment office in Dagestan shows local men hurling abuse at an enrolment officer, who is attempting to tell them that they will be "fighting for the future". "What are you talking about? We have no present!" replies one man.

Protests in the major cities have also been large. After several months of almost no arrests from street protest, there was a flurry of activity the night after the mobilisation was announced, with just under two thousand arrested. The primary slogan was nyet mogilizatsii – replacing the "b" in "mobilisation" to make "no to grave-ification".

Denis Zakharov, a Moscow activist, detailed his arrest and being given incorrectly filled-out draft papers in a Twitter thread, one of several accounts that confirms that arrested anti-mobilisation protestors are themselves being mobilised. Whether they, or any of the unwilfully-drafted men, will make good soldiers remains to be seen. □

# Labour conference shows need for political work in the unions

By Mohan Sen

At the Labour Party conference, 25-28 September in Liverpool, the Starmer leadership largely got its way. The left in Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) has fallen back significantly; but the decisive factor was a lack of strop-piness and political strategy from the union leaders.

The impact of growing working-class struggle in the UK was visible in the conference. It passed some good left-wing policies, mainly from the unions, whose motions could not be bureaucratically carved out as many left-wing CLPs' motions were. But it looked as if the unions had done a deal with Starmer: let some left-wing policies go through without resistance, adopt a less-cold tone on the strikes, and we'll give you a quiet conference and no rows about those conference policies being ignored in practice.

In advance of the conference, the unions did not challenge the expulsion

and suspension of delegates, ruling out of motions, etc. At the conference itself, a union majority supported all the leadership's regressive rule changes. The unions used their power to prioritise issues for debate to avoid controversial ones. They did not challenge manoeuvres to exclude demands that the leadership found inconvenient – notably public ownership of energy – and did not back challenges over existing conference policy being ignored.

Liverpool dockers were on strike during the conference. Left activists and MPs went (as individuals) to their picket lines; but the Unite delegates did not organise a visit; and when the dockers came to the conference, they did not mobilise people to join their protest, or even join it themselves, as a group.

Sadly, Momentum did little to get left-wing motions submitted or to organise delegates. It actively discouraged protest when Starmer had "God Save the King" played to conference. (LLI pro-

tested in its main bulletin and joined a minority of delegates pointedly disassociating inside).

Some of the text unions put to the conference was typically vague, but some of it was quite clear. The conference voted for:

- Supporting pay rises at least in-line with inflation.
- "Unequivocal support to all UK workers taking strike action" and for joining picket lines, including "all Labour MPs" doing so
- A £15 minimum wage
- Opposing privatisation, academisation and outsourcing; bringing services back in house; public ownership of the railways and Royal Mail specifically and of "essential services and utilities" generally (that last phrase was from Unite, though generally wording from the right-wing Unison was sharper than from Unite)
- A free, publicly funded and publicly provided social care system
- "Proper needs-based funding for local government", ie an implication of reversing the cuts
- "To return all privatised portions of the NHS to public control"

This builds on left-wing policies passed in 2021, including public ownership of energy and repeal of all anti-union laws. The issue is the weakness of campaigning demand Labour commits to them.

With motions for public ownership of energy and the broader Labour for a Green New Deal kept off the agenda, the composite passed on climate change was extremely bland. Ditto the composite on childcare.

The conference voted overwhelmingly for strong solidarity with Ukraine, but the composite was done so as to include right-wing CLPs' support for NATO and GMB's for higher UK military spending. It also dropped the positive

proposals for actually mobilising members put forward in the National Union of Mineworkers motion.

Unlike last year, when the unions voted down a CLP majority for proportional representation, this year both sections of the conference voted for, along with a call to abolish the House of Lords.

We should push wider programme to defend and extend democracy, while not treating PR as a panacea and while opposing Labour entering coalitions with the Lib Dems or SNP.

There were no motions on Brexit, on policing and criminal justice, or on international issues except Ukraine.

The leadership showed some small shifts to the left, with promises or nods on a publicly owned energy company, more council housing, tenants' rights, nationalising the railways, insourcing and workers' rights, among other things. However Starmer also pitched to the nationalist right by promising a "points-based immigration system".

Front-benchers said nothing to support strikes or about repealing anti-strike laws, except Angela Rayner saying Labour would reverse any new ones Liz Truss brings in.

Corporate lobbyists were a greatly increased presence at the conference, or at least the Labour press office briefed the media that they were.

In addition to distributing its bulletins, Labour Left Internationalists helped organise fights on conference floor and in compositing; mobilised people to support the dockers; also supported trans rights and anti-racist protests outside the conference; and worked with the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Free Our Unions and the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign to promote their events at the conference. □

• Adapted from the LLI website: [bit.ly/mo-int](https://bit.ly/mo-int)

## Proving us wrong?

By Martin Thomas

We've said before that Keir Starmer would come under pressure even from the Labour centre-ground to offer more politically, so as to rebuild and consolidate Labour support.

Truss's sharp swing to the right, and the economic spasm caused by Kwarteng's mini-Budget, may prove us wrong.

On 16 September 1992 the Tories, after 13 years in office, crashed Britain out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, a deal linking EU currencies in preparation for the euro. Although the economic turmoil proved

short-lived, it destroyed the idea that the Tories were competent (if cruel).

From 1992 to 1997 John Smith and then Tony Blair could glide to election victory with a minimum of social promises. And from 1993 Labour Party membership grew. It reached 400,000 (about the same as now) before the 1997 election, and then with Blair in power declined fast to 150,000.

The unions, despite Liverpool, are more assertive now than in 1992. Strikes are on the rise, while in 1992 workers had seen eight years of big defeats since the miners' strike. It's not the same. How different it turns out depends on what we do. □

## Labour Files: neither revealing nor convincing



By Keith Road

Al Jazeera's *Labour Files*, much like its 2017 series *The Lobby*, contains neither the explosive revelations promised nor a convincing political case that "antisemitism smears" were the downfall of

the Corbyn leadership. Over nearly four hours, we get only a handful of information that people active in the labour movement during the Corbyn period would not have known.

The right-wing in the Labour party are devious and seek to disrupt left-wing activists from organising. MPs worked alongside the Labour bureaucracy to shut down local parties, shared correspondence and were more interested in maintaining control than welcom-

ing new members. All true, but not news.

The primary purpose of the footage is not to give insight, but to further Al Jazeera and the attitude to Israel of its owner, the Qatari state.

The entire second episode and much of the other episodes are focused on accusations of antisemitism against Labour activists. Some of those accusations, so we on *Solidarity* believe, carry weight. None that we know of related to

Palestinian solidarity activity. In the footage we never see what any of those interviewed have been accused of. Instead, interspersed clips of Israeli assaults on Gaza and Palestinian demonstrations are used to suggest that these are activists who stood with the Palestinians and Labour officials or right-wingers concocted accusations of antisemitism as a consequence.

*Solidarity* has been relentless in its criticism of Labour's

disciplinary procedures: the lack of natural justice, activists often for many months not told what they are accused of, prolonged periods of limbo, the lack of rights to appeal, a thoroughly opaque process. None of that undoes the fact that antisemitism on the left is a real political issue.

Al Jazeera has no interest in exploring that. Much like *The Lobby*, *The Labour Files* is best avoided. □

# Belgrade reminds us: Pride is a protest

By Loretta Marie Perera

It's time – two words that set the scene for Belgrade's EuroPride in 2022.

"It is time for laws on same-sex unions, time for equality, solidarity, and much, much more," said Goran Miletic, longtime coordinator of the country's EuroPride. "It is time for Belgrade."

It was also time for the community to come together against a backdrop of thousands who had gathered to march in the weekends leading up to Pride.

"There was a strange mix of different right-wing groups, extremists, right-wing political parties, and religious groups who held joint protests, twice," Goran explained. "They are vocal, with a lot of Russian flags, Putin photos, and icons, with clear hate-speech towards the LGBT community."

Anti-Pride protests aside, whether or not Pride was legally allowed to continue was up in the air right till the last moment. With the week-long series of activities meant to culminate in a march through Belgrade on Saturday, Sep 17, organisers on Sep 13 received news of a ban from the police – this came after three weeks of uncertainty following President Aleksandar Vucic saying EuroPride would be cancelled altogether. On Sep 14, organisers announced that they'd just received a formal rejection of the appeal they'd filed the day before. Then finally, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, who is openly gay herself, announced that Pride could continue after all.

"I am not happy with the outcome," Goran said after the event, "since the government confirmed the ban of the EuroPride several times, and it looks like the police in Serbia do not understand freedom of assembly."

While restrictions wavered, the organisers were certain the event would continue. As stated on their social media platforms: Banning pride is a reason for pride.

## The tension felt

On the day of the event, organisers, volunteers, activists, groups from around the world gathered for what would turn out to be a far shorter version of the planned route.

Starting in front of the Constitutional Court building and continuing to a nearby stadium where concerts were held, an extremely high police presence was seen and felt. Screening every attendee at entry points around the area, heavily armed police formed a barrier around the event: batons ready and shields raised. Volunteers worked

to make sure Pride attendees were allowed access, even as small groups of protestors lurked beyond police lines. Nearby, an Orthodox church continuously and ominously rang its bells as Pride attendees approached. Within church grounds, police held several dozen protesters away from the passing march, which continued through the rain, with spirits cautious but high.

Attendees would only later find out about other incidents of violence and damage around the city. Later in the evening, a crowd of several hundred marched through the city singing and chanting, holding banners adorned with images of Jesus as police guarded every corner, exit, and storefront.

Entenela Ndrevataj, who came in from Albania to attend the event both as a journalist and as an ally, was aware of both risk and security. "Some of my thoughts were that it would turn into a violent march, but on the other hand I kept saying to myself that all the security – thousands of policemen – and an international presence (including diplomatic representatives from the US, UK, Sweden, and France) indicated that the situation would not be allowed to escalate."

"There was a huge amount of security, it's like we were put in a box, surrounded by thousands of policemen," said Entenela. "It was even difficult to walk, and it was also scary to march in those conditions – it's uncomfortable to see so many police, while people were marching for love, acceptance and peace."

The short march ultimately brought attendees to the stadium, where concerts continued through the heavy rain. It was there that, as the evening went on, reports of violence against the queer community began to come in – Entenela and her friends among those targeted.

"We decided to leave (the concert venue) around 8pm, because of safety, and because it was raining a lot," she said. "Near our hotel, a group of boys showed up, singing loudly, and we knew that we had to leave immediately. But one of our group, a gay male, panicked and started to run. They caught him."

"Me and another woman ran to get the police, just 30 metres away from us," said Entenela. "But they were very slow to react. It took a lot of time for them to come and while we begged for help, there was zero expression on their faces. They hardly responded to us."

By the time the police arrived, both



the friend who had tried to escape and two women had been assaulted by the gang.

In a separate incident, at about 7:20 pm while on their way out of the stadium, two participants found themselves alone on a dark street after being blocked and redirected by police.

It was on this street that the pair were approached by a young man asking for the time. "And then he hit me in the face. I think twice. I fell to the ground. Then he hit my friend at least two times. She also fell to the ground," said Nadine Lange, who lives in Berlin and had come in from Vienna for the event. "I lost my sense of orientation for a bit and thought the guy came at me again which made me put my hands up. That's when my friend screamed – and the guy ran away."

Nadine, an editor who works in the culture and LGBTIQ sections with Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, considers this a lucky escape. "We were extremely lucky not to be severely injured," she said. "My friend had a bump on her forehead and swelling on her right cheek, as well as neck and back pain from the fall," described Nadine, who sustained similar injuries.

While the pair reported the incident to Belgrade Pride organisers to warn others still at the stadium, they held back from alerting the police. "I don't trust them at all," Nadine said. "And I suppose there's nothing much they could do, anyway."

For organisers, it's now time to get answers. "We invite anyone who was a victim in any incident to report it to us as soon as possible, so we can put pressure on the police and prosecutor's of-

fice to conduct a proper investigation," Goran said. "Reporting is an essential step if we want access to justice, and if we want to show that we were victims of violence."

## What's next?

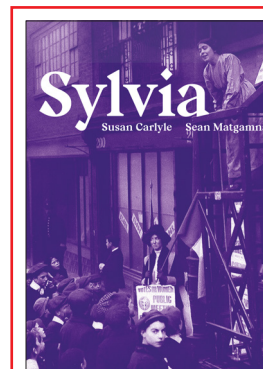
For Goran and his team, there are concrete next steps: To make Pride events in the region sustainable, so that no form of threats are faced and freedom of assembly is granted at all times. "Protests, concerts, and gatherings are happening every day, and the only community that is receiving threats because of freedom of assembly is the LGBT community," he said, "For us, it is important that we are visible, that people can see that we exist, and that we face real problems."

Violence and discrimination are two key problems faced by the LGBT community in Belgrade and the region. While some cases are reported, far more are not, with members of the trans community especially vulnerable to violence on the streets. Reports show 36% of LGBT individuals are subject to verbal harassment and other forms of violence in schools.

At the same time, lobbying for legalising same-sex unions is essential. "Only Montenegro has such a law at the moment, and we must have this legislation adopted in all (Balkan) countries," Goran said.

"I am happy that we still had EuroPride in the format that was planned," he continued. "It was the largest Pride ever in Belgrade with almost 10,000 participants, despite the ban. And two planned concerts were held despite the rain."

Entenela said that she still would have attended the event knowing how it would end for her and her friends. "It is about love and freedom, and violence doesn't scare me," she said. "If Pride would have been cancelled, that would mean a huge regression not only for the LGBTIQ+ community in Serbia, but for many other countries where existence is a daily fight." □



The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. £4 (inc. post) □ [bit.ly/shop-wl](http://bit.ly/shop-wl)



# The opposition inside Russia

By Michael Baker

Third of a [series](#) of articles on Putin and opposition forces inside Russia

Opposition to Putin takes many forms, some considerably more successful than others. This article will briefly explore the failures of the “traditional” routes for opposition, before exploring some of the newer and more well-organised trade unions, political parties and opposition leaders that have taken up the struggle over the course of the 21st century.

The Duma, the lower branch of the Russian governmental system somewhat equivalent to the British House of Commons, is in theory a democratic body in which elected deputies can discuss political issues and bring forward new bills. In practice, its influence is minimal. The Russian election procedure (a form of “parallel voting”) allows for very large majorities despite having elements of proportional representation, and United Russia, the party of Vladimir Putin, has rarely faced great opposition in the Duma. The second largest party is the CPRF, still led by Gennady Zyuganov, who voiced some serious opposition in the 1990s but have since transformed their nationalistic communism into a bizarre, full-fledged pro-Putin line. In 2006, when there was still a possibility of a majority-CPRF Duma, the government brazenly created a vote-splitting alternative party, “A Just Russia”. This party still exists, and some members likely joined it for good reasons, but it exists purely to function as a manufactured “second party” next to United Russia, with very little difference in its politics from Putin’s own. Its vote share is now exceedingly small. Similar in size to the CPRF is the Liberal Democratic Party, perhaps the most misnamed political party in recent memory. Led for many years by the late Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the party is, if anything, to Putin’s right, and rarely taken seriously by other politicians or the general public.

Especially in recent years, the Duma has voiced little other than rapturous support for Putin, especially since the invasion of Ukraine. The majority of left-wing activists who argue for electoral organising within Russia do so on a grassroots or municipal level, and rarely see much point in pushing for a Duma representative.

A recent [article](#) in *Solidarity* by Dale Street very efficiently and sharply analyses the history of the FNPR, Russia’s largest trade union federation. I will only provide a brief discussion of their role here, and recommend readers return to the former article for more detail. The FNPR (“Federation of Independent Trade Unions”) formed itself



Gary Kasparov, self-declared leader of the international anti-war movement

from the shell of ACCTU, the old Soviet trade union council, whose function was not militant organising or fuelling class struggle, but mediating between workers and the Soviet government, and managing the distribution of welfare and privileges. Although it helped organise some disputes in the 1990s, since Putin came to power it has focused solely on what it terms “social partnership”, a cosy relationship between workers and government that involves an absolute minimum of strike actions. Between 2008 and 2014 there were an average of four strikes per year. The FNPR agreed to the 2001 labour code, which greatly restricted the ability to strike, because through various measures it essentially cemented them as the country’s primary union. It has an awful track record of supporting Putin’s policies – most notably cheer-leading excessively for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, even going so far as to publish an article by Ramzan Kadyrov himself on the topic.

### Three

There are three movements that have posed any sort of “real” threat to Putin’s leadership during his reign. The first, a protest movement known as “the Other Russia”, was a haphazard alliance in 2008, primarily organised by chess legend Garry Kasparov and Eduard Limonov. Limonov was the original Russian “Nazbol”. He co-founded the Russian National Bolshevik Party (NBP) with Eurasianist Alexander Dugin in the late 90s. The NBP was always a critique of Putin from the right – it thought he should be going further and committing more to a violent irredentist politics, in as far as they ever had a coherent party ideology in the first place, not focused solely on violent street protest. Kasparov had rebranded from chess player to generic liberal democrat, a role he still plays to this day. Kasparov has tried to call himself the leader of the international anti-war movement from abroad, to little effect. The Other Russia was doomed to failure from the start, and despite lots of media attention, it failed to ever

pose a real threat to Putin’s leadership.

Boris Nemtsov was the second opposition leader. From around 2011 to his assassination in 2015, he was presented as the “sensible” alternative to Putin’s wild authoritarianism. While he did seem to have a strong groundswell of popular support, Nemtsov was by no means the ideal politician: he had been a governor under Yeltsin, and despite being vocal about government corruption he was no stranger to oligarchs and unlikely to take any action to reduce their grip on the country if he had ever made it to the Russian White House.

Then we have Navalny. There have been several articles in *Solidarity* covering the pros and cons of Navalny’s politics, so we don’t need to dwell on him for too long here. In short, Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) has played a huge role in exposing government corruption and the enormous personal wealth of any number of high-ranking officials, including Medvedev and Putin themselves. Navalny is a charismatic speaker and an efficient mobiliser. For many years he kept the anti-Putin movement alive through seeming sheer willpower. But his politics are a vague form of liberal-ish nationalism, which in the late noughties veered into some dangerous and overtly racist territory. He has never had an issue allying with the far right as a way of building popular support, and his economic and political plans for the country are far from promising. Socialists should absolutely advocate for Navalny’s release from prison as a point of political freedom, but they should not be advocating for him to become Russia’s next leader.

There is a small web of trade unions in Russia that are much more militant than the FNPR. Most of them are affiliated to the Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR). Some, such as the MPRA, a union for auto-industry workers, were founded back in the 2000s out of individual workplace disputes in factories and splits with larger unions, while others, like the Courier Trade Union, formed much more recently and with almost no prior unionisation in the industry. These unions operate across a number of different fields: couriers, auto workers, doctors, and school and university teachers are just a few. These unions all share vocal anti-Putin politics, a steadfast focus on the grassroots, and a constant willingness to escalate and strike if they can muster the power to do so.

Russia also has a proud history of wildcat strikes or un-unionised strikes. Sometimes, even workers in an FNPR union or another “yellow” union that refuses to condone strike action will take it anyway, with varying degrees

of success. With labour conditions and wages in Russia so poor, this is an inevitable outcome. However, we shouldn’t be rosy-eyed here: the Russian labour movement is in a weak place, and faces great risks whenever it takes any action whatsoever.

Finally, the left. Russia’s organised left is not particularly large, but has been around for a while now and is growing slowly. Unlike some post-Soviet countries, even amongst the more recent left-wing groups there are still a fair amount of Stalinists, or Stalinist-adjacent organisations. The largest group is probably the Russian Socialist Movement or RSD, an amalgam of several prior groups that formed in 2012 and is vaguely linked to the Mandelbrot Fourth International. There is also Left Front, an even broader coalition of all kinds of tendencies which played a significant role in the Bolotnaya protests of 2011-12. Left Front are much more sympathetic to Stalinist politics and not only supported the annexation of Crimea, but refused to say anything negative about the 2022 invasion, leading to the resignation of one of their founding members. Beyond that the numbers get very small, but comrades may recognise the names of some international groups with Russian branches, most notably very active branches of the ISA and the IMT.

There are also a handful of small but relatively well-organised anarchist or anarcho-communist organisations and networks, which have become particularly prevalent since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine for helping to coordinate railway sabotage and disruption, to prevent the Russian army from restocking itself. □

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# Truss, Kwarteng, and economics

By Martin Thomas

The Truss-Kwarteng policy is not Thatcherism, but Reaganomics. Thatcher and Reagan, early 1980s leaders of what came to smother the world under the name “neoliberalism”, had much in common; but also differences. Orthodox Thatcherites are shocked by Truss and Kwarteng.

The chief difference is this: Thatcher was a budget-balancer. She avoided government budget deficits. Such budget-balancing is a standard neoliberal line, though by now even Germany’s official economists, the most rigid on the issue, agree that governments should run temporary budget deficits in sharp slumps. (It’s a myth that the bourgeoisie ever “abandoned Keynesianism”; they modified it, and the dominant neoliberal trend in academic economics is now called “New Keynesianism”).

Reagan, by contrast, ran consistent large budget deficits unprecedented in the USA since World War 2. His motives were not “Keynesian”. He claimed that his tax cuts for the well-off, by encouraging wealth-seeking, would in time produce growth to mend the deficits. His advisers like Arthur Laffer had actual theories about that.

Truss is essaying a bigger exercise in “tax cuts for the rich now mean growth soon” than Reagan did. Reagan’s tax cuts did not bring growth. He had a slump in 1980-3; the revival after 1983 was driven by huge military spending,

and by then Reagan had stopped his tax cuts.

The Truss-Kwarteng policy is not from their 2012 book *Britannia Unchained*, either. The three other authors of that book, Priti Patel, Dominic Raab, and Chris Skidmore, backed Sunak in the Tory leadership race (though Skidmore later shifted). They appear to be standard Thatcherites.

The book itself contains no economic theory. Despite whingeing about the propensity of young people in Britain to study “soft” subjects rather than maths, it cites what few statistics it gives with no care for accuracy. Insofar as it comments on the issue, it applauds Thatcherite “budget-balancing”.

Mostly, the book is a sloppy, preening, arrogant tirade about getting British workers to work harder. Tax cuts, welfare cuts, union-bashing, and job insecurity are suggested in a general way as encouraging “work ethic”, but there is none of the actual theory which Reagan’s advisers had.

## Opportunist

Truss is an opportunist, a Remainer in 2016 who now goes with the “Singapore-on-Thames” ultra-Brexiter crowd. But then Reagan wasn’t an ideologue either. Kwarteng may have been reading Arthur Laffer. My best guess is that Truss and Kwarteng see the Tories as floundering (as they are), the unions as dangerously resurgent, Thatcherite budget-balancing as impossible, so the old Reagan line is the only option in their right-wing spectrum.

Kwarteng says he will balance the budget in the longer term. There is a theory in US academia, “[Modern Monetary Theory](#)”, with some right-wing origins but mostly-leftish support now, which says essentially that long-running budget deficits don’t matter: neither a promise of great future growth spurred by tax cuts, nor a promise of future social cuts, is needed to offset them. That’s another debate. Kwarteng doesn’t have that theory.

He promises cruel social cuts.

Truss and Kwarteng say they want to focus on “growth” rather than “distribution”. This is a bourgeois line from way before Thatcher and Reagan: to tell workers not to complain about our small “slice of the cake”, but to help the rich make “the whole cake” bigger.

It has a sinister twist at a time when unions are only beginning to push back. John Burn-Murdoch in the *Financial Times* ([16 Sep](#)) recently showed that the rich in Britain thrive relative to the rich almost everywhere else but the USA, but the worst-off 5% are 20% behind the worst-off in Slovenia (let alone the western-Europe average), and the middling (“median”) household is on course to be worse-off than its Slovenian counterpart by 2024. The diver-

gence has set in since 2010. Thatcher and Kwarteng want to speed, not reverse, that trend to increased inequality.

Both Thatcher and Reagan wanted to move from building an integrated national industrial base with accommodations for the workers to restructuring their areas under the imperatives of world markets to attract mobile capital seeking the most profitable sites.

So they cut taxes for the rich (supposedly encouraging them to be more “entrepreneurial”); squashed unions; cut welfare (though not entirely: mobile capital needs fixed public infrastructure); and diminished regulation. They made those policies bourgeois orthodoxy, though much “deregulation” turned out to be re-regulation of a market-friendly or market-mimicking sort.

Thatcher balanced budgets by raising taxes for the worse-off while she cut them for the well-off (she raised the standard rate of VAT, for example, from 8% to 15%), and by using the proceeds from privatisation (Reagan had comparatively little to privatise) and from North Sea oil, which boomed in her term of office.

Reagan called his line “supply-side economics”. The theory was that previous governments had used public spending too much to boost or repair growth, working on the “demand side”, and government should instead stimulate growth by working on the “supply side”. By freeing profiteers from the trammels of unions, regulations, and taxes on their gains, the government would stimulate them to invest more.

The majority would notionally benefit from the “trickle-down”, i.e. the increased hiring and wage-paying that the newly dynamic entrepreneurs would do.

Not much of that happened. Profits rates recovered from the early 1980s, but investment in machinery and buildings, as a share of profits, declined, and continues low in the US, UK, and similar economies.

The Thatcherites subscribed to the general talk about unleashing “enterprise” (which was not new in 1980), but did not use the term “supply-side” much. Under Thatcher manufacturing employment in the UK declined 23% in a few years after 1979, and the Thatcherites reckoned that to be a necessary adjustment to the world. Under Reagan, there was a sharp slump in 1982-3, but after that manufacturing employment actually rose a bit by the end of his term of office in 1988.

Thatcher’s promise was a bit different from Reagan’s “trickle down”. It was that middling households could enrich themselves through buying shares in the enterprises the government sold

off at low prices, and then quickly selling the shares again at higher prices; and by using the “right to buy” council houses cut-price. And that worked, after its own fashion, until the house price crash of 1989-92.

## Expansion

Both Thatcher and Reagan benefited from the expansion of world financial markets as exchange controls were scrapped. London and New York established themselves as world centres of the expanded and faster-moving markets, and to flag up a statistical increase in national “output” that came with no increase in useful goods and services (though with an increase in well-paid jobs in and around the City and Wall Street).

Thatcher gained office mainly on a promise to cut inflation. Her advisers had a theory about that, “monetarism”. After a couple of years of ineffectuality it was quietly faded out in favour of the standard bourgeois recipe of balancing budgets and keeping interest rates high (which didn’t work well, either).

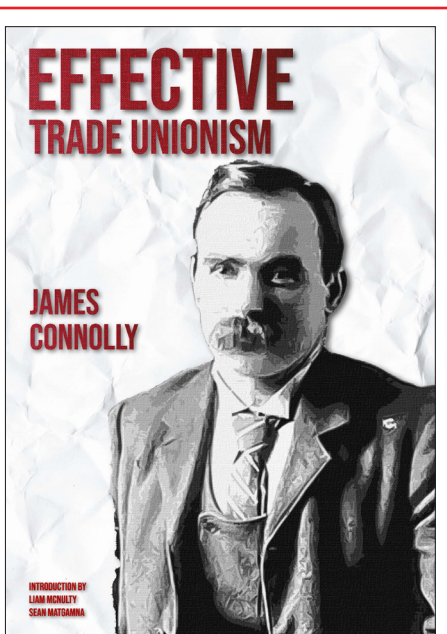
A more drastic effort to curb inflation through high interest rates, with some money-stock-targeting (“monetarist”) top-dressing, was already underway in the USA, initiated under Democrat president Carter by the Democrat Federal Reserve chief Paul Volcker, before Reagan came to office. He had only to continue it. The high interest rates caused a slump (businesses could not borrow to invest), which cut spending enough to dull inflation (eventually).

Interest rates now are much lower than then (17% in the UK in 1980, 22% in the USA). All other things being equal, increased consumer spending by the rich resulting from Truss-Kwarteng policy is likely to raise inflation. To offset that, and to induce overseas capitalists to buy British government IOUs (bonds), both to cover government spending and to offset the UK’s current huge trade deficit, Truss-Kwarteng will have to accept higher interest rates.

The USA also relies (and has relied since Reagan’s day, when it started running large trade deficits as well as budget deficits) on overseas capitalists buying its “Treasury bonds”.

The reliance is more precarious for Britain. The US dollar is the world’s chief reserve currency and medium of trade. Capitalists and governments worldwide want to hold dollar assets. They want to hold more of them, to give them a cushion of relative security, in times of economic turmoil, even economic turmoil originating in the USA.

They have no comparable “background” motive to hold British-pound assets. Slump is a more likely result from Truss-Kwarteng economics than boom. □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly’s organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death in 1916 was industrial unionism, workers’ solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. £5. □

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# How capitalist farming destroys our world environment



## Environment

By Stuart Jordan

The literary tradition of pastoral promotes a common misconception that the countryside is a land of vitality and plenty, a place of easy leisure unsullied by the filth and corruption of the city.

It's a myth that has been propagated since the time of the Greek rhapsodes. It's central to the Christian tradition with its imagery of god as good shepherd. Nowadays we find versions of it in the friendly farmyard animals that populate children's picture books and scenes of bucolic rural whimsy that dominate Sunday afternoon TV.

For George Monbiot, in his new book *Regenesi*, the myth is so ancient and engrained in our culture that we are barely conscious of how it shapes our perception of the world. It blinds us to the reality of modern food production, which he convincingly argues is "the world's major cause of ecological de-

struction". So for decades big landlords and Big Agriculture have carried out their civilisation-destroying work with barely a murmur of political opposition.

Monbiot demonstrates how capitalism has developed an astonishingly destructive and insecure food system, dominated by a handful of big landlords and multinationals. Large scale agriculture accounts for two-thirds of food production and runs according to one model: highly-mechanised, high-input, high-waste monocultures of the "Global Standard Farm".

Agriculture has always involved acts of destruction to other forms of life. The removal of previous ecosystems to grow selected crops for human consumption has always involves some reduction in biodiversity, a bending of the natural world to human will. The Global Standard Farm takes that tendency to a frenzied extreme.

Taking 40% of Earth's land surface (6% for human-consumed crops, 6% for animal feed and biofuels, 28% for grazing), agriculture is the main driver of habitat destruction. The expansion of livestock farming is responsible for 70% of deforestation.

92% of the world's grasslands have already been occupied by livestock or crops so most of the current expansion is at the expense of tropical rainforest. If current trends continue "meat production could swallow three million square kilometres of the world's most biodiverse places in just 35 years". As biologist E O Wilson once said, the logic here is equivalent to "burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal".

Biodiverse ecosystems are destroyed in favour of monocultures secured and maintained by the generous and escalating deployment of biocidal agents (chainsaws, guns, drones, pesticides). Large species go extinct as their habitats are destroyed and through bioaccumulation of pesticides. Modern agriculture's fertilisers, pesticides and prophylactic medicines also destroy the microorganisms and soil creatures that are the basis for all terrestrial life.

The Global Standard Farm creates deserts that require greater and greater applications of the chemicals to maintain yields. For Monbiot: "The implicit belief that this complex and scarcely understood system [the soil] can withstand all that we throw at it and con-

tinue to support us could be the most dangerous of all the assumptions about the global food system."

Beyond its assault on the living world, the Global Standard Farm drives a range of other ecological catastrophes. Our methods of food and textile production are draining the world's rivers and aquifers.

The draining of the Aral Sea, mostly to irrigate water-intensive cotton crops in the arid plains of Central Asia, has been dubbed the greatest ecological catastrophe in human history. The surviving residents live on a land poisoned by salt and toxic dust where average life expectancy is just 51 years old and most babies are born with birth defects. Most of the world's major aquifers are being drained faster than they can be replenished.

Agriculture both through habitat destruction and factory farming is also the main driver of pandemics. The industrial use of antibiotics (75% of antibiotics in the EU and USA are used on livestock) speeds the evolution of antibiotic resistance, which can undermine the efficacy of modern medicine. □

• More on Monbiot's book next week.

# Myanmar: reconciliation or revolt?

By Hein Htet Kyaw

The Association of South East Asian Nations, ASEAN, favours the compromised "dialogue" between all the stakeholders in Myanmar's politics, including the People's Defense Forces and the military junta. This reminds me of a quote by Ghassan Kanafani of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine: "a conversation between the neck and the sword".

If reconciliation is the path in post-revolution, Myanmar will be back to the neoliberal pathway to corporate capitalism where NGOs, CSOs, and some other neoliberals will cosplay as leftists to create new political situations where a newly created bipartisan party politics is inevitable. The over-privileged, rich, western-trained academia and their fellow neoliberal opportunists, cosplaying themselves as leftists, will drive the pathway to defend the neoliberal status quo, which in turn pro-

tections their families' wealth that were accumulated by exploiting the workers' surplus value and labour.

Reconciliation should therefore be viewed as reactionary considering the true nature of the working-class revolution. With the proper reconciliation, the ongoing effort to overthrow military governments will end, nevertheless, in a liberal sense. The governing class, including the military junta and its oligarchs, as well as some opportunistic political parties, will gain from certain types of political agreements.

Since the 1960s, the military in Myanmar has engaged in brutal behaviour. They ruthlessly murdered many students and detonated a bomb at the capital city's student union building. Numerous villages belonging to various indigenous ethnic groups, including the Rohingya, were destroyed by them. Many members of other indigenous ethnic groups, including the Bamar

themselves, who attempted to overthrow the military, were mercilessly murdered. Villages were repeatedly burned down; women were raped; children were slain; men were tortured to death.

The Rohingya exodus awoke the world, although Shan, Kachin, and Karen ethnic communities had been subjected to comparable levels of oppression since the 1960s. None of these victims, including the Rohingya community, had received justice.

In 1988, Myanmar went through an event comparable to the 2021 revolution. Numerous militias tried to overthrow the military junta in 1988. Many political parties, labour unions, activists, student unions, and other groups of citizens joined hand in hand against the military government and its executive branches. However, Aung San Suu Kyi's political debut fooled the entire movement.

Aung San Suu Kyi attempted to lecture the organic mass

with the idealistic values of democracy, peaceful negotiation, responsibility, and political integrity despite having no idea what was going on in Myanmar, failing to acknowledge her privilege as the nation's father's daughter, and having received a western education. She was able to command the attention and support of the populace thanks to her status as the daughter of General Aung San, who was a founding father of Burma.

As a result, everyone gave up on all genuine revolutionary strategies, including mass protests and military conflicts. On the other hand, she tried to persuade the military chiefs through reconciliation, or peaceful negotiation. Her neoliberal approach contributed to the demise of the revolution of 1988.

According to [Daniel De Leon](#), gradual changes or phases may represent a true era in a poodle's existence. However, in essence, a poodle still exists

as a poodle and always will be a poodle. Similarly, even after numerous reforms, a dictatorship still functions essentially as such. Myanmar started its reform process in 2010. Before the most recent coup, there had been substantial advances. However, the recent coup proved that the terrible political cycle of coups will continue whenever the military feels insulted or endangered. According to Daniel De Leon, a reform occurs whenever a modification leaves the internal system unaltered; a revolution occurs when the internal mechanism is altered.

To sum up, to transform into a true democracy, Burma must abandon its attempt to reform the political structure, military-centric constitution, and oligarch family members' economic influence. All of these should be overthrown by the people and should be replaced by a genuine workers' democracy. □

# Ukrainian trade unionists battle Putin and for rights

Ivanna Khrapko, youth chair of the Ukrainian Federation of Trade Unions, spoke to Martin Thomas from Solidarity on 25 September in Liverpool.

Our army is trying to kick out Russian soldiers from our territory – very successfully in some regions.

Terrible crimes have been found in the liberated territories. A lot of people died. When the territories were occupied, we lost contact with our union members there. We're trying to make contact again. I don't know the results yet.

The Russian army is bombing areas in the south of Ukraine. Our comrades in Mykolaiv tell me that the centre of Mykolaiv was bombed yesterday afternoon. The Russians bombed our trade union building.

The Russians have a big nuclear power plant occupied. We have contact with our comrades there, and they tell us Russian soldiers are taking people to the basement.

Putin says Ukraine doesn't want to

negotiate. But Putin is doing a fake referendum in the occupied areas, with soldiers controlling votes, and people brought in from Crimea to vote. Putin talks about negotiations, but he announces military mobilisation in Russia, and threatens to use nuclear weapons.

The east of Ukraine, especially, has a lot of Russian people who've been living there for a long time. It's mostly old people who lived there in the USSR time. Middle-aged and young people have tried to leave the occupied areas.

But there are also people who couldn't leave, or were afraid to lose their homes. They need money to live, so they went to work, and in a sense they started to "collaborate". There were also partisans who stayed in the occupied territories. Then there are some politicians who really collaborated.

I have no picture of the areas taken back as regards measures against collaborators.

The unions have started to collect warm clothes for winter. The official av-

erage temperature in flats is 14°C. And the Russian army has started to destroy infrastructure.

Personally I'm afraid of winter. My parents in their village can collect wood. I live on the 14th floor of a block of flats. The price of heating will go up. But I know how hard it is for the soldiers.

Our government is pushing new laws on work time to remove workers' protections. Some politicians were pushing this change before the war, but then we had demonstrations and strikes and pushed them back.

## Sacking

Where factories are still working, now employers can sack you without reason or consultation with the union. Before they had to consult with the union. How workers are on individual contracts, of variable length, one month or three months, and some on zero-hours contracts.

There's a risk of more changes to the law. Our government has a very bad attitude to the trade unions.

To resist, we can do demonstrations, mobilise international support, and use social media.

These measures will make more people want to migrate, too. But when I applied for a visa to come to Britain, I had to go to Warsaw. I was asked to wait two weeks, so I paid some money to speed it up. Then my papers had gone to Berlin. They were sent back to Berlin, and a friend collected them for me.

We ask trade unionists in Britain to continue to share information about what has happened in my country and continue to press your government to support Ukraine with weapons so that we can defeat Russia and end the war faster.

The refugees in Britain need support; and our unions need support in our fight against our government's new legislation.

I visited the Liverpool dockers' picket line this morning and took them a letter of support from dockers in Odesa and Mykolaiv. □



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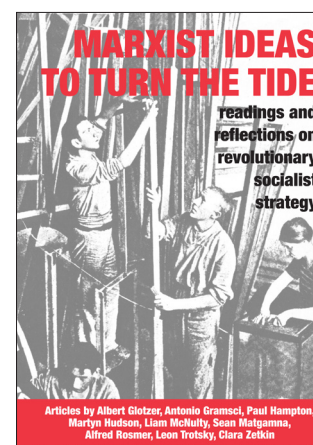
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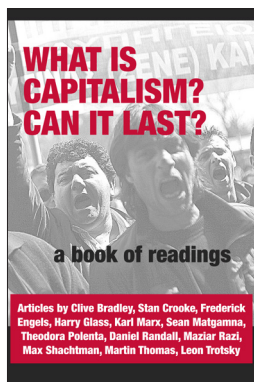
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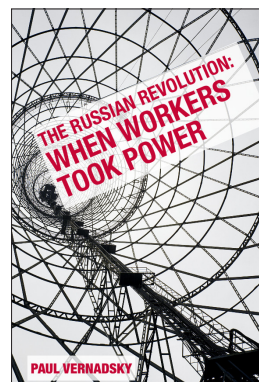
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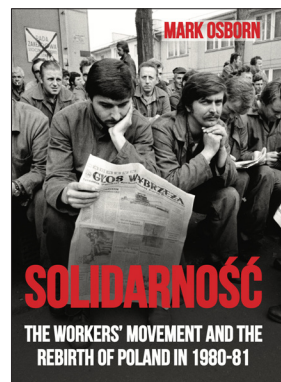
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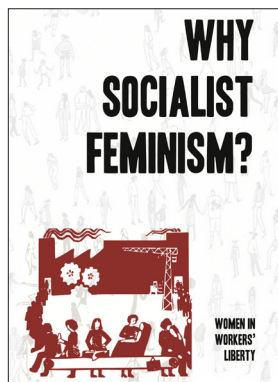
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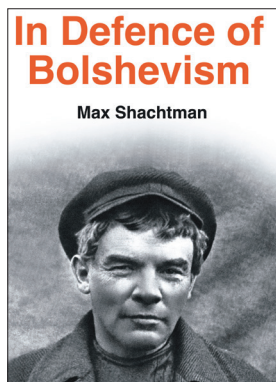
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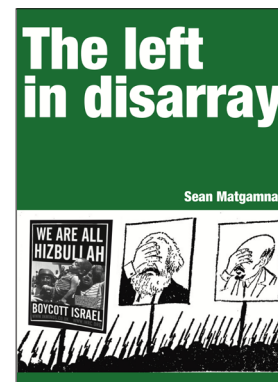
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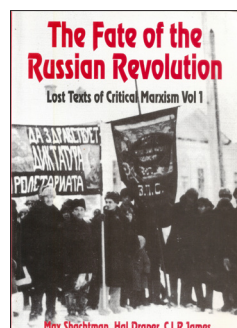
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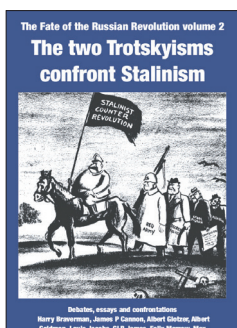
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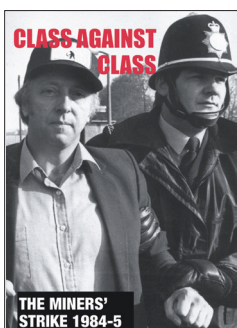
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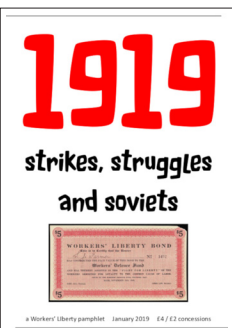
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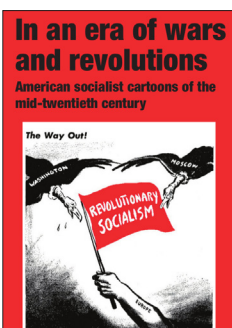
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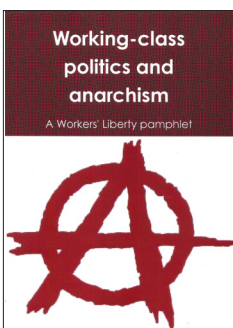
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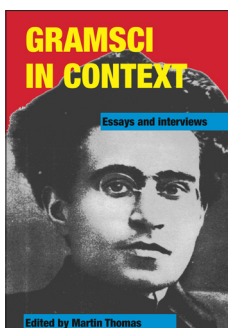
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# Council pay: looking to 2023



By a Unison member

Unison members in local government and schools have voted 64% to 36% to accept the offer of £1,925 flat rate (based on a 37-hour week) for all members. The turnout was 34%, significantly higher than the turnout in the industrial action ballot in December 2021, when only 14% of members took part.

Unison nationally made no recommendation. In both the North West and London a number of larger or more active branches called for rejection. Most branches and members in the North West rejected, and a majority of members in London rejected. There were some especially high rejections (over 80%) with high turnouts in Lambeth, Barnet, and Hounslow.

But most regions and members accepted the offer. On 26 September Unison's representatives on the National Joint Council yesterday voted overwhelmingly to accept the claim ahead of the GMB and Unite consultations, which end 21 and 14 October

respectively. Meanwhile in Scotland the three unions are recommending acceptance of a slightly better offer than England, Wales and Northern Ireland, giving a higher increase of £2,000 for the lowest paid, a higher increase for those earning more than £38,000, and one extra day of leave this year.

All workers will see a real-wage cut, and perhaps half of our members in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland will see a real-wage cut of more than 7%, on top of about 26% since 2010! In Scotland it's slightly less bad.

Rents, mortgages, and loans are going up, and other bills will too. The Resolution Foundation [said](#) even before the Kwarteng mini-Budget that "low-income households still face double digit inflation" which will remain "elevated for everyone well into next year". We need a bold plan for the 2023-4 pay round. Here is a proposal:

- £5000 flat rate (minimum wage of £13 per hour) and £15 per hour by 2024/5
- Agreement to re-open negotiations if RPI exceeds 15%
- An additional day of leave on top of the one agreed for next year
- A reduction in the working week to 35 hours by 2024.

We must learn lessons from 2022-3:  
*Timing:* The pay rise was due on 1 April but in England the three unions did not submit this to employers until

6 June (Scotland was two or three months ahead)

*Ballots:* The turnout was 10% up on the last consultative ballot (consultative ballots are easier, because they include voting by email), but we need more. Learn from branches with highest turnouts and rejections!

*Leadership:* Unions need to give a lead. In Scotland the campaign (also off the back of several successful local disputes) won a strike ballot and concessions from the employer. If employers are offering pay rises less than inflation for 50% of our members, we need to reject.

Disaggregated and selective action: In Scotland the three unions balloted early, with a bolder claim. The strategy included strikes council-by-council and by selected worker groups (schools, early years, bin and recycling workers), calculated to have maximum impact, and with escalation.

Using technology better: phone-banking, text-messaging. We started in this year but still most reps and stewards didn't use that technology. We need more online meetings and engagement and sharing resources and materials.

So:  
• A bold claim that has a significant flat rate element to reduce the pay gap

for the lowest paid council and school workers, who are struggling most; and offers an inflation proof deal to most of our members

- Stick to the claim, and don't propose a deal which gives most of our members less than RPI inflation

- Put in the claim now and ask employers to respond by 1 January, with a campaign ready to start balloting members from first two weeks in January.

- Identify our strong areas and worker groups who have most impact and could form part of a selective action (schools, bin collections, IT support, parking services, accounts). Free up national and regional resources. Have a plan for re-balloting for groups who miss turnout thresholds narrowly.

- Recruit 10,000 pay campaigners (2% of our NJC membership) to act as contacts, activists and champions for the period of the pay dispute, with a national meeting for these reps and stewards

- Big national rallies in person and online with high profile speakers and press coverage. Big regional rallies

- Cross union coordination, but without waiting for other unions who lag. Local strike committees to bring together those striking and preparing to strike. □

## Strong pickets at London universities

By David Santos

Cleaners and other professional services staff struck on 26-27 Sep at SOAS University in London as part of Unison's strike action across UK universities. The dispute is responding to a measly 3% pay offer, demanding an increase of 2% above inflation.

Unison picket lines across London campuses were lively during the first week of term, setting the context for a year to come on campus during

this historic upturn in workers' action. Picket lines at SOAS and Kings College London were well sustained by workers and students in support. The solidarity groups set up to support last year's strikes have continued and are ready to keep fighting.

Many of the workers on strike are some of the lowest paid in the university, their work often invisibilised, consistently subject to cuts in staffing levels, and denied professional development within the institu-

tion. It is the cleaning team, the lowest grade and overwhelmingly migrant workers, who sustain the picket lines, but one security guard stepped out of the norm to join at SOAS. "Normally they [other security guards] all stay there, but I had to make a stand", he said on joining the strike.

### Authoritarian

The decision was particularly brave considering the university's hyper-authoritarian response to the strike. Break-

ing decades of convention, the week before the strike the university sent a letter to the national Unison chair, announcing the university would not be permitting picket lines outside the main building, instead forcing them off campus. That policy was enforced with 40 private security on campus, who physically threatened students, and created an eerie atmosphere for those students arriving for Welcome Week.

Just down the road, cleaners at the High Holborn building of

the University of the Arts London (UAL) were engaged in their own week-long dispute. They are represented by GMB. An energetic local organiser with the union has been campaigning with the outsourced workers to be brought in house, despite intransigence from the university.

The five-day strike gathered support from students and other unions (CAIWU, IWGB) but the uni's lack of response points to the need for escalation. □

## Liverpool dockers determined to win

By Martin Thomas

Liverpool dockers are back at work on 3 October after a two-week strike for pay, but will be out again for a week from 11 October if they don't have a settlement by then, and then every other week, indefinitely.

The operator, Peel Ports, stonewalled at first, but has now agreed to talks, to start 4 October.

Union organisation in the port has

been rebuilt by patient effort since the defeat of the epic Liverpool dockers' strike of 1995-8. Meanwhile, the port has been expanded, to become again one of the busiest in Britain, and the workforce has increased.

### Review

Pay remains low by international port worker standards, with drivers on huge cranes on a lower basic rate than bus drivers. The strike demands a compre-

hensive pay review as well as a wage rise to match the current price surge.

Picket lines have been large, confident, and 24/7, with frequent mass meetings. The dockers' union, Unite, has organised strike pay for the 600 or so strikers, meaning that Peel Ports have no chance of forcing the dockers to back down because of financial pressures.

Dockers in Southampton have refused to handle ships redirected from

Liverpool. Although a few redirected ships have been worked by other ports, Peel Ports will have been hard hit.

The European Dockworkers' Council and the International Dockworkers' Council have also supported the dispute, and so has the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Australian Super, the largest pension fund in Australia, owns 25% of Peel Ports. Organisation, built up by constant effort over years, plus solidarity, can win. □

## 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](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)

# Pressure increases on Crossrail



## Diary of a Crossrail worker

By Steve Allan

As the news broke of the Queen's death, there was one question on everybody's lips: "Do we get any time off?" Naturally the railway does not stop during national mourning, especially not the Elizabeth line!

Management were quick to pay tribute on behalf of all staff, though a quick straw poll of staff would not show unanimous support for the monarch.

Regardless, we had to step up and provide extra services for the state funeral.

It's strange being part of a union leading a nationwide strike wave, though not being able to participate in it. Our pay deal was settled in April, but with inflation showing no signs of slowing down there is growing unrest about our conditions.

The station manager is back from his holidays and making his usual rounds. He stops for a chat and spots my "Support Rail Workers" sticker. He questions me since our terms and conditions have been agreed, but later in the week admits we deserve pay parity with London Underground!

Members are also still concerned

with the rostering situation. With the introduction of a new timetable, trains now start much earlier. Certain managers have shown no leniency in terms of booking-on. Yours truly was reprimanded for a two-minute lateness, despite arriving at the station on time. Reps assure us that the matter is being discussed with management.

Furthermore, the timetable is due to be extended past midnight once the whole line starts to be connected up in November. This includes a seven-day service. We currently receive a slightly enhanced Sunday rate and night-shift allowance, but we can't be expected to do more work for the same pay. □

# Ten years since the QCH dispute



## Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

October 3 marks ten years since the dispute at the construction site for the Queensland Children's Hospital was [settled](#), except for the criminal contempt charges I was facing.

The dispute lasted for 63 days and I proudly led it for the final 45 days after the organisers of the Construction and General Division of the CFMEU union were served injunctions which made their continued presence on the picket line difficult to maintain.

I was approached by CFMEU organisers and officials to take charge of the picket line. After meetings with CFMEU hierarchy I agreed to do it as a "community organiser", on an "honorary" basis.

My role was endorsed by a general meeting of striking members. The dispute was in a shambles and drastically needed to be re-organised.

The first thing put into place was regular weekly report-back meetings at the Serbian Community Hall, about 150 metres from the construction zone for the hospital. Numerous listening devices had been found where we had previously held meetings, and on top of that the builder, Lend Lease, had hired an industrial surveillance company to tape our every moment.

The second thing was to elect a welfare committee, in which one of the site "peggies", Virginia Clarke, played a really outstanding part. The third thing was regular strike bulletins.

Once the picket line had been made more democratic, and strike pay (\$100 a day for each day on the picket line, a maximum of \$600 per week) had been instituted, we got into the long slog of staying one day longer and one day stronger than Lend Lease (Abi Group).

We gained the support of other unions and community groups, and I'm proud to say no worker from the 650 in dispute crossed the picket line.

The electricians, about 55 workers, were especially principled. Although they were on a completely separate

Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, they held the line for 63 days. It was one of the finest acts of union solidarity I have witnessed, and completely flouted Australia's industrial-relations law. Each day the electricians were instructed to go to work, but each day they refused. Their staunchness should go down in the union history book.

On the 63rd day, we got word that Lend Lease (Abi) had relented on the central issues of a union EBA for the whole site with a clause covering subcontractors, we had a meeting to agree to return to work. I spoke in favour of a return to work, although I had a massive court trial pending that Abi would not relent on. It was important we go back to work united.

My work as a community leader had finished. My later trial on 54 charges of criminal contempt is in some regards another [story](#).

For those nine weeks, we fought the good fight, for immediate gain but also for those who come after us. In the end that is what being a union soul is all about. □

# The films that gave us "gaslighting"



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The term "gaslighting" (manipulating someone psychologically into doubting the reality around them) comes from *Gas Light*, a stage play written by Patrick Hamilton and first performed in London in 1938.

Set in the Victorian era, the play depicts a schizophrenic who drives his wife insane when she seems likely

to discover a murder he committed many years ago.

*Gas Light* was adapted for the British screen in 1940 (director: Thorold Dickinson), using the same title. In 1944 it was again adapted for the screen by Hollywood director George Cukor. and it is probably from that film that the verb "to gaslight" originates.

Contemporary critical opinion suggests that the British version was superior to Hollywood's despite Hollywood's leading role for Ingrid Bergman. It is rumoured that MGM attempted to buy the negative of the British film so they could destroy it.



The 1944 film

Patrick Hamilton has been described by some as a Marxist. His best known work is the novel *Hangover Square*, which has an underlying anti-fascist critique and was adapted for the screen in 1945 in the USA. He also wrote *Rope*, directed in 1948 by Alfred Hitchcock. His writing was admired by, amongst others, Doris Lessing. □

# More young workers joining



**John Moloney**

The ballot of UK civil service and other members of PCS for industrial action began on 26 September, with a closing date of 7 November. The reports I'm getting are very encouraging, and I feel we've gotten off to a good, solid start.

One objective measure of how we're doing is that we're recruiting new members at a much faster rate than we've done for years. We've gone through a period of sharp membership decline following the end of check off, followed by slow growth, but now, hundreds of new members are joining

every week. That shows there's an appetite to organise. People want to join the union at a time they can see that it's fighting over the issues that matter to them.

We also know that we're recruiting much higher levels of younger workers than previously. In many areas we're seeing that translating into more young people getting involved in the union as reps, activists, and as branch officers. In fact one of the key tasks of the union is to consolidate these "new" people properly into the union

We're planning meetings to discuss what kind of action we want to take if the ballots are successful. It's important though that such meetings happen across the whole of PCS and not just at the National Executive Committee

(NEC) level to discuss what sort of action can and needs to be taken. Members shouldn't feel like they're simply being told to vote for strikes and then wait for "the union" to tell them what to do, they should feel like they're setting the direction.

Our National Executive Committee has already held discussions around strategy, and there's a clear consensus that a dispute based on 24-hour strikes with weeks or months between actions won't be effective. We need to fight the dispute to win. I'll argue for the maximum degree of national, all-out action that we feel we can deliver. All-out strikes must be supplemented by selective or rolling action, keeping up the pressure on the employer in between national strikes.

I'm also arguing for the maximum amount of strike pay and hardship payments possible. By the end of the year, we'll have around £3 million in strike fund. Every member pays 50p a month from their dues into that fund; we may well look to increase that amount. I don't agree with those who say "striking should be a sacrifice"; invariably it does involve sacrifice, but we shouldn't elevate that into some kind of principle.

The point of a strike is to win. If paying strike pay helps more workers stay out for longer, we should do it. □

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

## Outsourced workers win staff travel passes



**From Tubeworker**

5,000 outsourced cleaners, caterers, and security workers on London Underground will get staff travel passes from April 2023, the new financial year, after Mayor of London Sadiq Khan finally conceded to years of RMT campaigning. Khan has also said he will review sick pay arrangements, and the outsourced cleaning contract itself, in April.

These workers are as much part of

the permanent, core Tube workforce as station staff, drivers, and others, and it was always a scandal that they were discriminated against by having substantially worse terms and conditions. This win goes some way to addressing that scandal, which was also a scandal of racism and sexism as it meant a majority-BEM/migrant workforce, which also had a higher proportion of women workers than the directly-employed workforce, were treated worse than the majority-white direct employees.

It's a testament to the determination and tenacity of union reps and activists amongst the outsourced workers, and their supporters, who have campaigned on this issue over a number of years, including taking the fight

to Khan's doorstep with numerous demonstrations at City Hall (including one in which several activists were on the wrong end of some rough treatment from City Hall security).

Our fight for equality is far from over. Let's use this victory as a springboard to push forward other demands such as £15/hour minimum wage, full company sick pay, minimum staffing levels for cleaners, improved pensions and, ultimately, direct employment. There are also other issues of outsourcing to address across the Tube, especially the reliance on firms like Cleshar and Morsons in the engineering sector.

Everyone who works on the Tube should be directly employed, on LUL terms and conditions! □



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## Luton couriers stage protest

**By Michael Elms**

Food couriers working for Deliveroo, UberEats and JustEat staged a protest in Luton on the night of 27 September, speaking out against low pay. Over 100 drivers participated in a protest outside McDonald's which ran from 10am to midnight.

Speaking to *Luton Today*, one driver said: "Before, we used to make around 15 to 20 deliveries a day, but now that they are employing more drivers it's gone down to around five or six a day. Some people are working from 7am to around 2.30am the next day just to make a living." The Luton couriers are in contact with the IWGB union.

From December 2021 to summer 2022, a national strike movement swept the UK food delivery gig econ-

omy. Sparked by a strike that began in Sheffield with the assistance of the local branch of Workers' Liberty, couriers organised with the IWGB to strike against Stuart, a subcontractor which serves JustEat, to demand an increase in pay.

The national strike action spread across the north of England and won some small concessions from the employer. But the annual summer lull arrived before it was possible to spread the strike and consolidate organisation sufficiently to win. The national strike campaign was suspended in the summer and couriers are still mulling when to re-start their national fight. With petrol prices up, and as delivery business picks up again, with the cold weather, the arguments to renew the fight are becoming stronger. □

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### Contact us

[020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

[solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

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

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



# Russia annexes parts of Ukraine, Putin threatens nuclear war

By Dan Katz

On 30 September Russian President, Vladimir Putin, signed “accession treaties” which formally subsumed four Ukrainian regions – Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk and Luhansk – into Russia.

Putin signed off the annexations following hastily arranged, blatantly rigged votes in these Russian-occupied areas. After three of the five days allocated for voting the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics had declared a fantastical 87% turnout, in a war zone, including 50% in the destroyed, largely abandoned and uninhabited towns of Lysychansk, Sieverodonetsk and Rubishne.

Russia claims these four areas voted 93, 87, 99 and 98%, respectively, to join Russia. These ridiculous “results,” so obviously rigged, were not meant to persuade anyone outside Russia that the votes were legitimate. Instead the figures were declared for Russia’s domestic audience where they were intended to project Putin’s power and reinforce the regime’s story that Ukraine is a non-country where there is almost unanimous support to join Russia.

Rattled by recent Ukrainian battlefield gains, and an unpopular conscription drive, Russia’s policy is so shambolic it was unclear exactly what territory Putin was laying claim to. Ukraine still holds large parts of Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts and is retaking ground in Luhansk and Kherson. Putin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said he would have to “clarify” the question of borders. Donetsk’s Russian stooge, Denis Pushilin said, “What are the borders? Let’s wait for the final decisions, consultations are being held on how to do it right.”

In a rambling speech to mark his attempted theft of Ukrainian land, Vladimir Putin ranted against the west: “[The Western powers] don’t want us to be free, they want us to be a colony.” Putin also hinted, yet again, that he could use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.

Putin’s remarks about nuclear war need to be seen in context. His basic policy is to pressurise and alarm the West enough to stop the US and EU states arming Ukraine, and to force Ukraine to sign a lousy peace deal favourable to Russia. Just as France and Germany did in 2014 when they pushed Ukraine to sign the Minsk agreements.

If Putin is able to freeze the war along its current lines he will be able to regroup and possibly invade again in the future.

So the threat of nuclear war is useful to Putin, politically. Which does not mean Putin is simply bluffing and nuclear war cannot happen. It might.

The world is probably closer to nuclear war than at any time since the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. Putin could calculate battlefield nuclear weapons might frighten Ukraine enough to force it to capitulate. He could destroy a town. Or, alternatively, he might decide to use nuclear (or chemical weapons) to prevent a Russian defeat in Ukraine (he looks likely to lose Lyman in the next few days and Ukraine’s counter-offensive in the north east is still gaining ground), which would endanger his position at home.

America has told Putin that any Russian use of nuclear weapons will be met with a very serious (probably conventional) counter-attack. That would widen the war immediately, and such a development would be very difficult to contain and to predict an outcome.

## Illegal

In response to Putin Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine would continue to fight to recover all Russian-occupied land. The four annexed Oblasts form about 15% of Ukrainian territory.

The US and EU denounced the annexations as “illegitimate”. NATO General Secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, called the move a “serious escalation”. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said annexation had “no legal value.”

A UN Security Council motion which described the referenda as “illegal” and asked governments to refuse to recognise the land-grabs was vetoed by Russia. The voting on the motion was 10-1 in favour with China, India, Gabon and Brazil abstaining.

Recently Putin admitted that China’s President Xi had expressed “concerns” about the invasion. India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also criticised the Russian war.

Despite their abstentions at the UN, China and India have both stated that they will not recognise the annexations. Close Russian allies Kazakhstan (which is worried about Russia taking part of its northern, ethnically-Russian territory) and Serbia (which has its own worries about borders) will also not recognise the annexations. □

• More on Ukraine and the war: Ivanna Khrapko, p.12; opposition in Russia, p.9; military mobilisation in Russia, p.6; Eric Lee, p.4

# Solidarity with Italy’s workers and oppressed!

By Sacha Ismail

Italy’s 25 September election has brought to power a “post-fascist” far-right party whose leader – almost certainly the next prime minister – still talks sympathetically about Mussolini.

This will be the most right-wing Italian government since Mussolini. It is a boost to the far right across the world and a brutal setback for Italy’s labour movement and oppressed people, who will need the greatest possible solidarity.

Fratelli d’Italia (Fd’I, Brothers of Italy) is part of a so-called “centre-right” coalition that won 43.8% of the vote, up from 37% in 2018. The centre-left coalition rose from 22.9% to 26.1%, while the populist Five Star Movement fell from 32.7% to 15.4%. Within the right-wing bloc, however, there was a huge shift. In 2018, Fd’I won 4.3% and 32 members of parliament; this time they got 26% and 119 seats, out of 400.

As in a number of countries, right-wing votes have shifted even further right. Fd’I’s partners, the far-right populist League led by Matteo Salvini and the conservative Forza d’Italia of former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, both lost about half their votes.

Overall the bloc has 237 seats; they could struggle to get to the two thirds necessary to change the constitution. Fd’I wants an executive presidency, to help shift towards a more authoritarian system.

Its leader, Giorgia Meloni, on the verge of becoming Italy’s first female prime minister – she is certainly no feminist – was a minister under Silvio Berlusconi (in 2008-11). But she began her activism and formed her ideas in the youth wing of the fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) – not in the distant past but the 1990s. She and the bulk of Fd’I’s leadership – and its tricolour flame symbol – come from the post-MSI organisation National Action.

Meloni claims she is not a fascist, but in 2020 she publicly praised the MSI’s founder, a minister in Mussolini’s government. She shouted the traditional fascist slogan Dio, Patria e Famiglia at a rally of the far-right Vox party in Spain last year. She likens herself to Hungary’s far-right, authoritarian prime minister Viktor Orbán. The Fd’I campaign attacked gay and trans rights, proposed to stop any migrants landing in Italy, and argued to make accessing abortion even harder.

It also attacked vaguely progressive welfare re-



forms introduced recently. The election resulted from the fall of the “national unity” government led by technocrat Mario Draghi and involving every significant party except Fd’I. Draghi’s government followed two Five Star Movement-led coalitions, one supported by the right-wing League and the other by the centre-left Democratic Party. Remaining independent, Fd’I has been able to present itself as an opposition to a series of neoliberal governments that have increased inequality and insecurity – although Fd’I is perhaps even more neoliberal.

In the context of constantly shifting alliances and governments, but a consistent tide of attacks on the working class, distrust in official politics has bloomed. Until recently Italy’s election turnouts were well over 80%; this time 37% abstained, up 9%. That distrust has mostly been channelled in a right-wing direction.

The new government will be vicious towards working-class struggles and organisations, and likely to embolden fascist street groups. Italy has already seen a rise in violent attacks on migrants and labour movement activists.

Despite the absence of a substantial working-class political voice, and a leadership that works to prevent the generalisation of struggles, elements of the Italian labour movement have continued to fight heroic battles. And when the fascist Forza Nuova took the opportunity of an anti-vax demonstration last year to trash the offices of the main Italian union confederation, CGIL, 200,000 workers demonstrated at a week’s notice.

The UK labour movement and left must find ways to support comrades in Italy. □





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## KICK THE TORIES OUT!

**By Martin Thomas**

Liz Truss, elevated to prime minister by the votes of 81,000 Tory party members to the horror of the wider electorate, is trying to make a turn in policy defined even by more cautious Tories as unjust and unworkable.

She can do so only because MPs elected for five years are insulated from recall or accountability for those five years, and because even those elected MPs are usually more controlled by the prime minister than controlling. Once Liz Truss had won the Tory contest, she could appoint whom she liked to the ministries, and thus protect herself by a "payroll vote" against most challenges.

The Tories have forced a retreat on one element of Truss's plans, the cut in the top income-tax rate which on her own admission was never discussed even by the Cabinet. Leading Tories are pressing Truss to honour the uprating of benefits in line with inflation in April 2023. On 4 Oct Truss refused to say she trusts Kwarteng, before saying she did after all. The essence remains: big tax cuts for the rich and business, token tax

cuts for the worse-off, and lifting the lid on bankers' bonuses, all on the promise that this will bribe the rich into generating "growth", and gains from that growth will eventually trickle down to the rest of us.

The promised growth, besides, is heavily in fracking, other oil and gas extraction, and financial money-churning business, growth which stunts our chances of minimising environmental destruction.

Some Tory MPs have talked of ousting Truss only days after she took office. The structures of British "constitutional monarchy" make that difficult short of crack-up. The prime minister, carrying much of the "constitutional" power of the monarch, controls parliament more than parliament controls the minister. The Tories eventually moved against Boris Johnson after long discredit and floundering. Truss has sought to escape the floundering by a lurch of policy.

The Labour Party should declare it recognises no right for the Tories to pursue Truss's lurch without a fresh election, and refuse ordinary parliamentary cooperation with the Tories.

(Labour MPs did that briefly in November 1980, over council rent rises imposed by the Tory government, and later on occasions in 1984, 1985, and 1988).

The chief way to call the Tories to account is to step up the strikes.

In early 1974 the Tory government of Edward Heath, which had attempted a version of Thatcherism before Thatcher and been thwarted by strikes, resorted to an early election on the theme: "Who governs Britain – government or unions?"

Many voters sought a middle road – the Liberals' vote went up from 7.5% to 19.3% – but Labour won that election with promises of a "social contract", a new reconciliation between social classes, immediately undoing the worst Tory policies.

That attempt to manage capitalism would sour into Labour cuts and attempts to impose limits on wage rises.

The lesson for today: light a fire under the Tories, and match industrial combativity with a drive to transform Labour into a democratic alternative committed to working-class policies. □

• Truss, Kwarteng, and economics: page 10