



For social ownership of the banks and industry

NHS IN WORST EVER PLIGHT



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NHS in worst-ever plight



Crisis is engulfing the National Health Service, with winter not even really underway yet. The labour movement must respond by a fight to win extra resources to restore the NHS. It should champion industrial action by NHS workers as part of a battle to salvage and rebuild the health service.

On 2 November NHS England's chief executive Amanda Pritchard said:

"When I started this job... I thought the pandemic would be the hardest thing any of us ever had to do. [In fact] it's where we are now... that isn't to take away anything, by the way, from just how tough particularly some of that early period of the pandemic was. But... it is harder now."

On 21 October the Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulator published a [report](#) outlining disarray in virtually every aspect of the health service and social care system. Its title summed up: "Gridlocked health and care system leading to deterioration in people's access to and experience of care."

The NHS has vast and growing waiting lists; long and growing waits for access to A&E; ambulances severely delayed; lack of GP appointments; a crisis in maternity care... Those things are worse, not better, than at the time of Thatcher's cuts to the NHS, when big demonstrations, hospital occupations, and health workers' strikes eventually pushed the Tories back.

Unlike with other public services, it seems the Tories won't actually reduce the England and Wales NHS budget in cash terms in Hunt's 17 November "new austerity" announcements, though the Scottish government is making cash-cuts. Instead the combination of steadily rising needs and inflation will cut NHS funding in real terms.

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation of health service providers, says this will be the first real-terms cut in NHS funding since 1997. The NHS Confederation [estimates](#) a real-terms cut next year of between £4 billion and £9.4 billion, between 2.65% and 6.22%.

The government's claims of a real-terms yearly increase of 3.8% is spin, refusing to take into account either increased inflation or the withdrawal of extra Covid-related funds.

Response

The government's response to Pritchard's comments made clear it does not intend to concede anything on NHS funding: "The NHS is concentrating on new ways of working to increase efficiencies, save staff time and ensure value for money."

There is a growing right-wing propaganda campaign attacking the NHS as a "money pit" that if anything has arguably received too much funding.

In fact the NHS was already underfunded before 2020. If the kind of increases it received under the last Labour governments (1997-2010) had continued, its £150 billion budget would be about £50 billion higher. If in-

creases had matched the average since 1948, £30 billion higher.

The CQC says there are 132,000 vacancies in the NHS and 165,000 in social care. If the government can get away with another real-terms pay cut, that situation will just get worse.

Unions should be launching a big campaign, among their members, in the media and on social media, in communities and on the streets, for more funding for the NHS. They should agree a round figure for more funding for health and care (£20 billion?), assert it aggressively, and get it into people's heads.

NHS workers' fight for a real pay rise – to prevent further grinding down of the workforce and start to push up pay and conditions – is a crucial front in the fight to save the health service. With it must go a demand to increase the NHS budget to cover the rise, as the National Education Union is demanding that school budgets increase to cover a pay rise for school workers. Otherwise, managers will seek to offset every 1% pay rise above the 3% the government has budgeted for by cutting £900 million somewhere else.

More money for health and care services and workforces should go alongside radical reforms: not more marketisation, but a reversal of care-damaging, money-wasting, profit-boosting privatisation and marketisation in the NHS. Social care, currently dominated by profit-seeking private companies, must be transformed into a free, publicly funded and provided, NHS-style service, with workers on



NHS levels of pay and conditions. The Labour leadership cites the NHS as the party's greatest achievement – yet it is doing nothing to defend it now. It cites Tony Blair's governments as a model – but it won't commit even to the increased NHS funding Blair disbursed. Part of the labour movement campaign we need is shaking Labour into a better stance and into action. □

• [SOS NHS conference](#), Saturday 12 November, 10am-5pm, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Sq, London NW1 9XB

Behind the £30 billion cuts



By Martin Thomas

Thirty-odd billion pounds of cuts are trailed for 17 November. The Tories plan to "repair" economic life by deliberately running down the public services and public investment which underpin it, and by deliberately further pauperising people who depend on state benefits.

This upside-down economics come from economic life being ruled by markets rather than collective conscious human decision.

In a capitalist market economy, as Karl Marx wrote, "the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between people at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons [i.e. mediated by things, commodities, money] and social relations between things [commodities]". "To the producers, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them".

"The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production

by freely associated people, and is consciously regulated by them".

In today's capitalism, with its huge needs for public infrastructure, and with extensive public provision (schools, health care) thanks to decades of labour-movement pressure, the rule of markets is sometimes more intricate and complex.

Especially since the 1980s, markets in IOUs and in "tickets" to future capitalist revenues have become much larger and faster than "everyday" markets in goods and services.

Today

In Britain today, markets in goods and services turn over

about £6 billion a day. Markets in government IOUs (bonds), about £30 billion a day. In trading between currencies, up to £3 trillion. In corporate bonds and shares, about £4 trillion.

The "official" story is that this is an efficient way to recycle savings into loans for productive investment, but in fact almost all the frenzied trading is competitive jousting to grab slices of the surplus-value coming from production.

The government fears that if capitalists come to reckon that a promise to pay back £1 million in so many years' time is losing relative value, then it will have to offer higher and higher interest rates to sell its IOUs.

It cuts public spending, and has the Bank of England raise the rate of interest it pays banks on their deposits with the BoE, to curb market demand, restrain credit and productive investment, and encourage saving relative to immediate spending. Such moves can slow down prices and encourage the wealthy to save in pounds rather than in other formats.

The upside-down logic here – engineer recession to save economic life – can be reversed only by the "conscious regulation" Marx wrote of.

That starts with taking the whole of high finance into public ownership and democratic control. □

Open the doors for refugees!

By David Santos

Hundreds of people protested outside Manston detention camp on Sunday 6 November. Through the pouring rain, we protested to demand Manston and all other camps were shut down, and for justice for all those currently detained, as well as all trying to cross the border.

The protest was called by the Action Against Deportations and Detention (AADD) coalition, following a protest inside by detainees and the visit by a smaller group of activists the week before, whose findings catapulted the abhorrent conditions to mainstream front pages.

The scandal has forced the government to reduce the intense overcrowding by moving some detainees out. But as of 4 November, the camp was still over double its capacity. At least some of those “released” were simply dumped in central London with no information or shelter.

Inside the camp, private contractor Mitie, under military direction, continues to profit from the internment, with detainees denied access to mobile phones, and basic medical care. There

is no evidence that these conditions have improved. A member of the security team revealed, in an interview with *The Times* this week, that even the dignity of knowing the time is denied to detainees, as a means to debilitate the frequent attempts at rebellion and escape.

At this protest, a key intention was to let detainees know that we were there and we care about them. Messages of solidarity were sent through a loudspeaker, read out in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Albanian and other languages, and we threw over paper planes with messages of support and legal advice. The authorities tried to restrict contact across the fences by installing tarpaulin barriers and keeping all detainees indoors. We saw people – individuals and families – waving white sheets towards the protest from their windows. But for all the speeches and messages of “We are with you”, a very real barrier remains between those outside protesting and those detained inside.

Protesters were unified and inspired by the demonstration. We chanted “Tear down the fences, open the borders” and “No Justice, no peace. No

Strikes

Rolling, since 26 Sep: Workers at Jacob’s Bakery factory in Aintree (GMB) on strike

Since 15 Oct: West Midlands Metro workers (Unite) strike for 52 days (non-consecutive), up to start of Jan

Since 20 Oct: Quorn factory workers in Billingham (Unite) on indefinite strike

10 Nov: London Underground and London Overground workers (RMT) strike

10 Nov: Transport for London workers in various departments (Unite) strike

Until 14 Nov: Workers at Polyflor factory in Manchester (GMB) strike

16, 23, 30 Nov: Outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (PCS) strike

24-25 Nov: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike; Uni staff in UCU strike

30 Nov: Uni staff (UCU) strike

30 Nov-1 Dec: Royal Mail workers (CWU) strike

30 Nov-1 Dec: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

7 and 14 Dec: Outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (PCS) strike

Until 29 Dec: Hull Stagecoach bus drivers (Unite) strike

11-12 Jan: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

15-16 February: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

Ballots

Until 10 Nov: Unison members at the Environment Agency ballot for action over pay

11 Nov-12 Dec: Midwives in England and Wales (RCM) ballot for action over pay

Until 14 Nov: Firefighters (FBU) ballot on whether to accept a five percent pay offer. The union is recommending rejection, which will almost certainly lead to an industrial action ballot

Until 15 Nov: Rail workers at Network Rail and Train Operating Companies (RMT) re-ballot for continued action in their dispute over pay, jobs, and conditions

Until 19 Nov: Prospect members at the Environment Agency ballot for action over pay

Until 22 Nov: Outsourced cleaners on multiple TOCs (RMT) ballot

Until 25 Nov: NHS staff (Unison) ballot for action over pay

Until 29 Nov: Ambulance workers across 11 trusts in England and Wales (GMB) ballot for action over pay

Until 8 Dec: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballot in their dispute over jobs, pensions, and conditions

Until 9 Jan: Teachers (NASUWT) ballot for action over pay

Around 9 Jan: Junior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay

Until 13 Jan: Teachers and school support staff (NEU) ballot □



All the Rage: A day of socialist feminist discussion and organising

Saturday 26 November, 11am-6pm, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1 5QJ. Talks and workshops include • Women and the cost of living crisis • Revolution in Iran • Fighting inequalities in India • Women versus the state • Trans-inclusive feminism • Childcare – what do we demand? • Reproductive rights, a worldwide fight • Ukraine: feminism on the frontline. Free crèche and kids’ activities. Overnight accommodation if required. Tickets: £10, £5 student or low-waged. More info: womensfightback@workersliberty.org. Tickets: bit.ly/wl-atr □

borders, no police” – clear indications of the radically different society we want to build. Calls were made to continue and grow the demonstrations, to keep fulfilling the important cause of making direct connection with those in detention.

An activist from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement also spoke, highlighting the significance of working-class agency. If workers refuse, no deportation flights or Hostile Environment policies can be implemented.

Trade union representation was lacking at this protest. Not only must we work to bring our union branches to future demonstrations at Manston and other detention centres, we must raise demands for open borders and migrants’ rights in the labour movement.

Workers in aviation, social work, education, healthcare and other services are coopted to do the work of the Hostile Environment – we should work to demystify these operations and persuade and embolden workers to organise and defy the Home Office’s commands.

The urgent humanitarian crisis that is the very existence of the border is not limited to detention centres, but follows individuals through No Recourse to Public Funds, denial of access to work, social security or housing, imposing destitution and precarity.

Immediately, we demand – and must press Labour and the unions to support – the release of all detainees to decent housing in the community, closing all these detention centres and camps; and all arrivals’ rights on day one to access work, social security, healthcare and public services.

Labour movement activists must also think seriously about how the resources of our unions – from branch level to the entire union – can be harnessed to support siblings facing border vio-

lence. Perhaps it’s funding coaches to detention centre demos. It could also be opening public spaces as spaces of sanctuary for undocumented people to meet, socialise, and organise.

A number of speakers at the Manston demo stressed also the international nature of this fight. Freedom of movement means freedom to go, but also freedom to stay. That means supporting causes of national liberation, struggles against occupation, oppression and climate destruction. □

Huge payouts for the rich

Top bosses’ pay went up 23% in 2022. The bosses of the top 100 companies on the Stock Exchange took an average of **£3.9 million**, with a record level of bonuses.

That’s just the top boss in each of 100 companies. Billions more will have gone in payments to other high-rank bosses, in dividends, in payments on corporate bonds, and in similar revenues from private-equity and other companies not quoted on the Stock Exchange.

The “luxury goods” market (ultra-expensive watches, jewellery, handbags, clothes, etc.) expanded **about 20%** in the first half of 2022 (over 2021), and has continued **expanding** since. It grew almost 40% in 2021, after dipping a bit in lockdown 2020.

The resources and the productive capacity are there for good pay rises for NHS workers and others.

Solidarity and determination can win them. □

The Morning Star talks about Trotskyism



Antidoto

By Sacha Ismail

The recent *Morning Star* [article](#) on Trotskyism, credited to the “Marx Memorial Library” (MML) associated with the Communist Party of Britain as author, is pitched to seem reasonable. It poses a “challenge” for “all genuine socialists” – suggesting this includes many Trotskyists – to “work together on our common objectives”.

But, for a start, the practice of the organisations behind the *Morning Star* does not match up with the appeal for reasonable cooperation.

The CPB’s youth wing, the Young Communist League (YCL), has been taken over by extreme [Stalinists](#) who – in addition to advocating for Stalin, North Korea, etc – venomously denounce Trotskyists, celebrate historical anti-Trotskyist violence and murder, and in some cases performatively advocate the same today.

Whether the “MML” article is in part a contribution to attempts to rein in

the YCL, which older CPBers must be worried about if only because it could jeopardise official union funding for the *Morning Star*, I don’t know.

The article reprises in more urbane tones the theme of older, more vitriolically worded, polemics against “Trotskyists”: we are both “ultra-left” and somehow right-wing.

It claims that “prominent Trotskyists... support Britain’s membership of Nato and the expansion of nuclear weapon systems”. It names none.

“MML” suggests that ultra-left, dogmatic and mechanical distortions of Marxist thinking characterise Trotskyist groups. Sometimes, yes: like the labels “democrat”, “socialist”, “Marxist”, “communist”, the label “Trotskyist” has acquired varied claimants over the decades. But only the most aberrant claimants to “Trotskyist” credentials come near the excesses of Stalinist groups over the decades. In fact, many of the faults of would-be Trotskyist groups come from the shaping influence on them of Stalinist parties in the era when those Stalinist parties were vastly stronger and richer.

Trotskyist organisations, say “MML”,

“exhibit many of the features identified by Lenin in his 1920 text *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*”.

In fact Lenin (whom the article bizarrely claims Trotskyists are not keen to cite) advocated tactical flexibility and socialist groups working within, or building united fronts of struggle with, even conservative and bureaucratic mass labour movement organisations. What the *Morning Star* means by avoiding “ultra-leftism” is different. One example: the MS [denouncing](#) left opposition to UCU General Secretary Sally Hunt while she tried to sell out a strike as “ultra-left tactical insanity”.

Unlike anti-Trotskyist polemics of previous decades, this one seeks to present Trotsky himself as a relatively admirable figure, while condemning all today’s Trotskyists. It highlights the absence of a “Trotskyist-led revolution” or “enduring mass Trotskyist parties anywhere in the world”. In other words, it seeks to boost the feeble CPB with the idea that its presumed similars in China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia etc. gained mass support and made revolutions.

But China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia were not workers’ revolutions. The regimes

there crushed working-class organisation. And some of most inspiring popular upsurges of the last decades were aimed against “socialist” dictatorships of the sort those “successful” revolutions produced.

With the collapse and discrediting of Stalinism, mass “Communist Parties” have withered or collapsed. The CPB itself is the product of a small 1988 splinter from the old Communist Party of Great Britain, which voted to dissolve itself in 1991.

Big historical questions are at the root of important differences between the *Morning Star* and any politics with real connection to Trotsky’s legacy.

For free trade unions, the right to strike and free elections in China and Cuba – or not? For an end to suppression of the Uyghur people by the Chinese state? For the Ukrainian people’s right to self-determination and self-defence? For trans rights? Against nationalist attempts to erect new borders in Europe? For building a rank-and-file left opposition to the bureaucratic leaderships of the unions?

Let’s discuss those. □

• Jim Denham is away for a week.

Richer, and with more poverty



Pages from a militant life

By Bob Carnegie

From my childhood and mid-teens, 50 or 60 years ago, to today, people have become significantly richer in material consumer goods in the stronger capitalist economies, and, in fact, in some ways, in weaker capitalist economies too.

When I was 13 or 14, in the mid 70s, TV came to Australia on a large scale. Initially colour TV in the Carnegie household consisted of plastic coloured wrap on a black and white TV. Eventually dad bowed to family pressure and bought a colour TV on the never-never, slang for hire purchase, with quite high interest rates.

In 1963, a black-and-white TV had cost ten times the average weekly wage (and that average of all wages, boosted by some high rates, is maybe 40% above the wage of the average worker). TVs became much cheaper in the 1980s and after. Today a new LCD colour TV can be bought for one-ninth of an average weekly wage.

Today it’s common in Australia, even in families with quite low household income, to have a TV in each bedroom. Even in China or in Bangladesh, most city people have TVs and mobile phones.

The super-exploitation of workers in China, Bangladesh, etc. shows itself in the high profit rates for capitalists in those countries, often contractors for multinationals; and the fact that workers there may well have TVs and phones which workers in richer countries lacked 60 years ago, but

still lack safe and healthy work conditions, and, often, decent housing, reliable electricity supply without power cuts, and other public infrastructure.

Clothes too have become much cheaper compared to when I was a lad. I remember as a child going with my slightly younger brother and mum (dad was away at sea) and getting our yearly allotment of clothes. A lot of attention was paid to making sure you could “grow into” your shoes.

Now it is common for teenagers from even poorer working-class families to have a relatively wide choice of clothes, and even some “brands”.

The sporting shoe giant Nike started from a product actually inferior to Adidas or Puma, but overtook them through targeted marketing using individual sports stars like Mi-

chael Jordan. Poor children in ghettos will commit crimes to have a pair of “Air Jordans”. That product attachment was not part of my growing up, but since being unleashed (in Australia) in the early 80s it has become common.

Capitalism’s capacity to change itself and find niches in marketplaces never ceases to amaze.

And yet homelessness, which was rare in Australia when I was young, has grown almost steadily since the country first started compiling official statistics for it in 2001. A recent [report](#) found that one person in 20 in the age group 15-19 had a first experience of homelessness in the years 2020 and 2021.

Food banks started only in the 1990s: the numbers dependent on them have surged year-on-year since then.

Many material gains of the

era from 1950 to the 1980s (in the stronger capitalist countries, later in the weaker ones) were solid and real. Washing machine ownership per household is over 90% now in all but the very poorest regions of China, and higher in Turkey than in the USA.

But poverty and insecurity remain real and growing even in the richest capitalist countries, and endemic in the poorer ones. □

Second hand books

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

Iran: “this is a left movement”



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

A new wave of student strikes swept Iran on the weekend 5-6 Nov. The protest movement has been continuing in the face of violent suppression by the Iranian state. Hundreds of people have been killed so far by security forces.

Sonia Mohammadi, a workers' and women's rights activist from Iran and a member of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran Hekmatist Official Line, talked to me.

“The killing of Mahsa Amini by the Morality Police of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the continuation of the treatment of all women by the regime. This is not the first time Islamic Republic forces have committed such a crime. Women have been facing gender apartheid. Genocide against women is central to the Islamic Republic.”

Mahsa Amini was a Kurdish woman visiting Tehran; her Kurdish name was Zhina. Kurdistan saw some of the first protests, under the slogan “woman, life, freedom”.



Sonia Mohammadi

“It doesn't mean that because Mahsa was a Kurdish girl, this movement is only a Kurdish movement. They've been trying hard. If I'd be honest with you, the government itself and the right-wing opposition want to say it is just Kurdish and make conflict in the movement. It is not true. And even in slogans, you can see clearly.

“For example one of them ‘Kurdistan is our heart’. So people would be chanting from Tehran to support Kurdistan, from Khuzestan to support Kurdistan, from Kurdistan for support to Iran. The uprising just breaks down that conflict.

“You know, they've been trying to labelise this movement with different

labels, which is basically not real. I'm pretty sure, because of all the news, all the videos and everything we get from Iran. It doesn't say anything about that. It's not a nationalist movement. It's mostly a left movement going on.”

The Iranian exile left have been organising under the umbrella Solidarity With The People's Uprising in Iran, challenging monarchists' attempt to hegemonise protests in solidarity with the movement against the Islamic regime with calls for the return of a Shah.

“We have to come together as an organisation, left organisation, women organisation, activities. Whoever we are, we just need to fight to get a voice for the uprising in Iran.

“The monarchists, they back regime change but to take us backward. But the people in Iran, the uprising, do not want that. Go back 44 years? You know, the last and previous revolution was unfinished. It wasn't unnecessary, it was unfinished. And we have to finish today. In the uprising people clearly we don't want a king or monarch.

“In some protests they even say ‘Long live socialism’ and this kind of slogan. That's why we strongly believe this is a left movement.”

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has condemned what he calls “rioting” and accused the US and Israel of planning the protests.

“This is something the Islamic regime uses all the time – opposition is the USA – but these protests are the people of Iran, the women, the workers, the students of Iran.” □

Free Alaa Abd el-Fattah!

By Mohan Sen

As the COP27 summit meets in Egypt a UK citizen, Alaa Abd el-Fattah, is on the verge of death in one of the Egyptian regime's prisons.

About to turn 41, if he makes it that far, Abd el-Fattah is an Egyptian democracy activist who has been in and out of prison under every Egyptian president in his lifetime – first decades-long ruler Hosni Mubarak, then Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and now Mubarak mark 2 Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

There are over 65,000 political prisoners in Sisi's jails.

On hunger strike for more than six months in protest at his brutal treatment, Abd el-Fattah has now stopped drinking water.

Though he has UK citizenship through his mother, the British government – despite professions of “deep concern” – appears not to want to make too much fuss. Unsurprisingly given the UK's huge business and military links with the Egyptian regime.

On 7 November a group of Egyptian journalists began a hunger strike in their union building to demand freedom for Abd el-Fattah and other political prisoners. □

Ukrainians are not deluded “pawns of the USA”



Eye on the left

By James Rink

At a “festival” organised by Socialist Appeal on 21 October, their leading writer and speaker Alan Woods devoted 15 minutes or so of his hour long [speech](#) to Ukraine.

Delivered in his oddly smug style, the speech set out the main elements of the group's analysis.

Firstly there was the marked emphasis on the “international relations” context of the conflict. Napoleon and Clausewitz were duly quoted. According to Woods, this is a war between the USA-Nato and Russia. The Ukrainian people, their national rights, the workers' movement and the left? They don't really figure.

On one level this allows Socialist Appeal to offer up a Marxist-sounding analysis while simultaneously side-stepping the immediate political questions posed by the attempted Russian conquest of Ukraine.

Unfortunately for Woods, the proxy-war position doesn't stand up to scrutiny. This is first and foremost a Russian imperialist war to subjugate Ukraine. The origin, timing and ferocity of this war lies with Putin and his ruling group

in Moscow. The response of the USA and Nato was of an entirely different nature and magnitude.

To overcome this problem requires Socialist Appeal, like Stop the War Coalition, SWP, Counterfire and others, to contort the history of the region and the conflict, so that they end up some distance from reality. Imaginary scenarios about Nato war drives to strangle-subjugate-dismember Russia – as if were mere detail that the war started by Russia extending its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, rather than by Ukraine invading and trying to seize chunks of Russia – belong in Putin's fevered propaganda and not in any Marxist analysis.

Pawns

Socialist Appeal has been about the most pro-Putin of the ostensibly Trotskyist left. It makes no mention, even as a political token, of wanting Russian troops out. Instead we hear an almost gleeful account, from Woods, of Russia mobilising another 200,000 troops and the impact that will have.

Woods makes two specific references to the actual Ukrainian people.

“I feel sorry for the poor Ukrainians, they don't know they are the pawns of American imperialism.”

“Give the devil his due, Ukrainian troops have fought well.”

A speech is a speech, not a written work; there can be more drift and lee-

way. But Woods was reading from extensive notes. It wasn't off the cuff.

Woods views Ukraine as a nation without rights or agency – a mere pawn jostled between bigger world-historic forces. To put it another way, the Ukrainians are a “non-historic people”, as per a formulation dismantled, ironically enough, by the Ukrainian Marxist [Roman Rosdolsky](#) over 70 years ago.

As for giving the devil his due – now that's a telling phrase if there ever was one. For Woods it must be a bit of a mystery as to why the Ukrainians are defending their territory with such intensity and intransigence. It is almost as if these supposed poor duped “pawns” are in fact really a nation that has been galvanised into defending itself from conquest by a brutal and despotic imperialist neighbour.

It is woeful politics from Alan Woods and Socialist Appeal, displaying an unsettling indifference to national oppression and great Russian chauvinism, especially from a group that prides itself on being “the Marxists”, with a strict adherence to the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky.

The war in Ukraine has brought some of the lingering legacies of Stalinism into sharp relief on the left. A gut sympathy for Russian imperialism is now clearly one of those legacies – the polar opposite of the tradition that Socialist Appeal claims. □



**Activist
Agenda**

The Free Our Unions campaign is running a crowdfunder (bit.ly/fightantistrikelaws) to raise cash for campaigning against the new anti-strike laws planned by the Tory government. The success of the unions in Ontario, Canada, in forcing the government there to repeal a new anti-strike law only days after it had been voted through, adds urgency to this appeal. □

• Links for campaigns and motions at workersliberty.org/agenda

Winning the cooperation we need



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

As COP27 meets, five tipping points that are underway. They include the collapse of Greenland's ice cap, the weakening of oceanic currents, and an abrupt melting of carbon-rich permafrost. Those impacts alone will lead to shifting coastlines, disruption to global rain patterns on which the food of billions of people depend, and further warming.

When the IPCC first discussed tipping points two decades ago it was thought they would not occur until we exceeded 5 degrees warming. Now, at 1.1 degrees Celsius, they are already underway.

Beyond the known tipping points, there are "known unknowns" that are beyond our capacity to model. Climate change is only one of a number of "planetary boundaries" that we have exceeded, thus posing an existential threat to human civilisation.

Other boundaries include species extinction, pollution and disruptions to the water, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles. As these multiple crises unfold they will feed one another. Climate change will drive further mass extinction as species struggle to adjust to a warming world. Species extinction will in turn add more carbon to the atmosphere as less carbon is locked in living organisms.

We know that all the organisms currently existing have evolved together in myriad symbiotic relationships over three million years of relatively stable climatic conditions. The Earth's biota has feedback systems that can help stabilise the climate and create conditions of habitability for life.

The past three million years have enjoyed unusual climate stability. The last 10,000 years, all the time that human civilisation has existed, have been more stable still. Losing great limbs of the tree of life will likely weaken the Earth's homeostatic feedback systems, creating conditions where it may become very difficult to re-stabilise the Earth's climate.

But there is reason to hope. There is a strong scientific consensus about the problems and what is needed for a "safe operating space" within which eight billion human beings (maybe more) could flourish alongside a thriving biosphere with a stable habitable climate. We know what needs to be done to return to this safe operating space.

We need to stop the ecocidal work that is currently taking place such as fossil fuel extraction and deforestation. We need to restore ecosystems, transforming the way we produce food and energy to halt emissions and free up land for rewilding and carbon draw-down.

We need to slow down, do less work and have more leisure time, resisting the bosses' incessant drive to intensify the rate of work. We must plan and create systems of production and consumption based on careful recycling of resources. We need to do all of this whilst ensuring that everyone has a comfortable amount of food, energy, housing, and basic services like telecommunications, healthcare, education, transport.

We also need to prepare and adapt for the natural disasters that are now unavoidable. Billions of people will need to relocate to cooler latitudes as the tropics become unliveable. Coastal cities will need to retreat, or relocate, as sea levels rise. New cities will have to be built in a New North. Alongside all this we need to better resource Earth sciences to improve our understanding



and guide this work of ecological restoration and climate restabilisation.

We know this work needs to take place to avoid catastrophic loss of life and a likely descent into war and barbarism. 27 years of COP meetings tell us that the current ruling class, cannot and will not organise this work. Their overriding organising principle, the endless pursuit of profit, is driving us in precisely the wrong direction and at accelerating speed. In the last 27 years, the best that world governments have managed is non-binding pledges that if they were achieved would still result in at least 2.5 degrees of warming, almost certainly triggering these many negative feedback mechanisms.

In order to accommodate the needs of endless capitalist growth, these pledges rely on carbon offsets in the form of afforestation schemes that would require a land area the size of USA, threatening world food supplies and biodiversity. Even these inadequate pledges are not being achieved.

The COP process exposes capitalist world leaders for what they are: completely out of control, overseeing economic life that runs according to its own logic of endless profit-making with complete disregard for the human costs.

In order to carry out the tasks that would see us avoid catastrophe we need a different way of organising human work. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/27-cop



Action on Covid-19

The science magazine *Nature* has published an assessment of scientific consensus on tackling Covid. It is based on surveying scientists' opinions in early 2022.

Then, recorded global case numbers were at their peak and the death count, at 1.4/ million/ day, was near the peak of 1.8 in early 2021. Now case, hospitalisation, case-fatality-rate, and death counts have fallen (deaths, to 0.2), and are falling. Wider vaccination (plus protection via previous infections), better treatments, and the non-emergence of a fiercer variant than Omicron, have helped. Yet some reverses must be expected in the Northern Hemisphere winter.

Some of the survey now looks dated and bland. But five main points emerge: clear communication, resilience in health care, wide vaccination, better ventilation, and support measures (sick pay).

Relevant demands which we have stressed in *Solidarity* include: restore NHS funding and repeal privatisation; requisition private hospitals to augment NHS resources; bring social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for staff. □

Union fightback stops anti-strike law

By Rhodri Evans

Doug Ford, the right-wing "Progressive Conservative" premier of Ontario, Canada, has backed down on anti-union legislation after a union fightback.

"We harnessed our collective power when it was needed most. Ontario workers, and especially the brave CUPE education workers, defended the right to strike for all people in Canada," said Patty Coates, Ontario Federation of Labour

President. And more: "Until education workers bargain a fair collective agreement, we will not stand down; we are ready to fight".

On 4 November, education workers in OPSEU-SEFPO, another union, walked out in solidarity with CUPE, the union whose education support-worker members were targeted by Ford. On 5 November, yet other unions joined in a "Solidarity Saturday" of demonstrations. Leaders of several unions threatened a

wider one-day province-wide strike to follow. Ontario CUPE President Fred Hahn said that a general strike in the province was "absolutely a possibility."

The teaching unions, the Elementary Teachers' Federation and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, encouraged members to join CUPE picket lines before and after work.

On Monday Ford said he would repeal "Bill 28", designed to impose a contract on 55,000 education support

workers and overrule their right to strike.

Schools across Ontario reopened on Tuesday 8 November and contract negotiations started.

Inflation in Ontario is now around 7% and the union is demanding a wage increase of 11.7% (the equivalent of about £2.10 per hour). The state offered 2.5% for the poorest-paid workers, and less for others.

Bill 28 would have made CUPE members face fines of

\$4,000 each day they strike, and the union, a \$500,000 daily fine.

Toronto public transport workers struck in a separate dispute from 7 November.

The Canadian workers have shown how the British labour movement can defeat the Tories' planned new anti-strike laws here: by speedy and concerted strikes and protests to stop them coming into effect, not by vague threats of future agitation after they come into effect. □

Far right gains in Israeli poll

By Dan Katz

The Israeli general election, held on 1 November, was the fifth in four years.

A right-wing alliance led by former Likud Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, won an overall majority. Likud remains the biggest party in the Knesset, with 32 members of parliament (MKs), up two. But the big winner in the election was the far right.

One of the main issues in the election was Netanyahu himself. He has repeatedly faced accusations of corruption, and legal action against him is ongoing.

In order to win Netanyahu brokered a deal between three far-right parties to create the Religious Zionism list as a future coalition ally. Particularly objectionable is the Jewish supremacist party, Jewish Power/Otzma Yehudit, led by Itamar Ben-Gvir.

Israel uses proportional representation. Governments were all dominated by Labour until 1977, but since then have often found it difficult to construct stable coalitions.

The outgoing government, a conservative but anti-Netanyahu alliance led by Naftali Bennett (Yamina) and Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid), was formed in June 2021 with 61 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. When one MK deserted that government it found itself unable to govern effectively and called the November election.

Talks to construct a new Likud-led

government began on Sunday 6 November. Likud's potential allies – Shas, United Torah Judaism and Religious Zionism – collectively won a similar number of seats to Likud, which will make it difficult for Likud to insist on holding all the senior government portfolios.

The far-right Religious Zionism list is made up of Bezalel Smotrich's party Tkuma, Itamar Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit, and the anti-gay Noam party. The three organisations have announced that they will conduct their negotiations with Netanyahu as a unified bloc, and will only enter the government together, once each has a portfolio.

In order to deal with the criminal cases Netanyahu faces, he intends to hand the Justice Ministry to a Likud member, Yariv Levin. Levin is very likely to begin frontal attacks on the independence of the judiciary.

Smotrich wants the Defence portfolio. And the anti-Arab Itamar Ben-Gvir wants to become Public Security Minister, which would give him control of the police. Last year the Police Commissioner accused Ben-Gvir of inciting violence, and if Ben-Gvir gets Public Security he will become the Commissioner's boss.

In the past Ben-Gvir has been aligned by the Kach political party, which was led by the racist, Meir Kahane, and eventually banned as a racist, terrorist organisation.

The fact that Netanyahu has opened the door for this reviled political outsider to become a candidate for a



ministry is a disgrace. Ben-Gvir's party polled only 19,000 votes in the March 2021 election. The Religious Zionists took 10.8% of the vote and now have 14 seats.

The ultra-Orthodox party, Shas, led by Netanyahu loyalist Arye Dery, gained two extra seats in the election. United Torah Judaism will aim to ensure ultra-Orthodox Jews are still able to retain schooling which excludes mathematics, English and science.

The losers in the general election are the Arab parties and the left. The Arab electoral bloc split three ways before this election; one of the three parties, Balad, with 2.9%, failed to reach the electoral threshold of 3.25% and lost its only seat. Meretz, the social democratic party of the peace movement, lost all its seats, only scoring 3.2%. And the once-dominant Labour Party (3.7%) lost three seats, and now only has 4 MKs.

Polls now that show 60% of the Israeli electorate identify with the right, and more among younger voters.

Israeli Arabs, who make up 20% of the Israeli population, had a voter turn-

out of only 55%, down on 65% in 2020, as against a general turnout of over 70%.

Standing Together, an Arab-Jewish movement campaigning for democracy, on social issues, and for the Palestinians' right to an independent state alongside Israel, worked to encourage Arab voter turnout. It faced legal action by Likud (which it successfully fended off) even for doing that, on the pretext that Standing Together is not a registered election participant.

One sign of hope: since the election, 243 new members have joined Standing Together. □



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, £9.99 □ bit.ly/shop-wl

NUS: debate, not summary sacking!

By Sam Myerson

The President of the UK National Union of Students (NUS), Shaima Dallali, has been sacked for alleged "significant breaches of NUS's policies".

The sacking comes as a result of an ongoing (and still to report) KC-led inquiry into allegations of antisemitism in the NUS. It is the first time in NUS history that a President has been sacked, although officers have previously been suspended by the organisation's full-time staff. It is very concerning that the sacking has occurred before the antisemitism inquiry reports: the action risks prejudicing responses to that report.

A brief [statement](#) from the NUS does not state what the breaches of policy are. Previ-

ously Shaima has made clear her opposition to NUS's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) [definition](#) of antisemitism. However, without knowing specifics we can't say this is the issue. We can say, while we believe the IHRA "Working Definition" set out good principles, its value is in educative work, not as a code of conduct in any academic context. Using it as such is likely to cause clashes with the freedom of students and academic workers to express their views on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

We have disagreements with Shaima, as we do with other leftist activists, over how to fight for Palestinian self-determination; we oppose policies (such as the "one state" programme) which push aside Israeli Jewish national iden-

tity. We say "two nations, two states; justice for the Palestinians, peace and reconciliation in the region". But we are mindful that all this comes at a time when the government has made clear their intention to suppress campus free speech.

Concerns

Some concerns stem from an historic tweet, which Shaima has already acknowledged as bad, and comments made during the invitation of Lowkey to NUS conference. But again, as little information has been released, it is impossible to comment or assess.

An article written by Shaima in 2020, which has been widely reported and quoted, makes reference to the now dead cleric, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, as a moral compass for

the Islamic community. Qaradawi's politics were those of Islamism. He was aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood. At one point he advocated suicide bombings against Israeli Jews, at another the prohibition of LGBTQ+ people's lives under Islam.

Any support, if true, for Qaradawi's views on these political matters should raise serious concerns. But neither wading through old tweets (and subjecting someone, as Shaima has been, to racist abuse) nor behind the scenes prosecutions are ways to deal with the important political issues underlying this controversy (on Israel-Palestine) and the truth about an individual's political alignment.

The government has already suspended recognition of NUS earlier this year, citing antisem-

itism. NUS has been left out of any governmental talks on student-related issues at a time of an historic cost of living crisis.

Underlying

Our conclusion remains the same, as it did over that question. There is no grounds for suspension. There is a need for political debate, not least because suspensions, code of conduct prosecutions and so on are not the way to oppose antisemitism; an open educational discussion and debate on how this occurs in society and politics is much better.

On the basis of the very poor process and threat to freedom of speech, we do not support this sacking; it should be reversed.

The NUS should organise for plural democratic debate on the underlying issues. □

Xi tries to clamp down

By Chan Ying

What is the significance of Xi Jinping securing his third term as leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the 20th Party Congress (16-22 October)?

Xi in his past two terms as leader had sought to steer away from policies and practices from the era of Deng Xiaoping; his third term is a clear sign that he has largely succeeded.

CCP congresses have been held every five years. Typically, 2000+ delegates gather for a week. Through processes as opaque as the way the Vatican selects a new Pope, the congress confirms a new Central Committee (around 200), a 25-strong Politburo, a Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) of between five and nine, and a new party leader, plus changes to the Party constitution.

In 1978, having survived being purged by Mao (twice) as a “capitalist roadster”, Deng became the CCP’s supremo. Unlike Mao, he did not persecute veteran leaders of his generation, who had also endured Mao’s bullying. He led as a “first among equals”, so to speak. He was acutely aware of how economic disasters, political chaos and massive human suffering during Mao’s era, especially during the Cultural Revolution, had severely weakened the CCP’s morale and legitimacy to rule China.

1949

On winning the civil war in 1949, Mao’s CCP had imposed a police state over the Chinese working class and peasants from day one of the People’s Republic. It was not a workers’ revolution. Chinese workers had zero control over the Maoist state or the state-sponsored All China Federation of Trade Unions, and were subjected to exploitation in the name of “socialism”. Initially tolerant of “patriotic” national bourgeoisie and landlords, the CCP regime expropriated them in the 1950s. Trying to emulate the Soviet Union, Mao’s adventurous attempts to force-march China’s industrialisation were terrible disasters. He launched the Cultural Revolution to deal with his critics within the CCP, whom he labelled as revisionists and capitalist roaders.

Deng ushered in market-orientated reforms – the economic prowess of China today is a direct result of his policies. While opening up China’s economy to external investment and loosening controls on the domestic private sector, he never embarked on political reforms. He aimed to perpetuate the CCP’s monopoly of state power. After the Tiananmen massacre of 4 June 1989 and the collapse of the



USSR, Deng’s regime further opened up to the West. Triumphant western powers reckoned that as China modernised economically with external investment that would inevitably lead to political reforms. This optimism persisted as China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. They could not have been more wrong in their assessment.

To prevent the CCP from being misled by a future Mao (or Gorbachev), Deng established a framework for succession planning and power-sharing between factions. Under these protocols, no one can be party leader for more than two five year terms, no one can be purged once in the PSC (the top committee), and no one can start a new five year term of office in the Politburo once they’ve reached the retirement age of 68. The irony of course was that Deng continued to hold ultimate power after he “retired” from all official positions. It was he who ordered the bloody massacre in Tiananmen.

After Deng, Jiang Zemin and then Hu Jintao each served two five-year terms as Party leader and President of the People’s Republic. When it was Xi’s turn to be party leader in 2012, the two retired party leaders still held many levers of power and had proteges in the PSC.

Deng’s collective leadership schema was doomed to fail, as autocratic systems require an autocrat. Once there were established faction leaders with protected status within the Politburo Standing Committee, political stalemate, patronage and systematic corruption accelerated, with many entrenched provincial power bases spread across a country geographically larger than Europe, and over 90 million CCP members. Many of those were entrepreneurs, previously not allowed to join the Party.

Earlier in 2007, Xi and Li Keqiang were both promoted to the PSC. Li was a high-flying technocrat with a PhD in economics from Peking University, who rose spectacularly through the ranks of the Communist Youth League and became a protégé of then Party leader Hu Jintao. Xi was a “princeling”, who

as a child had traumatically witnessed his high-ranking cadre parents persecuted and purged from power during the Cultural Revolution, with himself and other “princelings” sent down to the

countryside to “learn from the peasants”.

As the son of a “counter-revolutionary”, arrested for escaping from being sent down to the countryside and despatched to a labour camp, Xi somehow survived and was admitted to the Communist Youth League after seven applications. He applied ten times before being allowed to join the CCP. He emerged from this tough experience to climb resolutely up to the top of the party ladder, albeit after Deng’s return to power in 1978 had rehabilitated his parents and other fellow “capitalist roadsters”, so that he and fellow princelings could rely on their backgrounds to rise quickly.

Xi’s main leadership rival, apart from Li, was another princeling, the flamboyant Bo Xilai. Bo turned the decrepit inland megacity of Chongqing, China’s third largest after Shanghai and Beijing, into a brash modern metropolis, through Maoist-style “red” populism and strong-arm tactics to expropriate corrupt provincial cadres while attracting massive foreign investments. Central leaders became alarmed at Bo’s charismatic Maoist rhetoric, the destabilising effect of his Chongqing policies on party regimes in other regions, and a rumoured coup to take over the Party. Jiang and Hu moved decisively to strip Bo of Party membership, sentencing him to life imprisonment for “accepting bribes, embezzlement and abuse of power”. Such a dramatic move against a Politburo member was a massive shock to the party.

In contrast to Bo, Xi was perceived as a safe bet, not aligned with any faction, not playing the Maoist card, someone who had a solid but not outstanding track record and therefore was acceptable to the two previous leaders. However, once appointed, Xi turned out to be astute and single-minded in pursuing his agenda and outwitting different factions and regional power-blocs. During the last decade, he has vigorously purged and marginalised opponents, including Jiang and Hu supporters,

often by charging them with corruption or abuse of power. He has also “retired” rivals. While every CCP leader has deployed these moves, Xi has been relentlessly persistent in clearing out opposition.

Despite rumours of a coup leading up to this Congress, his power now appears to be secure. He has appointed six loyalists to join him in the PSC. He has achieved a much larger reshuffle of the Politburo and Central Committee, installing many more of his supporters. The Politburo has lost its solitary female member and is reduced to 24 men.

Xi at age 69 has stayed on, as have his key allies, while leaders more independent of him, such as Premier Li Keqiang and Vice Premier Wang Yang, both not yet 68, were prematurely retired from the PSC, not even staying on the Central Committee. Wang Yang, a technocrat like Li, had initiated free market approaches with less state intervention in the dynamic province of Guangdong, which includes the industrial powerhouse city of Shenzhen and the Pearl River delta, China’s Silicon Valley. In the past two years, Li and Wang had often emphasised the importance of keeping the economy going, while Xi was insisting on zero-Covid lockdowns, which had led to severe economic dislocation.

With no obvious successor and with Xi Jinping Thought now written into the Party’s constitution, Xi is set to establish a personality cult like Mao, and looking to continue indefinitely as autocrat.

What does Xi Jinping seek to achieve, what challenges faces him and the CCP, and most importantly how should socialists campaign against his policies and his regime?

Essentially, since coming to power in 2012, Xi has seen his mission as an existential struggle to shake up and toughen up the CCP so that it does not suffer the same fate as its counterpart in the USSR. Xi aims for China to eventually gain world hegemony midway through this century, in what he calls his “China Dream”, drawing upon Confucian ideology and glories of former imperial dynasties. In the 20th Congress, his policies have been confirmed and tweaked in response to hostility from US imperialism, while recent policies like “dynamic zero-Covid” have been rigidly adhered to with no exit strategy in sight.

To achieve this, Xi’s regime in the past decade has been, and looks set to continue to:

- Continually increase the Party centre’s power over the provinces, imposing greater ideological control on

continued on page 9 →

vn China's tensions

→ from page 8

party members through anti-corruption drives and a beefed-up party disciplinary machinery.

- Re-direct resources towards less developed inland provinces. While power blocs of party elite and entrepreneurs in coastal provinces wanted to press ahead with more economic innovations Xi has reined them in by emphasising the key slogan of “common prosperity”.

- Increase state investment in aerospace, high speed rail, AI and robotics, IT, farming, pharmaceutical (the “made in China 2025” policy).

- Heavily curtail tech giants like Alibaba and Tencent who wield huge financial clout through online gaming, purchasing, payment and comms platforms, and muscle in to control private enterprises generally – placing CCP cadres on boards, adding harsher state regulations to clip the wings of independent entrepreneurs.

- Utilise a massive police state machine to impose surveillance, censorship and control of Chinese citizens (worse than during the Cultural Revolution) with the aid of technology and a budget as great as the People’s Liberation Army’s.

- Attack the influence of western culture – block access to the internet in general through China’s Great Firewall; replace Facebook, Google, Twitter, Whatsapp, Youtube etc, with the government-controlled Tiktok, WeChat, Weibo etc; kill off the private English tuition industry and curtail international schools, lean on overseas Chinese scientists and engineers to return to the motherland.

- Assert Great Han chauvinism, claiming to be the custodian of a 5,000-year Chinese civilisation; marginalise and persecute ethnic minorities, their languages and cultures in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia; impose the regime’s narrative of patriotism in Hong Kong’s civil service and schools; promote Mandarin and target Cantonese language and culture as the last bastion of those stubborn resisting Hong Kongers.

A wide range of foreign policies include the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), deploying the PRC’s industrial strength to implement massive infrastructural projects in many countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. There are also the Confucius Institutes in Western universities; “United Front” activities in the Chinese diaspora; military bases built on islands in the South China Sea, border incursions along the Himalaya mountains against Bhutan and Nepal, as well as India; moves to intimidate South Korea, Japan and other south-east Asian countries; and above all

threats against Taiwan. The fact that the UN General Assembly did not vote to debate the damning report on Xinjiang by UN High Commissioner on Human Rights is a sign of China’s diplomatic muscle.

Many of Xi’s moves look like pages out of Mao’s Little Red Book. The construction of his cult of personality, the Orwellian prying into Chinese citizens’ lives, and the move to control the private sector, stir up CCP cadres’ memories of Mao’s exercise of absolute power and the attack against “capitalist roaders”. However, with the People’s Republic facing serious challenges domestically and now in major conflict with US imperialism, it was inevitable that the CCP factions could not but accept Xi’s terms.

By surrounding himself with loyalists and browbeating regional power groups and other factions inside the CCP into reluctant compliance, Xi puts himself in danger of making missteps based on poor information, and of rigid policy making and implementation which gets only tokenistic compliance or even passive resistance, as he tries to exert top-down command on the huge CCP bureaucracy across the massive country.

Structural

The CCP’s legitimacy is indeed based on delivering “common prosperity”. If Xi cannot achieve this, the whole Party, not just his grip on power, will be in crisis.

Xi and the CCP face unprecedented challenges. The Chinese economy is seriously stalling. It faces long-term structural problems linked to the way the CCP runs the country, which are accentuated by the serious disruptions arising from its zero-Covid policy:

- The expansion of the private sector over the past two or three decades has created a new middle class and an increasing gap between rich and poor, and uneven development between prosperous coastal provinces and marginalised landlocked provinces.

- Middle class investment in housing (which comprises three-quarters of Chinese household assets) has created a massive market, fuelled by huge debts, which has started to run aground. Major developers have become insolvent, projects have failed to get completed, prices have plummeted, mortgage strikes and loan defaults have hit banks and local government, which rely heavily on land sales as income. It was an unsustainable model in any case.

- Local government struggles with tight central control, indebtedness, reduced income and now additional expenditure, as a result of zero-Covid

mass testing and isolation costs.

- A demographic timebomb: the birth rate is falling rapidly, as those born during the one child policy are under so much economic pressure working and caring for the elderly that they are delaying marriage and child-bearing. The ageing population is increasingly straining social welfare and health services.

- The increasing demand for a highly skilled labour force runs up against a relatively weak education system, yet as the economy shrinks there is high unemployment of graduates this year.

- Manufacturing and the massive housing programme have relied on super-exploitation of rural migrants working in cities, of whom 200 million are denied housing, education and social welfare benefits enjoyed by urban citizens, and local governments do not have the finances to grant them residential status (hukou).

- Foreign investors have started to diversify their manufacturing out of China, to Vietnam, India and south-east Asia, in response to geopolitical tension and the rising cost of labour.

Specific crises points for Xi include:

- Sanctions – The US ban on technology exports, especially advanced microchips, has caused serious production bottlenecks. Chinese company shares on world markets have taken a hit as the US moves to delist some of them, while audit problems continue.

- In foreign policy, the tide may be turning as China continues to back Putin and so begins to aggravate more nations, including those now heavily in debt as a result of Belt and Road project loans.

- Chinese citizens are increasingly aggressive in protesting against Covid lockdowns, youth unemployment, and banking and housebuilding failures, through wildcat strikes, refusal to pay mortgages, runs on small banks and outbursts on cyberspace.

The latest manifestations include videos going viral of the lone protestor in Beijing unfurling a huge anti-Xi banner during the Party Congress. Those have led to sympathy protests by overseas Chinese students in UK and US such as not seen since the Tiananmen protests of 1989. □

Revolt against Foxconn

A revolt against electronics manufacturer Foxconn, with parts of it captured on [video](#), has seen up to 10,000 of the more than 200,000 workers at the vast complex of factories in Zhengzhou walking out of the plant in protest at repressive conditions. These factories are due to produce maybe over 85% of the world’s supply of the new iPhone 14. Already Covid curbs and workers’ protests are hitting Apple’s sales across the world in a usually highly profitable pre-Xmas period.

In order to walk out, thousands of workers had to climb over fences and confront security forces blocking the exits and streets. They were then blocked from transport to their home villages – thousands had to walk vast distances home. Others have had to camp within the factory complex waiting for a chance to escape.

Vast numbers of workers remaining in the factories are housed in cramped dormitories during Covid outbreaks and denied adequate food and sufficient Covid testing kits. Unrest in these Foxconn factories is far from over.

The founder and CEO of Foxconn is Terry Gou. He has a fortune of close to \$6 billion and has been a long time leader and presidential hopeful for the right wing Kuomintang Party

in Taiwan. Foxconn’s ruthless labour practices are notorious across China. In 2010 there were 15 suicides at their plant in Shenzhen, 13 by jumping off the factory roof. In response, the company brought in punishments on the families of workers who might commit suicide in future.

The Taiwanese and the Chinese ruling classes are happy to work together against Chinese workers when it suits them, as they will be happy to work together against the workers of Taiwan.

International supporters of Foxconn workers have already held solidarity pickets in New York outside Apple stores. More are planned by Labour Solidarity With Hong Kong, Lausan and other campaigns in the UK before Xmas.

A petition (bit.ly/zh-zhou) demands that Apple investigate the actions of their Foxconn supplier and take action against it. People should get their union organisations to sign the petition and join the solidarity pickets.

Internationally Apple workers are increasingly turning to unions, including in the UK. The GMB is organising in Glasgow. There is also the United Tech & Allied Workers at Apple (UTAW@Apple), and there are international networks such as Apple Together ([@AppleLaborers](https://AppleLaborers.org)). □

Connolly on WW

Our duty in this crisis



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

The two articles on these pages convey Connolly's first response to the outbreak of World War One in August 1914. His attitude would later change.

What should be the attitude to the working-class democracy of Ireland in face of the present crisis? I wish to emphasise the fact that the question is addressed to the "working-class democracy" because I believe that it would be worse than foolish – it would be a crime against all our hopes and aspirations – to take counsel in this matter from any other source.

Mr. John E. Redmond has just earned the plaudits of all the bitterest enemies of Ireland and slanderers of the Irish race by declaring, in the name of Ireland that the British Government can now safely withdraw all its garrisons from Ireland, and that the Irish slaves will guarantee to protect the Irish estate of England until their masters come back to take possession – a statement that announces to all the world that Ireland has at last accepted as permanent this status of a British province. Surely no inspiration can be sought from that source.

The advanced Nationalists have neither a policy nor a leader. During the Russian Revolution [of 1905] such of their Press as existed in and out of Ireland, as well as their spokesmen, orators and writers vied with each other in laudation of Russia and vilification of all the Russian enemies of Czardom. It was freely asserted that Russia was the natural enemy of England; that the heroic revolutionists were in the pay of the English Government and that every true Irish patriot ought to pray for the success of the armies of the Czar. Now, as I, amongst other Irish Socialists, predicted all along, when the exigencies of diplomacy makes it suitable, the Russian bear and the English lion are hunting together and every victory for the Czar's Cossacks is a victory for the paymasters of those King's Own Scottish Borderers who, but the other day,

murdered the people of Dublin in cold blood. Surely the childish intellects that conceived of the pro-Russian campaign of nine years ago cannot give us light and leading in any campaign for freedom from the British allies of Russia today?

It is well to remember also that in this connection since 1909 the enthusiasm for the Russians was replaced in the same quarter by as blatant a propaganda in favour of the German War Lord. But since the guns did begin to speak in reality this propaganda had died out in whispers, whilst without a protest, the manhood of Ireland was pledged to armed warfare against the very power our advanced Nationalist friends have wasted so much good ink in acclaiming.

Of late, sections of the advanced Nationalist press have lent themselves to a desperate effort to misrepresent the position of the Carsonites, and to claim for them the admiration of Irish Nationalists on the grounds that these Carsonites were fearless Irishmen who had refused to take dictation from England. A more devilishly mischievous and lying doctrine was never preached in Ireland. The Carsonite position is indeed plain – so plain that nothing but sheer perversity of purpose can misunderstand it, or cloak it with a resemblance to Irish patriotism. The Carsonites say that their fathers were planted in this country to assist in keeping the natives down in subjection that this country might be held for England. That this was God's will because the Catholic Irish were not fit for the responsibilities and powers of free men and that they are not fit for the exercise of these responsibilities and powers till this day. Therefore, say the Carsonites, we have kept our side of the bargain; we have refused to admit the Catholics to power and responsibility; we have manned the government of this country for England, we propose to continue to do so, and rather than admit that these Catholics – these "mickies and teagues" – are our equals, we will fight, in the hope that our fighting will cause the English people to revolt against their government and re-establish us in our historic position as an English colony in Ireland, superior to, and unhampered by, the political institutions of the Irish natives.



How this can be represented as the case of Irishmen refusing to take dictation from England passeth all comprehension. It is rather the case of a community, after 250 years colonisation, still refusing to adopt the title of natives, and obstinately clinging to the position and privileges of a dominant colony. Their programme is summed up in the expression which forms the dominant note of all their speeches, sermons and literature:

"We are loyal British subjects. We hold this country for England. England cannot desert us."

What light or leading then can Ireland get from the hysterical patriots who so egregiously misrepresent this fierce contempt for Ireland as something that ought to win the esteem of Irishmen?

What ought to be the attitude of the working-class democracy of Ireland in face of the present crisis?

In the first place, then, we ought to clear our minds of all the political cant which would tell us that we have either "natural enemies" or "natural allies" in any of the powers now warring. When it is said that we ought to unite to protect our shores against the "foreign enemy" I confess to be unable to follow that line of reasoning, as I know of no foreign enemy of this country except the British Government and know that it is not the British Government that is meant.

In the second place we ought to se-

riously consider that the evil effects of this war upon Ireland will be simply incalculable, that it will cause untold suffering and misery amongst the people, and that as this misery and suffering have been brought upon us because of our enforced partisanship with a nation whose government never consulted us in the matter, we are therefore perfectly at liberty morally to make any bargain we may see fit, or that may present itself in the course of events.

Should a German army land in Ireland tomorrow we should be perfectly justified in joining it if by doing so we could rid this country once and for all from its connection with the Brigand Empire that drags us unwillingly into this war.

Should the working class of Europe, rather than slaughter each other for the benefit of kings and financiers, proceed tomorrow to erect barricades all over Europe, to break up bridges and destroy the transport service that war might be abolished, we should be perfectly justified in following such a glorious example and contributing our aid to the final dethronement of the vulture classes that rule and rob the world.

But pending either of these consummations it is our manifest duty to take all possible action to save the poor from the horrors this war has in store.

Let it be remembered that there is no natural scarcity of food in Ireland.

World War One

Ireland is an agricultural country, and can normally feed all her people under any sane system of things. But prices are going up in England and hence there will be an immense demand for Irish produce. To meet that demand all nerves will be strained on this side, the food that ought to feed the people of Ireland will be sent out of Ireland in greater quantities than ever and famine prices will come in Ireland to be immediately followed by famine itself.

Ireland will starve, or rather the townspeople of Ireland will starve, that the British army and navy and jingoes may be fed. Remember, the Irish farmer like all other farmers will benefit by the high prices of the war, but these high prices will mean starvation to the labourers in the towns. But without these labourers the farmers' produce cannot leave Ireland without the help of a garrison that England cannot now spare. We must consider at once whether it will not be

our duty to refuse to allow agricultural produce to leave Ireland until provision is made for the Irish working class.

Let us not shrink from the consequences. This may mean more than a transport strike, it may mean armed battling in the streets to keep in this country the food for our people. But whatever it may mean it must not be shrunk from. It is the immediately feasible policy of the working-class democracy, the answer to all the weaklings

who in this crisis of our country's history stand helpless and bewildered crying for guidance, when they are not hastening to betray her.

Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord. □

• *Irish Worker*, 8 August 1914

A martyr for conscience sake

By James Connolly

Karl Liebknecht, the subject of this article, became the best-known representative of revolutionary internationalist opposition to the war. The report of him being shot on which Connolly based the article was false. Liebknecht was jailed in 1916-18, and murdered in January 1919 by right-wing militias working with the German government, then under right-wing Social-Democratic leadership following the November 1918 revolution.

As I am writing this the news appears in the press that our comrade, Dr. Karl Liebknecht, has been shot in Germany for refusing to accept military service in the war. The news is unconfirmed, and will, I trust, be found later to be untrue, but I propose to take it this week as a text for my article.

Supposing, then, that it was true, what would be the socialist attitude toward the martyrdom of our beloved comrade? There can be little hesitation in avowing that all socialists would endorse his act, and look upon his death as a martyrdom for our cause. And yet if his attitude was correct, what can be said of the attitude of all those socialists who have gone to the front, and still more of all those socialists who from press and platform are urging that nothing should be done now that might disturb the harmony that ought to exist at home, or spoil the wonderful

solidarity of the nation in this great crisis?

As far as I can understand these latter, their argument seems to be that they did their whole duty when they protested against the war, but that now that war has been declared it is right that they also should arm in defence of their common country, and act in all things along with their fellow subjects – those same fellow subjects whose senseless clamour brought on this awful outburst of murder. We are told, for instance, that the same policy is being pursued by all socialist parties. That the French socialists protested against the war – and then went to the front, headed by Gustave Hervé, the great anti-militarist; the German socialists protested against the war – and then, in the Reichstag, unanimously voted 250 millions to carry it on; the Austrians issued a manifesto against the war – and are now on the frontier doing great deeds of heroism against the foreign enemy; and the Russians erected barricades in the streets of St. Petersburg against the cossacks, but immediately war was declared went off to the front arm in arm with their cossack brothers. And so on.

Now, if all this is true, what does it mean? It means that the socialist parties of the various countries mutually cancel each other, and that as a consequence socialism ceases



Memorial sheet for Karl Liebknecht, by Käthe Kollwitz (1920)

to exist as a world force, and drops out of history in the greatest crisis of the history of the world, in the very moment when courageous action will most influence history.

We know that not more than a score of men in the various Cabinets of the world have brought about this war, that no European people was consulted upon the question, that preparations for it have been going on for years, and that all the alleged "reasons" for it are so many afterthoughts invented to hide from us the fact

that the intrigues and schemes of our rulers had brought the world to this pass. All socialists are agreed upon this. Being so agreed, are we now to forget it all: to forget all our ideas of human brotherhood, and because some twenty highly-placed criminals say our country requires us to slaughter our brothers beyond the seas or the frontiers, are we bound to accept their statement, and proceed to slaughter our comrades abroad at the dictate of our enemies at home. The idea outrages my

every sense of justice and fraternity. I may be only a voice crying in the wilderness, a crank amongst a community of the wise, but whoever I be, I must, in deference to my own self-respect, and to the sanctity of my own soul, protest against the doctrine that any decree of theirs of national honour can excuse a socialist who serves in a war which he has denounced as a needless war, can absolve from the guilt of murder any socialist who at

continued on page 12 →

→ from page 11

the dictate of a capitalist Government draws the trigger of a rifle upon or sends a shot from a gun into the breasts of people with whom he has no quarrel, and who are his fellow labourers in the useful work of civilisation.

We have for years informed the world that we were in revolt against the iniquities of modern civilisation, but now we hear socialists informing us that it is our duty to become accomplices of the rulers of modern civilisation in the greatest of all iniquities, the slaughter of man by his fellow man. And that as long as we make our formal protest we have done our whole duty, and can cheerfully proceed to take life, burn peaceful homes, and lay waste fields smiling with food!

Our comrade, Dr. Liebknecht, if he has died rather than admit this new doctrine, has died the happiest death that man can die, has put to eternal shame the thousands of "comrades" in every European land, who, with the cant of brotherhood upon their lips, have gone forth in the armies of the capitalist rulers – murdering and to murder. The old veteran leader of German social democracy, his father, Wilhelm Liebknecht, said in one of his pamphlets:

"The working class of the world has but one enemy, the

capitalist class of the world, those of their own country at the head of the list."

Well and truly has the son lived up to the truly revolutionary doctrine of the father: lived and died for its eternal truth and wisdom.

Now we are hearing a new excuse for the complicity of socialists in this war. It is that this war will be the last war, its horrors will be so great that humanity will refuse to allow another.

Homely

The homely Irish proverb has it that "far off cows have long horns," or that "far away hills are always green." It must have been in some such spirit that this latest argument was evolved. For what can happen in the future that is not more applicable now! In the future this militarist spirit will probably be in the ascendant, new national prejudices will have been born, new international hatreds called forth. There will be memories of recent defeats to wipe out, fresh frontiers to conserve or to obliterate, and the military caste will have acquired an ascendancy over the popular imagination because the large numbers of the various armies will have given rise to widespread solicitude for their welfare and consequent hopes for their success. If you have friends or relatives whom you dearly love serving in the army, you cannot help wishing

for the success of that army, and the defeat of its immediate opponents, and from such a state of feeling to the most intense jingoism is but a small and easy transition. The large armies of today draw upon the whole population, all are interested in the fate of their friends or relatives, and we may all be sure that the lying press can be depended upon to convert solicitude for our friends into passionate hatred for those whom war makes their opponents.

No; we cannot draw upon the future for a draft to pay our present duties. There is no moratorium to postpone the payment of the debt the socialists owe to the cause; it can only be paid now. Paid it may be in martyrdom, but a few hundred such martyrdoms would be but a small price to pay to avert the slaughter of hundreds of thousands. If our German comrade, Liebknecht, has paid the price, perhaps the others may yet nerve themselves for that sacrifice. On what conception of national honour can we blame them, before what fetish of national dignity can we prostrate ourselves in abasement to atone for their act?

The war of a subject nation for independence, for the right to live out its own life in its own way, may and can be justified as holy and righteous; the war of a subject class to free itself from the debasing conditions

of economic and political slavery should at all times choose its own weapons, and hold and esteem all as sacred instruments of righteousness. But the war of nation against nation in the interest of royal freebooters and cosmopolitan thieves is a thing accursed.

All hail, then, to our continental comrade, who, in a world of imperial and financial brigands and cowardly trimmers and compromisers showed mankind that men still know how to die for the holiest of all causes – the sanctity of the human soul, the practi-

cal brotherhood of the human race! □

• Forward, 22 August 1914

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workersliberty.org/publications

Unis to strike 24, 25, 30 November

By a UCU member

The University and College Union (UCU) has announced three days of strikes in higher education: 24, 25, and 30 November. The union is also committed to escalation of industrial action if there is no progress in negotiations.

The action will run up to scheduled negotiations with the employers (UCEA) at the end of the month. Indications are there may be some movement on pay. But will it be enough?

Some better-off employers have already paid an extra 2% (some in the summer and some more recently); something like 5% could be for-

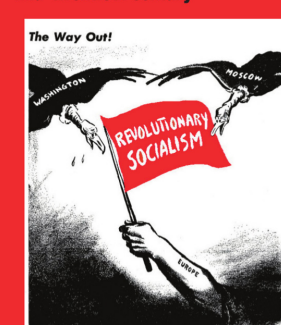
malised as an offer. To settle for that, or anything below the current rate of inflation, would be a waste of the (aggregated) ballot for action the union has just won. If there is such an offer, or an offer in the pensions dispute short of the full claim (to reverse all cuts), then the union should keep to the plan to escalate the dispute.

It is important for UCU to join up with Unison members in higher education who are also in dispute. Co-ordinated strike action would secure almost full campus shutdowns. That will be a powerful show of strength and help galvanise solidarity from students and the wider labour movement. □

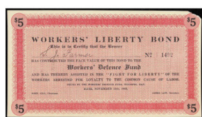
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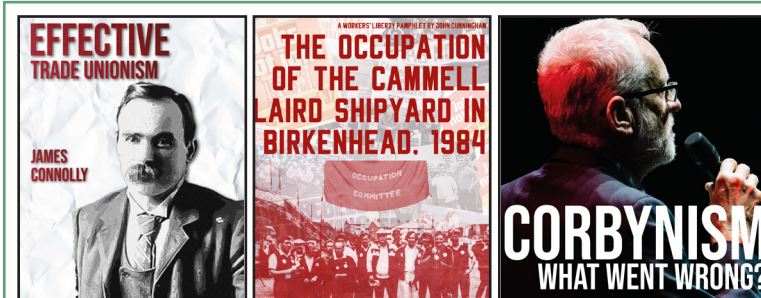
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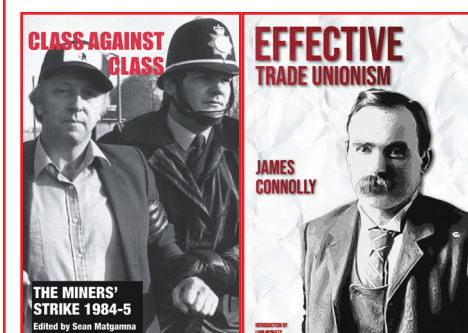
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In 2022, in the largest strike wave in a generation, we have much to learn from James Connolly's writings as a socialist and union activist; and from the 1984-85 Miners' strike. £10 for both books, usual price £14.

Unison wins Barnet dispute



By Bill Davies

Housing Repairs workers in Unison who work for Barnet Homes have settled their dispute over sick pay for an employee who was injured at work. The worker did not receive sick pay for three weeks while the employer de-

layed in upgrading transferred-in repairs workers to its standard contract which pays sick pay from day one. The details of the settlement have not been disclosed, but I understand it is a satisfactory one for the worker concerned.

Solid

The strike which began on 17 October, the first indefinite strike authorised by Unison, remained solid for 13 working days. It was well supported by the local labour movement at daily picket lines

and protests outside the Council offices, two lobbies of Council meetings, and a fundraising event.

The strike and the dispute raise questions about the management of The Barnet Group, the local authority trading company which runs the arms-length housing provider, Barnet Homes. The Barnet Group is 100% owned by Barnet Council but is officially a different employer and one that employs workers on different (and

worse) terms and conditions from the Council.

Labour councillors, now a majority on Barnet Council, resisted involvement in this dispute, saying that it was an operational matter. They can and should now do more to hold accountable an organisation funded and owned by the Council, which pays its Chief Executive Officer more than the CEO of the Council gets. □

National Coal Mining Museum

By Cy Grove

Workers at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, in Wakefield, struck 26-30 October over pay. More negotiations in the week starting 7 Nov may reach agreement, but if not workers will strike again 12-13 Nov. No frontline workers crossed the lively and regularly 30-strong picket lines, and the museum closed for the duration of the strike. The picket lines were large and lively and regularly had 30 workers on them. The museum had stated that they were subject to

a 5% pay cap by the government but refused to provide evidence. Unison inquired, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport replied that there was not a pay cap and the museum was free to determine its own pay award. Wakefield Unison branch secretary Sam Greenwood told *Solidarity*: "Our members were told that if they struck the museum would close, the government would remove funding, and any worker who spoke to the press or was identifiable in press coverage would be dismissed. The lie about the pay cap is just another insult to our members". □



Liverpool dockers out again from 14 Nov

By Neil Laker

Liverpool dockers held further strikes from October 24 to November 6, and will strike for two weeks again from 14 November unless an improved offer is made.

The strike has remained solid. There is no word of movement from either side,

meaning that Peel Ports continue to hope to ride out this dispute, whereas the workers and their union, Unite, remain confident that the costs of the dispute can build up enough pressure to win their pay demands.

Dock workers in Hull and other UK ports say they are continuing to refuse to handle

shipments diverted due to this strike, adding to mounting financial losses for Peel. Nonetheless, the two weeks out and one week back at work schedule does allow for bottlenecks to ease, and the prospect of an all-out strike, though challenging and tough, must be debated.

Alongside the walkout, the

community solidarity is starting to get organised and grow. Funds are being raised through collections such as at Goodison Park (before the Toffees' defeat on Saturday – no comment necessary), and a call for a mass picket earlier that day was well observed by community and left groups. Fundraising will be particu-

larly important in the coming weeks with the expensive festive period on the horizon. □

- Petition bit.ly/lpool-d
- Strike fund: Unite NW 628, Port of Liverpool Branch – sort code 608301, account number 2029237
- Solidarity messages bit.ly/lpool-s

Reballot at Amazon warehouse

By Ollie Moore

The GMB union is re-balloting members in Amazon's BHX4 warehouse in Coventry for strikes to win higher pay, after a previous ballot resulted in a 99% vote for strike action, but missed the 50% turnout threshold by three votes.

BHX4's workforce of around 1,400 workers includes many migrant workers, including a significant proportion of migrants from East Africa and Eastern Europe. Many live in flats or house-shares which

mean receiving individual mail is sometimes difficult. Although the ballot is due to run for several more weeks, union activists are confident they are generating the momentum needed. The ballot campaign has seen both union organisers and shop floor members undertake phone banking and door-knocking at members' homes to turn out votes.

Following the failure of the previous ballot, Amazon briefings to workers attempted to disparage the union by suggesting the turnout showed

staff weren't interested in striking. GMB activists say the briefings had the opposite effect to the one intended by the company and have served as a reminder to people to vote in the re-ballot. Since the dispute was launched, Amazon, which had previously said pay rates were fixed, announced a £500 national bonus, in two £250 payments. The second of the payments was conditional on workers not having any "unauthorised absence", widely seen as an inducement not to participate in any strike. The

GMB plans a legal challenge in response.

Nevertheless, the £500 bonus is seen as a first victory in the GMB's pay campaign.

As part of the ballot campaign, the union plans a protest at the site on "Black Friday", 25 November, a major business day for Amazon.

The dispute aims to win a pay increase to £15/hour. Although Amazon's pay rates are determined nationally, rather than on a warehouse-by-warehouse basis, the company's banding system means rates

are higher at some warehouses than others, so a strike even at a single warehouse could lead to that warehouse being moved into a higher pay band.

The union has also run day schools for worker activists to develop campaigning skills and discuss strategy for the dispute, and recently held an online rally featuring an Amazon worker from the Amazon Labor Union, which recently ran the first successful union recognition campaign at any Amazon facility in the USA. □

“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.

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- 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! □

A piece of the Hostile Environment



Diary of a social worker

By Wilson Gibbons

Working with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children is like working with any other child in care, visits, meetings, care plans and admin. But looming above all that, casting a long shadow, is the age assessment – about whether the young person is the age they say they are.

When my manager told us our team were to attend day-long training on it, a knot tightened in my stomach. I've spoken at length about my unease with the process with all the members in my team. We filed into the meeting room against the backdrop of news coming out of Manston processing centre.

The day began with the classic round of introductions before social workers from the Home Office's new age assessments team launched into the history and case law.

"It's not about trying to poke holes in their story," Facilitator 1 reassured the room.

Facilitator 2: "I really want them to be the age they say they are – your heart drops when you start to think otherwise, but there are certain things that indicate they might not be being honest. Y' know, like there are certain things that should be the same no matter who they are telling their story to."

This didn't sit right, and I asked for an example.

F2: "Well for example, if they tell you that they were let on the boat for free, and then tell someone else that they had to pay... You begin to question things."

Me: "I don't think it follows that if someone feels the need to lie about how they got here then they would lie about their age. Or, in fact, that there wouldn't be a reason someone's story might change the more they tell it."

F2: "Well you don't take it alone, but it's part of the picture"

Me: "Sure, but if you accept that there are legitimate reasons that someone's story might change, then it's difficult to use that to build any picture. In any other situation in social work, you wouldn't expect a child who had been through something traumatic to remember every detail of their trauma and be able to recount it."

J: "There's always uncertainty in social work that you have to work with."

Me: "But if you are going to make a life-changing decision for a family, you need real evidence."

W: "It's about safeguarding, though. You can't risk putting an adult in a foster placement or school."

Me: "It's easy to bend that stick too far. It's also a safeguarding risk to turn a child into someone who is legally an adult."

The conversation moved on.

F2: "We actually do a lot of advocating for our young people."

Me: "Advocate?! How can you say you advocate for them, when you're potentially deciding that they don't get services they might be entitled to."

Despite the "not about poking holes" line, it was hard to escape the feeling that a piece of the Hostile Environment is sneaking into social care with little resistance.

When I asked what effect a failed age assessment could have on an asylum claim, F1 skirted the question. As the session closed F1 said "I hope you don't think of us all as Home Office goons." There was a defensiveness which was not lost on me. □

Restart the railway strikes!



Off The Rails

The rail union RMT is striking on London Underground and Overground on 10 November; but, with less than eight hours to go until they were due to begin, RMT announced that the strikes

planned for 5, 7, and 9 November on Network Rail (5th, 7th, 9th) and Train Operating Companies (TOCs) (5th and 7th) were cancelled. TSSA, another rail union, had cancelled their strikes on Network Rail, planned for the same days, a few days earlier.

RMT statements said the cancellation was to allow for a period of "intensive negotiations". Unless there's something

the union isn't telling us, there's no indication of an actual settlement, merely the promise of more talks. Negotiations were taking place anyway – how will they be different now they've become "intensive"?

RMT's statement refers to negotiations now taking place "without preconditions". It doesn't specify exactly which "preconditions" have been removed. As far as the messaging to members goes, all we know for sure is that strikes have been called off not for any concrete concession but merely for more talks. Strikes should restart! □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/rai-dis

Cinema Novo from Brazil



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

In the 1960s a number of South American filmmakers, including Glauber Rocha in Brazil, challenged the domination of Hollywood cinema developing a counter movement known as Cinema Novo. His film *Black God, White Devil* (1964) is one of the best known examples of Cinema Novo, and considered by many critics to be one of the finest Brazilian films ever made.

It is set in the 1940s in the arid, parched landscape of the Sertão. Ranch hand Manoel (Manoel Del Ray) is desperate to escape poverty

and the never-ending drought. He attempts to buy some land from a local landowner but is cheated. He then kills the landowner and goes on the run with his wife Rosa (Yoná Magalhães).

They encounter a religious sect but soon become disenchanted with their harshness and then join a band of cangaceiros (Robin Hood style bandits). The couple drift along, but never confront the notion that instead of tagging on to one allegiance or another should develop their own independent way of thought and living.

In 1971 Rocha, fleeing the military dictatorship which ruled from 1964 to 1985, went into exile in Portugal. Suffering from a serious lung infection, he returned to Brazil in 1981 but died shortly thereafter. □

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Action should not stop for talks



John Moloney

Our national ballot closed on 7 November. We expect to have the full results by 9 November, ready for the National Executive on Thursday 10th. PCS disaggregated the ballot into 214 separate units and we are confident of hitting the thresholds in a significant number of areas, including major government departments where workers have particular leverage.

Our National Executive will further meet on 18 November to discuss proposals for action. In the week between getting the results and the 18 Nov meeting, the union will write to the Cabinet Office to reiterate our demands put in the ballot: a 10 per cent pay increase or a £15/hour minimum wage whichever is higher; no cuts to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme; job protection for all and a reduction in pension contributions (under a cost sharing arrangement

imposed on staff by the government, contributions are 2% too high).

Although the plan for 91,000 job cuts has been withdrawn, the expected government spending cuts will still lead to job losses, so our demand on job security is still relevant.

It's possible the government will respond by saying it's prepared to negotiate with us. In my opinion that won't be enough. We should not hold up the actions for the promise of talks.

Negotiations can take place whilst strikes are happening, and indeed we'll have more leverage in those talks if the employer is under the pressure of ongoing or upcoming strikes, rather than an unspecific threat that we might call some in the future. I've also argued that, in departments where we don't hit the threshold but got close, we should look to re-ballot as soon as possible.

Although the national dispute, involving a large majority of the union's membership, is an understandable focus, there's no question of de-prioritising or downscaling other, local disputes which are taking place. Our



Pic: [Gemma Short]

outsourced worker members at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will strike on 16, 23 and 30 November, and 7 and 14 December. They're demanding an above-inflation pay increase.

Local disputes in the Ministry of Justice over the use of the "Common Platform" computer software, which has

unnecessarily increased workload for our members, and with HGS, which handles outsourced civil service work doing DBS checks, are also ongoing. □

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

Royal Mail dispute is still ongoing

By a postal worker

Communication Workers Union (CWU) strikes in Royal Mail are planned for 24-25 November and 30 November-1 December.

The union has called off other strikes in Royal Mail planned through November, in part because of legal threats from the company. The union subsequently published a joint statement with Royal Mail. Royal Mail halted the planned imposition of redundancies and changes to terms and conditions. In the statement, both sides also affirmed their commitment to resolving the dispute and to a "de-escalation of tension to avoid flash-points and restoring calmness in the workplace." A postal worker and CWU activist spoke to Solidarity.

Recent developments have been somewhat frustrating, particularly the calling off of departmental strikes in the face of legal threats. There hasn't been an enormous amount of detail shared about exactly what the threats were, but clearly there was a feeling that attempting to face them down would have put the whole dispute at risk. The feelings of frustration were compounded by the strikes on 12 and 14 November, which had been called to make up for the departmental strikes having been called off, also being cancelled.

Nevertheless, despite the frustration there's a sense in which the joint statement between the union and the company is seen as a sign of progress. At least it's a public statement that the employer wants to find a resolution and is prepared to negotiate towards that, and the fact that Royal Mail agreed to halt the planned imposition of job cuts, a new pay settlement and changes to terms and conditions is significant. However, since the statement was issued, Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson has repeated claims that there's no money available to fund an increased pay offer, which casts doubt on how serious he is about reaching a settlement.

The employer is also committed to tying any pay offer to changes in terms and conditions, including removal of many allowances and other things that the union has won for its members over the years. This would mean in many cases a direct pay cut as well as the pay rise offered being well below the rate of inflation – in effect getting us to work harder for less money. In addition to this, new recruits would be employed under worse conditions and have to work longer for less. The two-tier workforce this would imply is something the union has always opposed strenuously.

The strikes have been totally solid so far, and I think they'll be solid next time. Of course we want a settlement,

but not at any cost. We can't act as if the dispute is now basically over; if we send that signal, then it will be. Reps have to make it clear to members that we have to prepare for further action. We should expect the next strikes to go ahead. If it's clear to the company that we are preparing to take that action, then that will improve the prospects of getting a better deal sooner.

In terms of opportunities to discuss and debate strategy, there have been gate meetings, where there is an opportunity for more direct and participatory discussion than there is in the online briefings, which are more just about disseminating information and doing a bit of rabble rousing. There's a certain common sense which holds that the talks between the company and the union need to be kept fairly confidential, on the basis that too much transparency could prejudice the outcome. But that can also lead to a feeling that the dispute is being run in a top-down way without much opportunity for members to feed in, which can lead to a sense of frustration with the union.

We can't allow disunity to set in. The key thing in the immediate term is to make it clearly understood, by members and the employer, that the dispute is not over. We are continuing with our campaign, we will take further action if necessary. □

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USA votes under the gunman's shadow

By Tom Harrison

Just when you thought what passes for recent political life in the United States couldn't sink any lower, it has. The attack on 82 year old husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi by a conspiracist, which resulted in him receiving a fractured skull, hasn't met with universal condemnation.

Completely unsubstantiated anti-LGBT slurs have been spread instead, claiming Pelosi knew his attacker. Unsurprisingly, Trump himself gave credence to this gross falsehood, as did kindred scumbag, Elon Musk, who spread it on his newly acquired Twitter platform. Twitter has seen an upsurge in far right hate speech since Musk took over, including from Britain First.

The assault on Paul Pelosi is a harbinger of things to come. He himself was not an elected official, but countless politicians, judges and administrators have received death threats in the past few years. Major violence is on the cards given the current political climate. It's only a matter of time before someone gets killed.

Political murder was of course upmost in the minds of the "Hang Mike Pence" crowd which attacked the Capitol at Trump's behest in January last year. Prior to that, there was the plot to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer, Michigan's Democratic governor, by the Wolverine Watchmen fascist militia group – an action they hoped would trigger civil war. Convictions have been secured against five of the plotters to date, despite concerns that an all-white jury at the initial trial last April failed to get any.

The Republican right have been engaged in voter suppression and gerrymandering of electoral districts for decades. What has emerged with a vengeance in recent weeks though is blatant voter intimidation. This has been particularly noticeable around ballot drop boxes where electors can post their votes.

In Mesa, Arizona, two armed masked individuals dressed in tactical gear set up watch in close proximity to a drop box site.

These self-appointed "election monitors" in various states have been filming voters and noting down their car registrations. They follow the discredited conspiracy theory advanced in the "documentary" *2000 Mules*, which claimed the 2020 Presidential election was "stolen" from Trump.



Kari Lake, the Trump endorsed Republican candidate for Arizona Governor

Just what these "mules" (NGO workers supposedly illegally collecting ballots to put in drop boxes) are meant to look like or how they are to be "identified" (do they have floppy pointed ears?) is something of a mystery, but the presence of armed vigilantes at polling places is going to make actual voters afraid to turn up.

Intimidation is also being employed by far-right door knockers posing as local government officials. They've been going door-to-door grilling residents about their voting history and asking who lived in their homes.

Arizona is a particular focus for MAGA Republicans because it was narrowly won by Biden. Trump was especially enraged when Fox News "called" the state for Biden, signalling Trump's defeat. All four Republican candidates there – for Governor, US Senate, Attorney General and Secretary of State – are election deniers. In eleven other states, too, Republican candidates for Secretary of State in twelve states maintain Trump won in 2020. This obviously has implications for future elections where they could meddle in the outcome and overturn the popular will if it goes against their party.

Refusal to accept defeat will be mimicked by Trump-endorsed candidates, particularly in places where the vote margin between candidates is close. The effect will be to further cast doubt on the credibility of elections.

Voter suppression and intimidation tactics are an admission that if US elections were conducted fairly the Republicans would never win again. And they pave the way for many to think, resignedly or eagerly, that maybe elections can or must be dispensed with.

The USA is a considerable way down that authoritarian road already. □

Trumpist surge poses threat to Ukraine

By Dan Katz

America's midterm elections take place on Tuesday 8 November. According to polls, Republicans are likely to win the House of Representatives and may win the Senate. The Democrats have controlled both chambers since 2020. The results may well impact on the Ukraine war.

In May, the House of Representatives voted 368-57 in favour of a \$40bn aid package to Ukraine. All 57 votes opposing the aid were from Republicans.

If the Republicans take either chamber, or both, support for Ukraine is likely to weaken. That will strengthen Putin and make Russian withdrawal from Ukraine more difficult.

The US has supplied more weapons and financial support than all the other NATO states combined. The US has donated more than \$60bn since the Russian invasion.

The European states have given less to Ukraine, often publicly promising more than they have actually handed over. And they have generally made loans, rather than donations.

Polling in October found that 66% of Americans believed that the US should continue providing weapons to Ukraine, up from 51% in a poll two months earlier. The important difference is probably explained by the Ukrainian battlefield victories in Kherson and Kharkov oblasts in September and October, made possible by advanced US weapon donations.

Putin

Two-thirds of Americans say they are closely watching the progress of the war.

However, US Republican politicians are divided between neo-Reaganites and Trumpists. These Republican leaders are united in demanding the US pushes harder against Iran and China. But they are much more divided on Russia. The Reagan-tradition Republicans are hostile to Russia, and pro-Ukraine; the Trump camp is, at the least, more reserved, and some are for an accommodation with Putin.

If the Ukrainians keep winning back territory from the Russian invaders they will probably continue to get American weapons. Financial aid to prop up the devastated Ukrainian economy is more problematic. And yet financial aid is also desperately needed.

Unfortunately, Democrats from the left-wing Congressional Progressive Caucus recently sent a letter to Biden calling for his administration to negotiate with the Kremlin to end the war. That would mean the US abandoning Ukraine's legitimate fight and allowing Putin to grab territory and rip Ukraine up. Although the letter was quickly condemned and withdrawn it indicates a deficiency in pro-Ukraine support on the left of mainstream US politics.

Both left and right who equivocate in their support for Ukraine often use the same nationalist argument: spend money at home on health and education rather than send arms and aid to Ukraine. This line of thought can be expected from the xenophobic right. But leftists who argue in this way pander to backwardness in the working class. They are saying: yes, don't bother about foreigners being attacked and brutalised by Russian imperialism, let's sort out problems here; we're more important.

British left

In fact those on the British left who argue in this way – the *Morning Star*, CND and Counterfire – are also often dishonest. Counterfire's Chris Nineham might appear to be a pacifist when he [argues](#) that Stop the War will "fight for the prioritisation of welfare over warfare and for negotiated settlements over armed conflict," but the practical effect of his calls for an end to British and US military aid to Ukraine is a military victory for Putin.

Counterfire know this very well. They don't care much about Putin's attempt to wipe out Ukraine. They simply want to see the US and Britain defeated. And they are willing to rally support among British workers and trade unionists using reactionary arguments.

The idea that in rich countries there is a real choice to be made between aid to Ukraine and welfare spending is nonsense – for exactly the same reason as there is no necessary choice to be made between funding the NHS, on the one hand, and pensions or schools or free education on the other... There are plenty of resources for everything we need. The working class must demand that the wealth which is owned and controlled by the capitalist class is taken for our priorities, not theirs.

Tax the rich to fund the welfare state, and back Ukraine with weapons and aid! □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

STRIKE WAVE CAN STILL GROW

By Ollie Moore

Significant pay rises have been won by Unite members at multiple companies in the bus sector. 2 November saw another, with Stagecoach East London workers winning a 10% increase, a marked improvement on the company's initial 6% offer. In this instance, the mere threat of a ballot, not even of a strike, produced the improved offer, suggesting that Unite's preparedness to take sustained or indefinite action elsewhere in the sector has put the fear of the union, so to speak, into employers.

UCU has announced strikes in universities for 24, 25, and 30 November. The civil service union PCS expects to report industrial action mandates in many departments when it announces its ballot results on 9 November (see page 15). Nurses' union RCN has achieved mandates in some trusts. There is potential for the strike wave to spread.

Harder-hitting, sustained action remains a better basis than sporadic strikes, and certainly than sporadic strikes with unions signalling to employers that action will be called off if more talks are offered.

Sometimes, faced with es-

pecially intransigent and hostile employers, workers must strike simply to get bosses to negotiate with them. If the demand is to open formal negotiations, then that opening may be deemed a sufficient step forward to justify the suspension or cancellation of planned strikes.

But where workers are striking to win specific improvements to their terms and conditions, or to rebuff an employer's attack, suspending strikes merely for the promise of talks is a step back. That is what both RMT and CWU, seen by many as the vanguard of the current strike wave, did in the week up to 5 November, in their respective disputes in the rail and postal sectors. (More on those disputes pages 14-15).

It is worth adding here that the two union leaderships are only following union-official norms by orienting more to the prospect of "getting a deal" than to going all out to win.

Of course, even industrial disputes generally felt by the workers involved in them to have been concluded successfully rarely involve the workers winning all their demands. But even to get a satisfactory compromise, putting the brakes on strikes and allowing negotia-

tions to take place free from the direct pressure of immediate action is unlikely to help.

The CWU's joint statement with Royal Mail explicitly commits to the union to "de-escalation of tension" and "restoring calmness in the workplace". Whilst it is not a principle of militant trade unionism to aim to make day-to-day working life as frenzied and febrile (uncalm) as possible, such a statement suggests a conception of trade unionism that is more about putting fires out than lighting them.

The very nature of trade unions, as bodies that seek to bargain within the existing system, creates a tendency for them to seek a mediating, balancing, peacemaking role; but at the same time, their character as the bedrock organisation of workers as workers, organised at the point of production, creates a potential for struggle. The job of socialists active in workplaces and unions is to fight for strategies and democratic reforms that facilitate unions' function as instruments of class struggle and suppress their function as enforcers of class peace. □

- Schedule of strikes and ballots: see page 3